

# Grace Beacon

God  
MADE  
A WAY  
IN A MANGER

Grace Baptist Church of Germantown  
Rev. Dr. J. Henry Buck, Jr., Senior Pastor  
December, 2023

"In Him was life; and the life was the light of men."  
John 1:4

ImageVine

## CHRISTMAS MEDITATION: The Visited Planet by Philip Yancey *Posted on December 30, 2012*

Sorting through the stack of cards that arrived at our house last Christmas, I note that all kinds of symbols have edged their way into the celebration. Overwhelmingly, the landscape scenes render New England towns buried in snow, usually with the added touch of a horse-drawn sleigh. On other cards, animals frolic: not only reindeer but also chipmunks, raccoons, cardinals, and cute gray mice. One card shows an African lion reclining with a foreleg draped affectionately around a lamb.



Angels have made a huge comeback in recent years, and Hallmark and American Greetings now feature them prominently, though as demure, cuddly looking creatures, not the type who would ever need to announce "Fear not!" The explicitly religious cards (a distinct minority) focus on the holy family, and you can tell at a glance these folk are different. They seem unruffled and serene. Bright gold halos, like crowns from another world, hover just above their heads.

Inside, the cards stress sunny words like love, goodwill, cheer, happiness, and warmth. It is a fine thing, I suppose, that we honor a sacred holiday with such homey sentiments. And yet when I turn to the gospel accounts of the first Christmas, I hear a very different tone, and sense mainly disruption at work.

Even those who accept the supernatural version of events concede that big trouble will follow: an old uncle prays for "salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us"; Simeon darkly warns the virgin that "a sword will pierce your own soul too"; Mary's hymn of thanksgiving mentions rulers overthrown and proud men scattered.

In contrast to what the cards would have us believe, Christmas did not sentimentally simplify life on planet Earth. Perhaps this is what I sense when Christmas rolls around and I turn from the cheeriness of the cards to the starkness of the Gospels.

Christmas art depicts Jesus's family as icons stamped in gold foil, with a calm Mary receiving the tidings of the Annunciation as a kind of benediction. But that is not at all how Luke tells the story. Mary was "greatly troubled" and "afraid" at the angel's appearance, and when the angel pronounced the sublime words about the son of the Most High whose kingdom will never end, Mary had something far more mundane on her mind: *But I am a virgin!*

Once, a young unmarried lawyer bravely stood before my church in Chicago and told of a sin we already knew about: we had seen her hyperactive son running up and down the aisles every Sunday. Cynthia had taken the lonely road of bearing an illegitimate child and caring for him after his father decided to skip town. Cynthia's sin was no worse than many others, and yet, as she told us, it had such conspicuous consequences. She could not hide the result of that single act of passion, sticking out as it did from her abdomen for months until a child emerged to change every hour of every day of the rest of her life. No wonder the Jewish teenager, Mary, felt greatly troubled: she faced the same prospects even without the act of passion.

In the modern United States, where each year a million teenage girls get pregnant out of wedlock, Mary's predicament has undoubtedly lost some of its force, but in a closely knit Jewish community in the first century, the news an angel brought could not have been entirely welcome. The law regarded a betrothed woman who became pregnant as an adulteress, subject to death by stoning.

Matthew tells of Joseph magnanimously agreeing to divorce Mary in private rather than press charges, until an angel shows up to correct his perception of betrayal. Luke tells of a tremulous Mary hurrying off to the one person who could possibly understand what she was going through: her relative Elizabeth, who miraculously got pregnant in old age after another angelic annunciation. Elizabeth believes Mary and shares her joy, and yet the scene poignantly highlights the contrast between the two women: the whole countryside is talking about Elizabeth's healed womb even as Mary must hide the shame of her own miracle.

In a few months, the birth of John the Baptist took place amid great fanfare, complete with midwives, doting relatives, and the traditional village chorus celebrating the birth of a Jewish male. Six months later, Jesus was born far from home, with no midwife, extended family, or village chorus present. A male head of household would have sufficed for the Roman census; did Joseph drag his pregnant wife along to Bethlehem in order to spare her the ignominy of childbirth in her home village?

Nine months of awkward explanations, the lingering scent of scandal — it seems that God arranged the most humiliating circumstances possible for his entrance, as if to avoid any charge of favoritism. I am impressed that when the son of God became a human being he played by the rules, harsh rules: small towns do not treat kindly young boys who grow up with questionable paternity.

Malcolm Muggeridge observed that in our day, with family planning clinics offering convenient ways to correct "mistakes" that might disgrace a family name, "It is, in point of fact, extremely improbable, under existing conditions, that Jesus would have been permitted to be born at all. Mary's pregnancy, in poor conditions, and with the father unknown, would have been an obvious case for an abortion; and her talk of having conceived as a result of the intervention of the Holy Ghost would have pointed to the need for psychiatric treatment, and made the case for terminating her pregnancy even stronger. Thus our generation, needing a savior more, perhaps, than any that has ever existed, would be too 'humane' to allow one to be born."



The virgin Mary, though, whose parenthood was unplanned, had a different response. She heard the angel out, pondered the repercussions, and replied, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." Often a work of God comes with two edges, great joy and great pain, and in that matter-of-fact response Mary embraced both. She was the first person to accept Jesus on his own terms, regardless of the personal cost.

When the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci went to China in the sixteenth century, he brought along samples of religious art to illustrate the Christian story for people who had never heard it. The Chinese readily adopted portraits of the virgin Mary holding her child, but when he produced paintings of the crucifixion and tried to explain that the God-

child had grown up only to be executed, the audience reacted with revulsion and horror. They much preferred the virgin and insisted on worshipping her rather than the crucified God.

As I thumb once more through my stack of Christmas cards, I realize that we in Christian countries do much the same thing. We observe a mellow, domesticated holiday purged of any hint of scandal. Above all, we purge from it any reminder of how the story that began in Bethlehem turned out at Calvary.

