

CHRISTMAS 2021

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4

GRACE NOTES

NEWS IN AND AROUND THE GRACE CHURCH COMMUNITY

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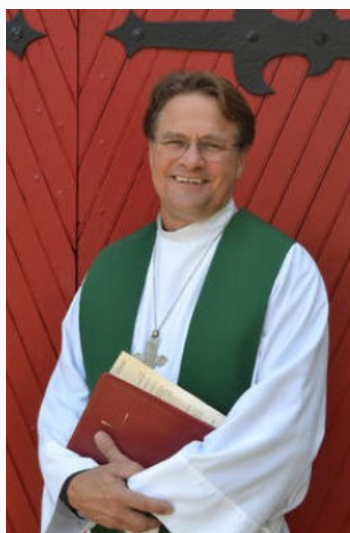
FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN

Charlie Brown: *"I guess I really don't know what Christmas is all about. Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?"*

Linus: *"Sure, Charlie Brown. I can tell you what Christmas is all about. Lights, please?"*

OUR EYES SHALL BE ON GOD

BY THE DR. REV. MATTHEW CALKINS



It is sunny but blustery on this late November morning as I write. Leaves are hanging on, but winter is coming. The afternoons turn quickly to night. But amid the darkening times and cold wind, I also feel the subtle thrill of Advent approaching, the season in which we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ into the world again.

I notice the secular consumer-oriented world has announced that “the holiday season” has already arrived, now encompassing Thanksgiving as well as Christmas and Hanukkah. Better get out early and buy, buy, buy lest the fearsome supply chain Grinch eat your children’s Christmas. Well, as an inveterate late shopper, I should be more careful this year. But I resist the cultural swallowing of Christ’s birthday as purely a children’s holiday and shopping season.

There is an important spiritual practice that the ancient Church’s seasonal calendar reflects. Just as John the Baptist warned the people then of the need to repent and return to God before the coming of the Messiah, so we now should pause and reflect on our fundamental orientation. Are we facing the future with the faithful hope of Christ’s coming again in power and glory? Or are we only nostalgically remembering the babe born in Bethlehem (and our own childhood), and reducing Advent to a season of lights, and Christmas to a pageant story and well-wrapped presents? Are we now bereft of God’s active presence? If so, then the times are truly dark.

My beloved friends, I am using the first person plural because I am as much in need of turning and returning to God as anyone. We all need to practice the disciplines of prayer and worship, and strengthen the muscles of memory and hope. Our tradition of spiritual wisdom has always known we are in need of help if we want to live with joy, love, and courage: Help from God through the Holy Spirit, and help from others who share our faith in God. Help through helping, because in service to our neighbors we kindle mutual love and care. By encouraging ourselves and each other to volunteer, give to charity, and remember the neediest, we recover our sense of deep purpose: to make this a better world, what Jesus called the kingdom of heaven, a world he died to make possible, and a world he is coming again to judge. May he find us working with purpose and joy in this and all seasons. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Matt+

ADVENT HIGHLIGHTS

ADVENT 1: NOVEMBER 28

8:00 Holy Eucharist with sermon
 9:00 Advent Poetry Study led by Rev. Alison Quin
 10:00 Holy Eucharist with sermon and music
 11:00 Godly Play led by Rev. Alison Quin

FRIDAY DECEMBER 3

5:00 Help decorate the Grace Church parade float
 6:00 Parade of Lights, Millbrook

SATURDAY DECEMBER 4

10:00-2:00 St. Nicholas Bazaar: Fine Local Crafts and Holiday Cookie Sale

ADVENT 2: DECEMBER 5

8:00 Holy Eucharist with sermon
 9:00 Advent Poetry Study led by Rev. Alison Quin
 10:00 Holy Eucharist with sermon and music
 11:00 Godly Play led by Rev. Alison Quin

ADVENT 3: DECEMBER 12

8:00 Holy Eucharist with sermon
 9:00 Advent Poetry Study led by Rev. Alison Quin
 10:00 Holy Eucharist with sermon and music
 11:00 Godly Play led by Rev. Alison Quin

ADVENT 4: DECEMBER 19

8:00 Holy Eucharist with sermon
 9:00 Advent Poetry Study led by Rev. Alison Quin
 10:00 Homily by former GY Fellow Nastia Khlopina
 4:00 Live Nativity Scene

MEET PARISHIONER MARLI HIGA



"It's giving up control instead of asking God for something. Letting go of what you think your needs are and letting God be God."