In the birth stories of Luke and Matthew, only one person seems to grasp the mysterious nature of what God has set in motion: the old man Simeon, who recognized the baby as the messiah, instinctively understood that conflict would surely follow. "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against," he said, and then made the prediction that a sword would pierce Mary's own soul. Somehow Simeon sensed that though on the surface little had changed — the autocrat Herod still ruled, Roman troops were still stringing up patriots, Jerusalem still overflowed with beggars — underneath, everything had changed. A new force had arrived to undermine the world's powers.

The earliest events in Jesus's life, though, give a menacing preview of the unlikely struggle now under way. Herod, King of the Jews, enforced Roman rule at the local level, and in an irony of history we know Herod's name mainly because of the massacre of the innocents. I have never seen a Christmas card depicting that state-sponsored act of terror, but it too was a part of Christ's coming. Although secular history does not refer to the atrocity, no one acquainted with the life of Herod doubts him capable. He killed two brothers-in-law, his own wife Mariamne, and two of his own sons. Five days before his death he ordered the arrest of many citizens and decreed that they be executed on the day of his death, in order to guarantee a proper atmosphere of mourning in the country. For such a despot, a minor extermination procedure in Bethlehem posed no problem.

Scarcely a day passed, in fact, without an execution under Herod's regime. The political climate at the time of Jesus's birth resembled that of Russia in the 1930s under Stalin. Citizens could not gather in public meetings. Spies were everywhere. In Herod's mind, the command to slaughter Bethlehem's infants was probably an act of utmost rationality, a rearguard action to preserve the stability of his kingdom against a rumored invasion from another.

And so Jesus the Christ entered the world amid strife and terror, and spent his infancy hidden in Egypt as a refugee. Matthew notes that local politics even determined where Jesus would grow up. When Herod the Great died, an angel reported to Joseph it was safe for him to return to Israel, but not to the region where Herod's son Archelaus had taken command. Joseph moved his family instead to Nazareth in the North, where they lived under the domain of another of Herod's sons, Antipas, the one Jesus would call "that fox," and also the one who would have John the Baptist beheaded.

A few years later the Romans took over direct command of the southern province that encompassed Jerusalem, and the cruelest and most notorious of these governors was a man named Pontius Pilate. Well-connected, Pilate had married the granddaughter of Augustus Caesar. According to Luke, Herod Antipas and the Roman governor Pilate regarded each other as enemies until the day fate brought them together to determine the destiny of Jesus. On that day they collaborated, hoping to succeed where Herod the Great had failed; by disposing of the strange pretender and thus preserving the kingdom.

From beginning to end, the conflict between Rome and Jesus appeared to be entirely one-sided. The execution of Jesus would put an apparent end to any threat, or so it was assumed at the time. Tyranny would win again. It occurred to no one that his stubborn followers just might outlast the Roman empire.

As I read the birth stories about Jesus I cannot help but conclude that though the world may be tilted toward the rich and powerful, God is tilted toward the underdog. "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but sent the rich away empty," said Mary in her Magnificat.

I wonder what Mary thought about her militant hymn during her harrowing years in Egypt. For a Jew, Egypt evoked bright memories of a powerful God who had flattened a pharaoh's army and brought liberation; now Mary fled there, desperate, a stranger in a strange land hiding from her own government. Could her baby, hunted, helpless, on the run, possibly fulfill the lavish hopes of his people?

Even the family's mother-tongue summoned up memories of their underdog status: Jesus spoke Aramaic, a trade language closely related to Arabic, a stinging reminder of the Jews' subjection to foreign empires.

Some foreign astrologers (probably from the region that is now Iraq) had dropped by to visit Jesus, but these men were considered "unclean" by Jews of the day. Naturally, like all dignitaries they had checked first with the ruling

king in Jerusalem, who knew nothing about a baby in Bethlehem. After they saw the child and realized who he was, these visitors engaged in an act of civil disobedience: they deceived Herod and went home another way, to protect the child. They had chosen Jesus's side against the powerful.

Growing up, Jesus's sensibilities were affected most deeply by the poor, the powerless, the oppressed — in short, the underdogs. Today theologians debate the aptness of the phrase "God's preferential option for the poor" as a way of describing God's concern for the underdog. Since God arranged the circumstances in which to be born on planet Earth — without power or wealth, without rights, without justice — his preferential options speak for themselves.

There is one more view of Christmas I have never seen on a Christmas card, probably because no artist, not even William Blake, could do it justice. Revelation 12 pulls back the curtain to give us a glimpse of Christmas as it must have looked from somewhere far beyond Andromeda: Christmas from the angels' viewpoint.

The account differs radically from the birth stories in the Gospels. Revelation does not mention shepherds and an infanticidal king; rather, it pictures a dragon leading a ferocious struggle in Heaven. A woman clothed with the sun and wearing a crown of twelve stars cries out in pain as she is about to give birth. Suddenly the enormous red dragon enters the picture, his tail sweeping a third of the stars out of the sky and flinging them to the Earth. He crouches hungrily before the woman, anxious to devour her child the moment it is born. At the last second the infant is snatched away to safety, the woman flees into the desert, and all-out cosmic war begins.

Revelation is a strange book by any measure, and readers must understand its style to make sense of this extraordinary spectacle. In daily life two parallel histories occur simultaneously, one on Earth and one in Heaven. Revelation, however, views them together, allowing a quick look behind the scenes. On Earth a baby was born, a king caught wind of it, a chase ensued. In Heaven the Great Invasion had begun, a daring raid by the ruler of the forces of good into the universe's seat of evil.

John Milton expressed this point of view majestically in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, poems which make Heaven and hell the central focus and Earth a mere battleground for their clashes. The modern author J. B. Phillips also attempted such a point of view, on a much less epic scale, and last Christmas I turned to Phillips's fantasy to try to escape my earthbound viewpoint.

In Phillips's version, a senior angel is showing a very young angel around the splendors of the universe. They view whirling galaxies and blazing suns, and then flit across the infinite distances of space until at last they enter one particular galaxy of 500 billion stars:

*As the two of them drew near to the star which we call our sun and to its circling planets, the senior angel pointed to a small and rather insignificant sphere turning very slowly on its axis. It looked as dull as a dirty tennis-ball to the little angel, whose mind was filled with the size and glory of what he had seen.*

*"I want you to watch that one particularly," said the senior angel, pointing with his finger.*

*"Well, it looks very small and rather dirty to me," said the little angel. "What's special about that one?"*

When I read Phillips's fantasy, I thought of the pictures beamed back to Earth from the Apollo astronauts, who described our planet as "whole and round and beautiful and small," a blue-green-and-tan globe suspended in space. Jim Lovell, reflecting on the scene later, said, "It was just another body, really, about four times bigger than the moon. But it held all the hope and all the life and all the things that the crew of the Apollo 8 knew and loved. It was the most beautiful thing there was to see in all the heavens." That was the viewpoint of a human being.

To the little angel, though, Earth did not seem so impressive. He listened in stunned disbelief as the senior angel told him that this planet, small and insignificant and not overly clean, was the renowned Visited Planet:

*"Do you mean that our great and glorious Prince. . . went down in Person to this fifth-rate little ball? Why should He do a thing like that?"*

*The little angel's face wrinkled in disgust. "Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that He stooped so low as to become one of those creeping, crawling creatures of that floating ball?"*

*"I do, and I don't think He would like you to call them 'creeping, crawling creatures' in that tone of voice. For, strange as it may seem to us, He loves them. He went down to visit them to lift them up to become like Him."*

*The little angel looked blank. Such a thought was almost beyond his comprehension.*



It is almost beyond my comprehension too, and yet I accept that this notion is the key to understanding Christmas and is, in fact, the touchstone of my faith. As a Christian I believe that we live in parallel worlds. One world consists of hills and lakes and barns and politicians and shepherds watching their flocks by night. The other consists of angels and sinister forces and somewhere out there places called Heaven and hell. One night in the cold, in the dark, among the wrinkled hills of Bethlehem, those two worlds came together at a dramatic point of intersection. God, who knows no before or after, entered time and space. God, who knows no boundaries, took on the shocking confines of a baby's skin, the ominous restraints of morality.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation," an apostle would later write; "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." But the few eyewitnesses on Christmas night saw none of that. They saw an infant struggling to work never-before-used lungs.

Could it be true, this Bethlehem story of a Creator descending to be born on one small planet? If so, it is a story like no other. Never again need we wonder whether what happens on this dirty little tennis ball of a planet matters to the rest of the universe. Little wonder a choir of angels broke out in spontaneous song, disturbing not only a few shepherds but the entire universe.



## How well do you know the Christian meaning of some popular Christmas decorations?

**CHRISTMAS TREE:** In the early 700s, Saint Boniface, who converted the German people to Christianity, demolished the Oak of Thor, the mighty sacred tree worshipped by the Saxons. From its roots grew a fir tree which Boniface took as a sign of the Christian faith. About the year 1500, inspired by a snow covered fir tree, a small tree was brought indoors and decorated with candles in honor of Christ's birth. By the 18th century, the custom of decorating a Christmas tree was well established in France, Germany, and Austria. Thus, the Christmas tree represents the original Tree of Paradise, the burning bush which spoke to Moses, the branch of Jesse from which Jesus was born, the life-giving tree of the cross of Christ, and the tree which St. John the Apostle saw in the Book of Revelations whose leaves have medicine for the people and which yields fruit each month for the healing of the nations. Because it is green year-round, the evergreen tree represents hope. Its needles and its narrow crest point upward, turning our thoughts to heaven. Because the tree is cut down and then erected again, it is a symbol of Christ's resurrection.

**CANDLES AND CHRISTMAS LIGHTS:** Candles and Christmas lights represent Christ, the Light of the World. Candles and Christmas lights also remind us that we are to be light to others, to show them the way to Christ.

**BELLS:** Bells were part of the Jewish high priest's garb. Christmas bells not only symbolize the joy of Christmas; they also remind us that Christ is the High Priest.

**CANDY CANE:** The candy cane is shaped like a shepherd's crook, reminding us that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, came into our world at Christmas. The red stripe symbolizes Christ's sacrifice and the white background His purity. Candy canes have a peppermint flavor, reminiscent of hyssop which had medicinal purposes. The peppermint flavor reminds us that our healing came at the price of Christ's life. The candy cane is meant to be broken and shared, just as Jesus' Body is broken and shared at every Eucharist.

**CHRISTMAS CAROLS:** Christmas carols remind us of the angels who announced the birth of Christ by singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth!" Song has been a part of worship since the beginning. Miriam composed and sang a hymn of Thanksgiving when God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians. David sang and danced before the Ark of the Lord when he was accompanying back to Jerusalem after having rescued it from the Philistines. He composed the Psalms, all of which are to be sung. Many of the Psalms mention times when the Jewish people sang, some of which are: bringing in the harvest, going up to the temple, success over one's enemies. Jesus mentioned funeral songs in one of His exhortations. People use song as an expression of highest emotion. How fitting that we sing about the birth of Christ!

(continued on page 10)

Greetings!!!!!! Greetings!!!!!! Greetings!!!!!!

Happy Yuletide Season



**Rev. Dr. J. Henry Buck, Jr.**  
**Senior Pastor**

This is the season of ADVENT. What truly is the meaning of ADVENT? That's a wonderful question during this time. Advent is the observed season for Christians all over the world, and in all Christian denominations, as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for both the Nativity of Christ at Christmas and the return of Christ at the Second Coming. Each of the four Sundays during this time has a particular representation.

- The first Sunday represents HOPE. Hope leads us to celebrate not only just the birth, but also the beginning new liturgical season. This year it is Sunday, December 3, 2023.
  - The second Sunday represents PEACE. The birth is not only a peace symbol; it is a peace of reality.
  - The third Sunday represents JOY. There is a reason for that burst of inspiration as we move closer to the Christmas celebration. It is because there is the anticipation of joy, and equally unspeakable joy.
- The fourth Sunday represents LOVE. God's ultimate presentation is "for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

I think that in these four moments that we look towards as we enter the season of Advent, we can have HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE. At what other times in our spiritual, natural and personal lives do we so keenly recognize our need of these four elements? But it doesn't have to stop here. We can use this time to share and show how much of these four elements we have not only experienced, but that we are excited to share. And you certainly know that you need no authorization to demonstrate any of these. SO, let this season be the reason that these four principles govern you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

I want to send a "good job compliment" to our Philadelphia Eagles National Football Team. Their record at this time is 10-1. Now stay with me on this Grace because there is a lesson in this. At the beginning of the season there was much talk that the Eagles may not fare as well this year, that the players may have had just a moment of "good luck" and that they were not really a good team. Well, the season started and they won one game, one game turned into two games, two games turned into three games, three games turned into four games. They lost one game but kept on trucking. Then the winning turned into five games and so on to the point they have won 10 games. I say this to let you know that you are not defined by your past and what others may say or have concluded about you. When you have the right people on your team, no matter how many losses you may have, when you pull things together you can certainly get back on the winning track. Grace has to get back on the winning track.