This is Marli Higa's description of centering prayer, something she and Father Matt are planning on introducing to the parish as a retreat or an ongoing class, possibly in early 2022. "It's a different way to relate to God," Marli says. "You're sitting in silence. Instead of asking God or thanking God for this or that, there's no dialogue. You're just making yourself available to Him."

Fairly new to Grace Church, Marli first watched services online during "lockdown," then started attending in person once we were allowed back into the sanctuary. Born in Honolulu, Hawaii on the island of Oahu to Japanese American parents, Marli lived in six states — Hawaii, Mississippi, Arizona, Alabama, Missouri and Illinois — as well as Korea before she was in 7th grade. With a father in the US Air Force, moving was a way of life. "I was always the new person, so I'm sensitive to new people," she says. "But I liked starting something new, having fresh goals. Moving around a lot gives you exposure to many different things. But I also like making a home wherever I am."

For college, Marli attended Stanford University, then for graduate school, she moved clear across the country to NYU to earn her Masters in Creative Writing. After graduation, she worked as Publications Director at the Asian-American Arts Alliance, then as a freelance copy editor at several magazines. Since 2011, she has been Copy and Research Chief at *Women's Health*. She also coached varsity track for 14 years at The Spence School, a private girls' school in Manhattan. On top of all that, she is currently writing a novel set in 1937 in New York's West Village whose main characters are mice.

When Father Matt suggested Marli start a class on centering prayer, she agreed to give it a try. "I'd done many forms of meditation over the years and nothing spoke to me. Then I discovered centering prayer. The whole premise is that you are opening yourself up to God, you're consenting to the presence and action of God in you. It's very quiet, but very powerful."

But in case you think centering prayer merely entails sitting still, it also focuses on the practice of intentionally letting go of thoughts, over and over again. This letting go helps you in your daily life, says Marli, because "you learn to let go of things that normally you might hang on to. And because you practice this repeatedly in centering prayer, the impulse to let go and trust in God becomes stronger than whatever is preoccupying you. That is how you feel the effect and the peace of centering prayer."

In addition, you begin to think of God less as a superhuman being and more as a light and an energy that's in you and in everything, Marli explains. "Centering prayer helps you uncover that, so that the light in you which is God, that universal spirit, can come through." Here's hoping we can all find our center, which is God.

FALL FESTIVAL A HUGE SUCCESS

October 9th was a beautiful autumn day, the perfect backdrop for our Grace Fall Festival. Kids and adults alike mingled, laughed, ate, played, painted, read biblical stories and made memories with each other and the larger community. The event had something for everyone: music, roasting s'mores, ring toss with prizes, pumpkin painting, face painting, and lighting candles in the church. Around 70 people attended, including at least 15 families with children. The day was a huge success and I sincerely thank everyone who helped make it all possible. - Amanda Williams



GOLF TOURNAMENT AND GALA NETTED \$15,000!

On September 27th, we held our 14th Annual Grace Golf Tournament and Gala Dinner/Auction. The yearly event was once again blessed with an abundance of generosity and support by Grace parishioners and the greater community! We enjoyed a beautiful autumn day of golf at McCann Golf Course, followed by an amazing buffet dinner and silent auction at Charlotte's in Millbrook. The Rt. Rev. Mary D. Glasspool spoke, people bid copiously, and every corner of Charlotte's was filled with song, great conversation and fellowship. - Pam Freeman



The winning team: Sheriff Butch Anderson group

Gala and auction revelers

ST. NICHOLAS BAZAAR AND HOLIDAY COOKIE SALE



DON'T MISS the 6th annual St. Nicholas Bazaar and Holiday Cookie Sale, Sat. Dec. 4th, 10am-2pm! Enjoy a treasure trove of handmade crafts from local artisans, including knitted clothing and accessories, handpainted children's step stools, beaded and silver jewelry, candles, hand-painted glassware, locally-produced wool yarn and knitting needles, soaps, lotions and so much more. Then top it off with a box of beautifully decorated homemade holiday cookies. This is a major fundraiser for Grace Church so please support it! Cookies will be available in the Parish Hall and also at Marona's. Questions? Contact Lynda Boissey at lboissey@aol.com.

PARISH RETREAT



A group of Grace Church parishioners and Grace Year Fellows joined Fr. Matt and the Rev. Gwyneth Murphy, the retreat leader, for our annual parish retreat at Holy Cross Monastery (suspended last year due to COVID). It was a beautiful fall weekend in mid-October and the time spent in prayer, conversation and holy silence was spiritually invigorating!