We celebrate all special days, birthdays, anniversaries and any other day of reflection for our members. Grace we also celebrate the lives of those who have transitioned from labor to reward. We pray that God will bless and comfort those families.

Well, time is winding down and I would just like to say on behalf of the entire Buck Family and the entire Grace family, have a Happy and Wonderful Holiday season and remember others who are not so fortunate.

Pas Vobiscum  
Pastor J. Henry

# Do you know the background of some of our most popular Christmas Carols?

## What is the story behind... 'Silent Night'?

The story goes that 'Silent Night' (originally 'Stille Nacht') was first performed on the evening of Christmas Eve in 1818.

Joseph Mohr, a young Catholic priest at St Nicholas Church, Oberndorf bei Salzburg in Austria, was in despair: the **organ** at his church had been incapacitated by mice, and the chances of fixing the instrument before the evening service were looking slim.

But young Joseph had an idea. A few years before, he had written a rather beautiful poem called 'Stille Nacht'. So, he asked Franz Xavez Gruber, a schoolmaster and organist in a nearby town, to set his six-stanza poem to music. That night, the two men sang 'Stille Nacht' for the first time at the church's Christmas Mass, while Mohr played **guitar** and the choir repeated the last two lines of each verse. Good thing they didn't call an engineer...

## ...O Come All Ye Faithful?

It is unclear who first wrote the music or lyrics to this hymn. Possible candidates include King John IV of Portugal and John Francis Wade, while composers **Handel** and **Gluck** have been suggested as the brains behind the melody. The hymn also features in the 1992 film *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York*, when it is played by a symphony orchestra at Carnegie Hall.

## ...Hark! The Herald Angels Sing?

With **lyrics** written by Charles Wesley, and set to a tune by **Mendelssohn**, this carol was always going to be one of the most recognizable and popular ones on the list. It's also got a cracking descant.

## ...Joy to the World?

Rather than celebrating the birth of Christ, the text of this hymn represents Christ's triumphant return. The words, dreamed up by English writer Isaac Watts, are based on the second half of Psalm 98 in the Bible. In the late '90s, it was named the most-published Christmas hymn in North America. You can just feel the merriness pouring out of it.

## ...Good King Wenceslas?

This hearty carol is based on the life of Wenceslas, Duke of Bohemia, who became a martyr after being killed by his wicked brother, Boleslaw the Bad. Wenceslas's body lies in St Vitus's Cathedral, Prague, and he was recently made a patron saint of the Czech Republic.

## ...The First Nowell?

There's a misconception that 'The First Noel' is French, because of the spelling of 'Noël'. But it is actually of Cornish origin, with most hymn sheets opting for the old English Anglo-Saxon spelling, Nowell.

## ...O Little Town of Bethlehem?

Following a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Rector Phillips Brooks wrote the text to this hymn after he was inspired by the view of Bethlehem from the hills of Palestine. Three years later in 1871, his church organist Lewis Redner wrote the melody for the local Sunday school children's choir.

## ...O Holy Night?

Placide Cappeau, a wine seller from southern France, was asked by the local parish priest to write a festive poem in 1847 to celebrate the church organ's renovation. Cappeau felt it should be accompanied by music, so approached his friend Adolphe Charles Adams. Adams' text reflects on the birth of Jesus and of humanity's redemption.

## ...It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

The lyrics for this carol were written by Massachusetts pastor Edmund Sears and refer to ideas of war and peace. The most common musical setting was adapted from an English melody in 1874 by Arthur Sullivan.

From <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/occasions/christmas/nations-top-30-christmas-carols/>



From the keyboard of the editor

*Short and Sweet... Merry Christmas  
and a Blessed New Year  
2024!  
From All of Us to All of You*

COME CELEBRATE THE JOY WITH US

# CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

Wishing you joy, laughter, and festive cheer  
as we gather to celebrate the magic of  
Christmas at our celebration

DECEMBER	24	SUNDAY
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25 West Johnson Street  
Philadelphia, Pa 19144

You are invited to join us for a joyous Christmas  
Celebration  
on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2023  
Morning Worship Service at 10:00 am  
immediately followed by  
a delicious Luncheon and Drama Presentation,  
as well as an  
Angel Tree and Food Giveaway for our special guests.  
Grace Baptist Church of Germantown  
25 West Johnson Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19144  
215-438-3215  
Rev. Dr. J. Henry Buck, Senior Pastor

**ALTHOUGH THIS EVENT IS OUR FREE GIFT TO  
YOU, RESERVATIONS ARE NECESSARY.  
PLEASE Sign up Between December 3  
and December 15.**

**There will be someone in the Narthex to take  
your reservation, or you may call the Church  
Office at 215-438-3215**

CHURCH MEMBERS AND FRIENDS , PLEASE GIVE  
YOUR NAME AND NUMBER ATTENDING.

SPECIAL GUESTS, PLEASE GIVE YOUR NAME,  
NUMBER ATTENDING, AND IF YOU ARE  
REPRESENTING AN ORGANIZATION, PLEASE  
INCLUDE THE NAME OF THE ORGANIZATION.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SHARING GOD'S LOVE  
WITH YOU  
IN THIS SPECIAL WAY ON THIS SPECIAL DAY!  
JESUS IS THE REASON FOR THE SEASON!

CONGRATULATIONS RHONDA!



## HALL OF FAME *Class of 2023*

# Rhonda D. **HIBBLER**

Rhonda D. Hibbler has the distinction of being a 'first' throughout her life, including an early acceptance into the University of Pennsylvania at the age of 16. While matriculating, she was the first African American to pledge into the Kappa Delta sorority where she remains a life member.

WWDB Radio, the first FM talk station in the nation again provided Rhonda opportunities to shine as a first for African American women in the industry. Rhonda produced their first remote broadcasts from the White House and Israel and the first simulcast with CSPAN. During her 14 years at WWDB, she held positions ranging from weekend sports and psychology and political programming to producing the highest rated program at WWDB, the morning show. She also continued developing her multi-faceted career, attaining the position of Senior Producer, encompassing automation and syndication.

The next stop along her luminous broadcasting career was a job at WIP Radio as producer, board operator, call screener and engineer.

At WPEN, Rhonda again scored another industry – and personal – first. "Never in the history of Greater Media, Inc. had an African- American female – or any female – been hired in the role of Production Director", Rhonda D. proudly exclaims!

One thing about Rhonda is quite certain: she has always found time in her busy life pursuing her career, to focus on family and her community. Rhonda cared for her brother George as his care-giver and chief advocate for deaf-blind people. She was George's eyes, ears and mouthpiece throughout his entire life.

Rhonda served as Docent of the Philadelphia Orchestra School Concert Program for three years and mentored students at Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University. In fact, "Ivy League Christian Observer" featured Rhonda as a "Culture Changer."

With heavy emphasis on mentoring youth, Rhonda D. has had enormous impact in both her notable career in Broadcasting, and as a devoted sister, supportive and loving friend, and community leader.

She is thrilled and appreciative to be inducted into the Broadcast Pioneers of Philadelphia 2023 Hall of Fame.

(continued from page 5)

**WREATH:** Wreaths combine several Christmas symbols including holly, fruit, mistletoe, evergreens, tinsel, and so on, all of which retain their symbolism on the wreath. The word wreath comes from an old English word, meaning to writhe or twist. Greens twisted into a circle made "crowns" for kings, military leaders, and athletes. Because wreaths, due to their circular shape, symbolize eternity, the circle of life, and endless hope, they began to be used at Christmas and hung. Because a wreath has neither beginning nor end, but is a continuous circle, it symbolized God Himself.

**SANTA CLAUS:** Santa Claus is an alteration of Saint Nicholas, fourth Bishop of Myra (located in modern Turkey) whose feast day is December 6. Saint Nicholas was known for taking to heart Jesus' words about almsgiving being very generous to the poor, but most often anonymously. The most famous story concerns three young women whose destitute father was going to force them into prostitution in order to survive. To prevent this heinous crime, Nicholas, on three different nights, anonymously went to their father's house and threw a bag of gold through an open window. The bishop's miter and fur trimmed red winter garments were corrupted into Santa's outfit, while Saint Nicholas's generosity was transferred to the "jolly old man" who delivers gifts anonymously on Christmas Eve.

**HOLLY:** Holly is an extremely hardy shrub that can be grown most places, making it one of the few plants that can withstand temperatures from 110 degrees F to – 40 degrees F. Holly plants are noted for their attractive red berries and glossy, sharp-toothed green leaves which remain on the plant year round. The holly bush represents immortality, a trait that God has given to each human being. We are all destined to live forever, either with the Lord or separated from Him. The sharp-toothed edge of the holly leaf reminds Christians of the crown of thorns with which the soldiers mocked Our Lord during His Passion. As a Christmas symbol, the red holly berry represents Christ's blood, shed for all people including those who reject Him.

**GIFTS:** For many people, gifts define Christmas. They focus on the giving and receiving of gifts instead of on our greatest Gift Jesus Who gave Himself to us at Christmas. The wise men who brought their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to honor the infant King in Bethlehem's manger have inspired the concept of gift giving at Christmas. God also gives us the gifts of the Holy Spirit which help us to follow God's direction in our lives. The seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit are Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Knowledge, Piety, Fortitude, and Fear of the Lord (Awe of God's Greatness and Power).

From <https://nolacatholic.org/christian-meaning-of-christmas-decorations>

## Social Action News

Dr. Dianne Faust has been selected to serve on the advisory board for Penn Medicine at the Penn Memory Center. Dr. Faust works closely alongside Co-Directors Dr. David Wolk, and Dr. Jason Karlawish, in their latest research and development for cognitive decline.

She is also helping to develop a toolkit with Terrence Casey, the Director of Communications and Outreach at Penn Memory Center, and Morgann Adams, the Outreach Coordinator. This information will be used within the community to help navigate the social experiences and needs of caregivers and those with memory loss. It will also help to establish a template for hosting a Memory Cafe.

With her advocacy work, she has inspired the work of her daughter Dr. Jessica Richmond, on cognitive decline. Cooper Medical School has invited Dr. Richmond to write a chapter on dementia in a Medical School textbook that will be used nationwide in Medical Schools.



The Women's Retreat Ministry did a fantastic job of planning and executing a wonderful one day retreat on October 29, 2023.

The retreat was held at the American Baptist Home Mission in Valley Forge, PA.

Approximately 40 Grace women were joined by others from the Philadelphia and West Chester communities as the Spirit rained down and unleashed His Power!