THE CHOIR IS BACK!



Wait, what's that we hear? Is it the Grace Church Choir, filling our church with magnificent songs of praise and worship once again? Yes indeed, the choir is BACK, under the expert guidance of Director Music of Suzanne McDonald. Want to join? Contact Suzanne at 1750Suzanne@gmail.com or 978-968-5122. A joyful noise is being made again! Alleluia! Alleluia!

STEWARDSHIP

Thank you to everyone who submitted a pledge during our recent annual stewardship campaign. We celebrated the Ingathering and Consecration of pledges during the service on the last Sunday of Pentecost, Christ the King Sunday, November 21st. Don't fret if you missed the date. It is never too late to give. Historically, throughout the country, the end of the year is when the largest part of annual charitable giving occurs. People often use this season to increase their charitable giving as well as take advantage of the tax benefits for charitable contributions. If God has blessed you, please be a blessing to others — and the church. Contact the office at Grace Church or visit our website and click on Gracious Giving (www.gracemillbrook.org/gracious-giving) for more information on how to donate or make a planned gift.

GODLY PLAY AT THE PRESCHOOL



*Rev. Alison telling a Godly Play story
with the Preschool students*

The Rev. Alison Quin, Grace Year Fellow Adelle Dennis and parishioner Lynda Boissey have been trained in the method and are offering Godly Play after the Sunday 10am service each week. Come and check it out!

LIVE NATIVITY SCENE!

We are planning to create a live nativity scene in front of the church on Sunday, Dec. 19th at 4pm. We are looking for kids (or adults) who would be willing to put on a costume and be a shepherd, angel, one of the magi, Joseph or Mary. Contact the Rev. Alison Quin at revalisonquin@gmail.com if you'd like to participate. A few farm animals will complete the scene! Come help us dream and sing our way to Bethlehem.



SILVER CROSS JEWELRY



Sterling silver crosses in the shape of the cross atop the church have been designed especially for Grace Church with the generosity of Joyce Heaton Jewelers. Both mens (\$145) and ladies (\$125) sizes are being offered. Both include sterling silver chains. Place an order by completing the application form found in the back of the church or by calling the church office. Samples will be available for viewing in the church office or at Heaton Jewelers (3283 Franklin Ave. in Millbrook). Order by December 4th to have them for Christmas!

SPANISH LANGUAGE SERVICES

On Sunday December 12th at 4pm, we will celebrate the Feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico and the Americas. And on December 17 at 6pm, our EPIC students and others will host a festive posada.

Servicios de idioma español

El domingo 12 de diciembre a las 4 pm celebraremos la Fiesta de la Virgen de Guadalupe, patrona de México y América. Y el 17 de diciembre a las 6 pm, nuestros estudiantes épicos y otros serán los anfitriones de una posada festiva.



ANNUAL MEETING, BISHOP'S VISIT

Mark your calendar: Grace Church Annual Meeting will take place upstairs in the Parish Hall on January 30th following the 10am service. This will be an important time to gather, thank outgoing Vestry members and elect new ones, receive reports on the budget and programs, and enjoy a time of warm fellowship. Lunch will be potluck — bring a favorite dish and celebrate the new year.

In addition, The Rt. Rev. Mary D. Glasspool will be with us May 1st for a visitation and confirmation.

GRACE YEAR UPDATE



The Grace Year fellows had a strong start to their year, with a grounding weekend visit to Holy Cross Monastery across the river. Since then, the fellows (John, Kristin, Ris, Adelle and Thomas) have been settling into their praxis placements and living life in intentional community. We've had many wonderful visitors to our weekly seminars at Grace, including our own Father Matt, as well as Laila Walzer, a sufi musician; Nick Miles, who shared with us about his experiences with Native American spirituality; and Jeff Golden, a Vassar professor who worked with us on themes of self-love and vulnerability. The fellows also got to explore opportunities in New York City, visiting the Whitney and the Met Cloisters, and attending the Diocesan convention. Most recently, we walked a labyrinth at Linwood Spiritual Center in Rhinebeck. This year's fellows have brought a lot of great energy and ideas to Grace already, and we are so excited to see what they make of the next half of their Grace Year. -Kira Peterson

CHRISTMAS SERVICES



- Christmas Eve: 5:00pm Family Service
- Christmas Eve: 8:45pm with Special Music
- Christmas Day: 10:00am Jesus is born!

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