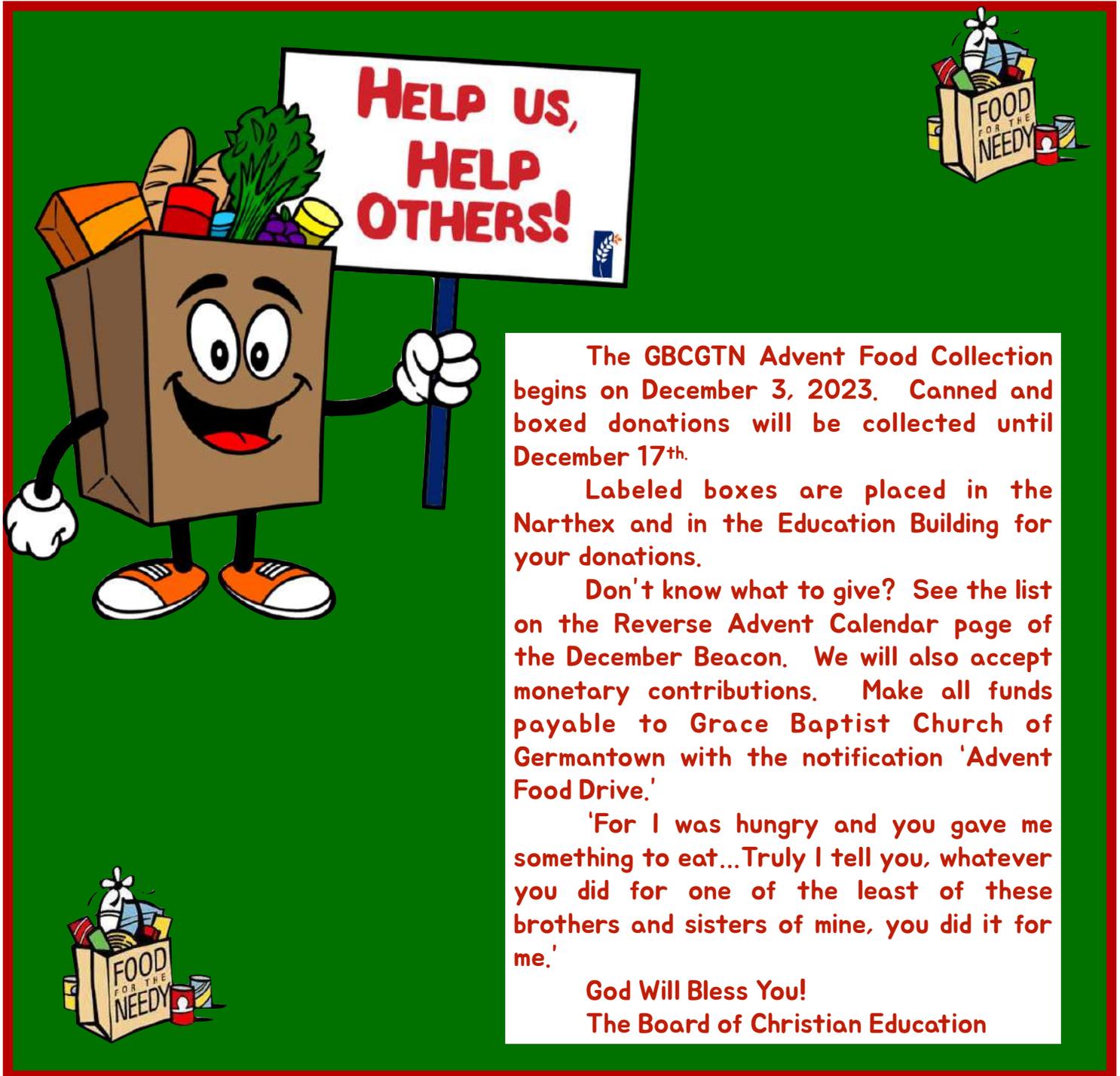
This is the first retreat since Covid , and the women truly looked forward to it...and were truly blessed by it.

Thank you to our Women's Retreat Ministry for all of your hard work in getting this together. We are looking forward to returning to the full weekend in 2024 and invite all women of Grace and friends to join us.

Announcement of the details will be presented in early 2024.







The GBCGTN Advent Food Collection begins on December 3, 2023. Canned and boxed donations will be collected until December 17<sup>th</sup>.

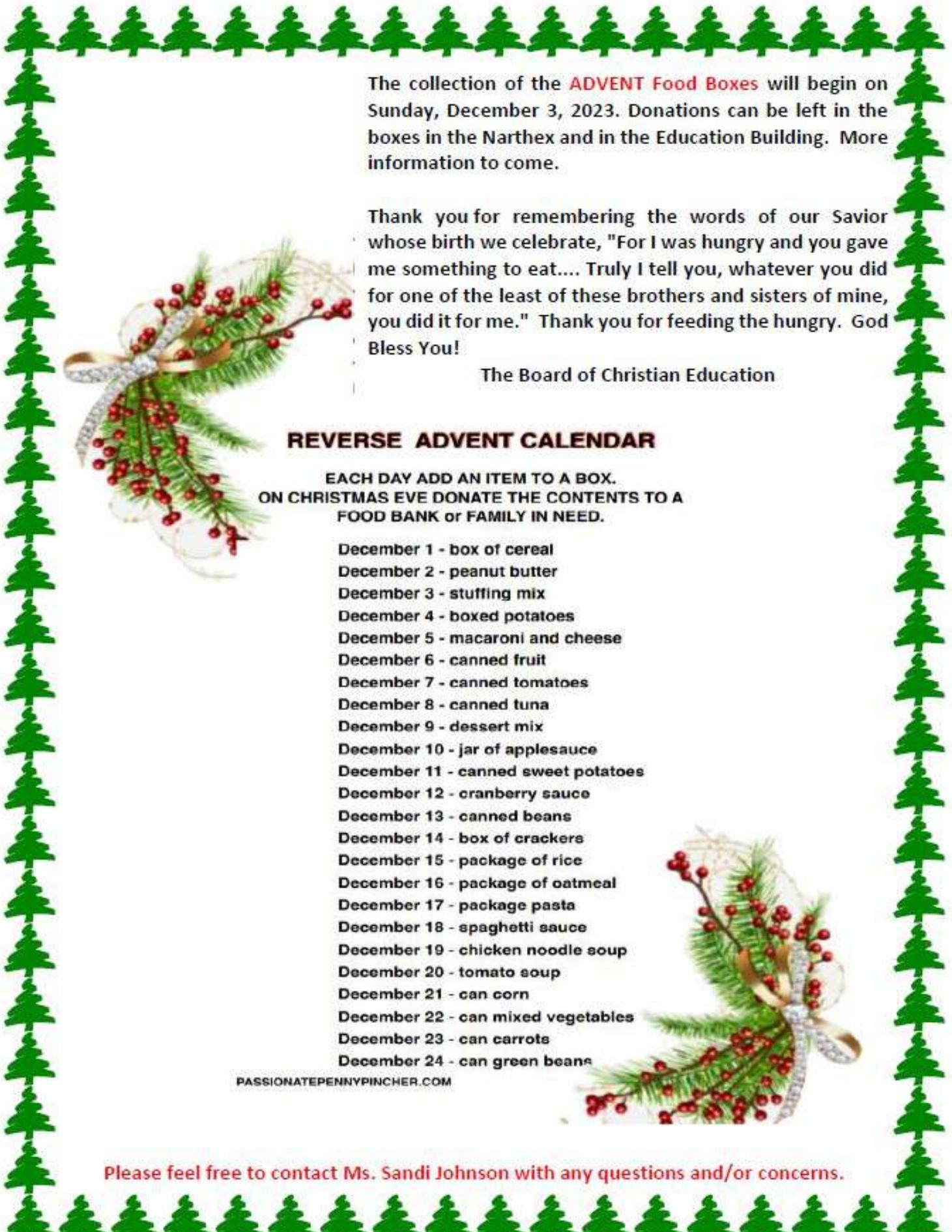
Labeled boxes are placed in the Narthex and in the Education Building for your donations.

Don't know what to give? See the list on the Reverse Advent Calendar page of the December Beacon. We will also accept monetary contributions. Make all funds payable to Grace Baptist Church of Germantown with the notification 'Advent Food Drive.'

'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me.'

**God Will Bless You!**

**The Board of Christian Education**



The collection of the **ADVENT Food Boxes** will begin on Sunday, December 3, 2023. Donations can be left in the boxes in the Narthex and in the Education Building. More information to come.

Thank you for remembering the words of our Savior whose birth we celebrate, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me." Thank you for feeding the hungry. God Bless You!

The Board of Christian Education



### **REVERSE ADVENT CALENDAR**

**EACH DAY ADD AN ITEM TO A BOX.  
ON CHRISTMAS EVE DONATE THE CONTENTS TO A  
FOOD BANK or FAMILY IN NEED.**

- December 1 - box of cereal
- December 2 - peanut butter
- December 3 - stuffing mix
- December 4 - boxed potatoes
- December 5 - macaroni and cheese
- December 6 - canned fruit
- December 7 - canned tomatoes
- December 8 - canned tuna
- December 9 - dessert mix
- December 10 - jar of applesauce
- December 11 - canned sweet potatoes
- December 12 - cranberry sauce
- December 13 - canned beans
- December 14 - box of crackers
- December 15 - package of rice
- December 16 - package of oatmeal
- December 17 - package pasta
- December 18 - spaghetti sauce
- December 19 - chicken noodle soup
- December 20 - tomato soup
- December 21 - can corn
- December 22 - can mixed vegetables
- December 23 - can carrots
- December 24 - can green beans

PASSIONATEPENNYPINCHER.COM



Please feel free to contact Ms. Sandi Johnson with any questions and/or concerns.

## PAINTING WITH A TWIST !



Saturday, October 28, 2023 from 12-3p.m. The invitation was for the YOUTH (ages 10-30)

We had Girls Scouts from Grace Baptist Church of Germantown and the community. The children enjoyed pizza and other refreshments.

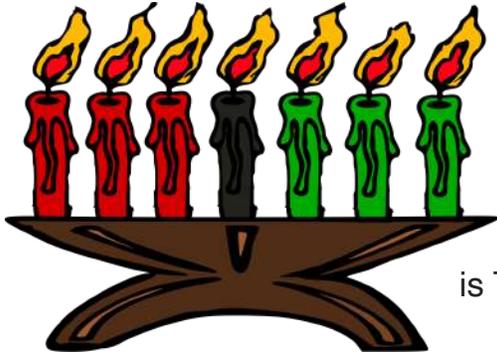
They created a masterpiece of their own and were able to take their masterpiece home.

Featured Artist, Chad Cortez Everett

Sponsored by the Women's Guild  
Grace Baptist Church of Germantown







## KWANZAA

is Tuesday, December 26, 2023 to Monday, January 1, 2024.

### What is Kwanzaa and why is it celebrated?

Created in 1966 by Maulana Ron Karenga, Kwanzaa is an African American and Pan-African holiday that celebrates history, values, family, community and culture. The ideas and concepts of Kwanzaa are expressed in the Swahili language, one of the most widely spoken languages in Africa.

### Why is it called Kwanzaa?

The name Kwanzaa is derived from the phrase “matunda ya kwanza” which means “first fruits” in Swahili. Each family celebrates Kwanzaa in its own way, but celebrations often include songs and dances, African drums, storytelling, poetry reading, and a large traditional meal.

### What are the 7 principles of Kwanzaa?

- Umoja (Unity) To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race. ...
- Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) ...
- Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility) ...
- Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) ...
- Nia (Purpose) ...
- Kuumba (Creativity) ...
- Imani (Faith)
- 

Submitted by:

Inez D. Henry, President, GBCOG, AAHM

Marlene Patterson, Vice-President, GBCOG, AAHM



**HAPPY KWANZAA**

**OUR KNOWN SICK AND SHUT-INS:**

Dr. K. Wesley Alford  
Mrs. Dorothy Allen  
Ms. Joyce Allen  
Deacon Robert Berkley  
Mrs. Luvonia Bivens  
Mr. Leonard Carter  
Mrs. Shirley Carter  
Trustee Em. Ruben Collins  
Mrs. Claudia Cuyler  
Mrs. Juanita Dade  
Mrs. Carol Daley  
Trustee Em. Sidney Estes  
Mrs. Liller B. Green  
Mrs. Brenda Hinson  
Mrs. Florence Jenkins  
Mrs. Deborah Steward-Johnson  
Mr. Darryl Jones  
Mrs. Jacqueline Johnson  
Mrs. Elayne King  
Trustee Em. Iris Lewis  
Mrs. Patricia Lomax  
Ms. Celesta McLean  
Mrs. Helene Morris  
Mr. James Napoleon  
Ms. Ida Reeder  
Mrs. Jennie Robinson  
Mrs. Dorothy Wint-Ryan  
Miss Aileen K. Scroggins  
Deacon Eugene Thompson  
Ms. Alice Whitaker  
Ms. Sandra White  
Mrs. Irma Williams  
Ms. Audrey Wright

**OUR NURSING HOME & REHABILITATION**

**RESIDENTS:**

Mrs. Catherine Willie, **Terrace at Chestnut Hill**

Trustee Em. Kenneth Jackson, Sr., **Complete Rehab at Harston Hall**

Deacon Eddie L. Collins, **Echelon Care and Rehab Center**

Mrs. Pearl Montgomery, **Genesis Healthcare Nursing &**

**Rehab**

Deacon Em. William Ballou, Jr., **Germantown Home**

Ms. Dolores J. Bouldin **Terrace at Chestnut Hill**

Mr. George Beach, **ProMedica Total Rehab+**,

Mr. Christopher and Mrs. Ludell Roberts, **Springfield Crossings Rehab and Health Care.**

Mrs. Marian Davis, **Wesley Enhanced Living at Stapley**

Mrs. Barbara Hutchinson, **Wesley Enhanced Living at Stapley**

Ms. Keisha Way, **Towne Manor East**

**PRAYER LIST:**

Ms. Linda Lawrence, **sister**, of Mrs. Barbara Autry

Ms. Shirley Walker, **sister** of Mrs. Barbara Autry

Mr. Kevin Barlow, **son** of Mrs. Cora P. Barlow

Ms. Annette M. Jackson and Mrs. Shirley Macon, **sisters** of Mrs. Cora Barlow and Mrs. Theresa Smith

Mrs. Barbara Barnes

Ms. Joanne Evans, **friend** of Mrs. Patricia Beach

Trustee Em. Darius Berry

Ms. Karen Beyers and Mr. Eugene Beyers

Mrs. Shyolanda Nichols-Brown of Denver, CO

Mrs. Norma Birckett

Ms. Juan Clairbourne of Las Vegas, NV, **cousin** of Rev. Dr. J. Henry Buck, Jr.

Ms. Catavia Buck, **sister** of Rev. Dr. J. Henry Buck, Jr.

Aesha Butts, mother and Teesha Butts, **daughter**

Mr. Adelbert Bush  
Mr. William Carter  
Mr. Robert Corbett, **brother** of Ms. Ellen Corbett  
Ms. Elizabeth Corbett  
Mrs. Grace Corbett  
Mrs. Helena Dennis, 125 E. McIver Road,  
Darlington, SC 29532, **mother** of Ms. Lisa  
Dennis  
Mrs. Marlene Diggs  
Mr. Willie Evans, **father of** Ms. Tiffany Evans  
Mrs. Carolyn Gardner  
Mrs. Parthenia Gardner, **sister** and Mr. Tyrone  
Randolph, **son** of Mrs. Geraldine V. Gilmore  
Mrs. Geraldine V. Randolph-Gilmore  
Mrs. Carolyn McLean of Raeford, NC, **sister**  
of Ms. Vera Graham  
Ms. Tamika McLean, **niece** of Ms. Vera  
Graham  
Mrs. Ethel Johnson  
Ms. Joanne Johnson  
Mrs. Christina Pleasants-Johnson  
Mr. Richard Kydd  
Mr. Marcel Wilson, Mr. Samuel Wilson & Mr.  
Steven A. Wilson, **sons** of Mrs. Christina  
Pleasants-Johnson  
Mr. Christopher H. Vinson, **son** of Mrs.  
Geraldine Lamar  
Ms. Yvonne Love, **sister** of Ms. Vinnette Love  
Mrs. Florence Lucas, **sister-in-law**, Mr.  
Robert Lucas, **brother** and Mrs. Dorothy  
Ripley, **sister** of Trustee William & Adele  
Lucas  
Mrs. Jacqueline (Garden) Marshall  
Mr. Roger Lee Jenkins (NC), **uncle**, Ms.  
Yolanda Bailey, **cousin and** Mrs. Marilyn  
Robinson, **cousin** of Deacon Prince &  
Lorraine Massey

Rev. Victoria Monts and Master Joshua Monts  
The Moody Family  
Mrs. Zenola Hubbard-Moore  
Mrs. Lillian V. McClanahan-Nunn  
Mrs. Marlene Patterson  
Mr. Joseph Norman  
Rev. Charles W. Quinn, Senior Pastor,  
Bethlehem Baptist Church  
Mr. Carl Richardson, **husband** of Mrs.  
Barbara Richardson  
Rev. Arnold C. Storr  
Ms. Suzette Edwards, **friend** of Rev. Arnold  
Storr  
Mr. Vito Scutti  
Mr. George Jackson, **son** of Mrs. Dorothy  
Stewart  
Mr. Kevin Turner, of Durham, NC, **son** of Mrs.  
Elayne Turner  
Mrs. Matilda Simmons, **sister** of Ms. Alice  
Whitaker & Mr. Landon Whitby  
Mrs. Roslyn Stanley (**no calls/no visitors**)  
Mr. Don Jose & Mrs. Dolores Stovall  
Mrs. Lisa Williams, **wife** of Mr. Anthony  
Williams  
Mrs. Ellen L. Williams  
Mrs. Mae F. Williams  
Mrs. Dorothy Wilson, **mother** of Mr. J. R.  
Wilson II

# December Calendar

\*Birthday

\*\*Anniversary

\*\*\*Memorial

- B 01 John R. Custis, III
- B 01 Liller Green
- A 01 Wiliam and Shirley Carter
- B 03 Felicia Wallace Benton
- B 03 Mrs. Priscilla Custis
- B 06 Vera Graham
- B 07 Brenda G. Norman
- M 09 Verna Overton
- B 09 Brian Wallace
- B 10 William Carter
- B 11 Alice Mae Whitaker
- B 12 Aimira Diarra
- B 13 Solomon Diarra
- B 13 Lavidia White Royster
- M 15 Alberta Duncan
- M 15 James Duncan
- M 17 Nannie Paige
- M 19 Oliyja S. Estes
- B 19 James S. Fields
- B 21 Kris Garrison
- B 22 Sheri L. Diggs
- A 22 Don Jose & Dolores Stovall
- B 23 Brooke Lynn Hickenbottom
- M 27 Lorraine F. Taylor
- B 27 Tiffany M. Fields
- B 28 Sydney Alexis Gandy
- M 28 William McQuillan, Sr.
- B 29 Deja Imani Griffin
- M 31 James F. Scott, III
- B 31 Maxine H. Tucker