



Highlights

From the Heights

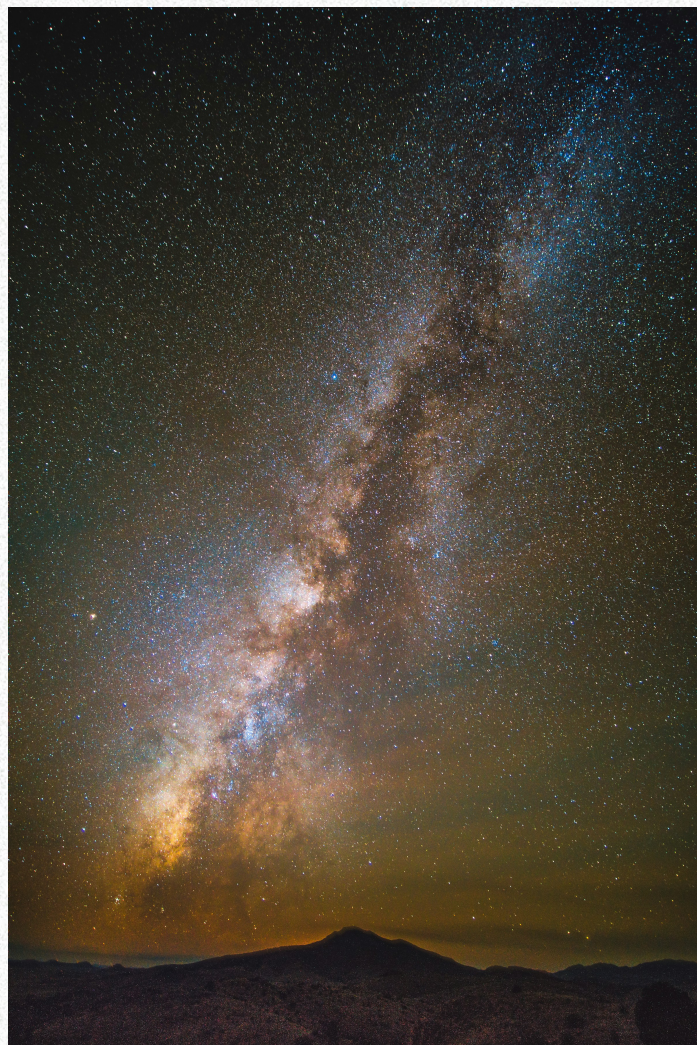
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | NORTHMINSTER EPC | DECEMBER 2024 – VOLUME 12

PASTOR'S CORNER — THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. — Revelation 12:3-6

There is something in us that loves fantastic stories about the supernatural, “fantasy” in its truest, literary sense. We love epic tales of good versus evil, of supernatural beings and superhuman people. Stories that stir our imagination, encouraging us to see the larger, cosmic story unfolding when we look past the merely physical world we live in and interact with on a daily basis. Whether we call those stories fantasies, myths, science fiction, or something else, we find them speaking to something intrinsic in our experience that knows there is more to this life than the physical world we see and touch.

I am willing to bet that when you go to read the Christmas story with your family, the verses above are not the ones that first come to mind. When we think of the Christmas story, we usually turn to the opening chapters of Matthew or Luke. If you're



wanting a more existential version, then John is the gospel for you. The last thing we think about when we it comes to the Christmas stories are dragons and cosmic battles. The incarnation of God the Son in the form of Jesus Christ is the first miracle of Christmas, a truly fantastic moment when the heavens came to earth, the spiritual took on the physical. It is the heart of what we celebrate at Christmas. But even in the midst of this epically mythical occasion, our focus centers on the stuff of earth — a pregnant teenager, a messy barnyard, a baby taking its first breath. The birth of Jesus Christ is so exceptionally visceral, it's easy to forget how the incarnation transcends time and space.

In Revelation 12-14, John recounts human history from heaven's perspective. It's a truly cosmic and fantastic story that involves dragons and beasts, angels and people. It's so different from the rest of Scripture, its hard to understand, let alone know who is who. Here's your cast of characters: The dragon is Satan. The woman is Mary (at least in these verses - the woman changes throughout the chapter from Eve, to Israel, to Mary, to the Church... it's complicated). The baby is the easiest one to figure out - he's Jesus, clearly identified by the reference to Psalm 2:8-9 ("the one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron"). In the verses above, we have not only the story of Christmas, but Jesus' entire life and ministry consolidated into one short sentence. Chapter 12 captures all of human history in 17 verses. What's been eons for us is but the blink of an eye in heaven (2 Peter 3:8). Quite a different version of the story we all know so well.

We know the incarnation is a wondrous and miraculous event. Even with that, it's so easy to miss just how truly wondrous and miraculous it was. It's so much more than nativity sets and advent wreaths. It's a true story that is so much more and better than anything we've ever dreamed or imagined. The incarnation is a miracle of cosmic degree

and impact, breaking through heaven and earth, shattering the boundaries that separate the spiritual from the physical, bringing together the divine and the human in a way that had never happened before, and will never happen again. Through Jesus Christ, Satan (the dragon) has been barred from heaven (Rev. 12:8) and thwarted at every turn (Rev. 12:13-17) until his ultimate defeat when Christ returns (Rev. 14:1-6).

The Christmas season is one of the most tangible and tactile seasons we celebrate. It carries with it so many unique sights and sounds, textures, aromas and tastes. It is very much an imminent celebration. But Christmas is also a transcendent season extending through time and space. In the midst of your Christmas celebrations this year, allow time for your imagination to take hold of the cosmic dimensions that are very much a part of the Christmas story. Jesus has come. God is with us. And evil has lost. Joy to the world, indeed!

John 1:9-14

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

WOMEN'S BOOK CLUB MEETS MONDAY, DECEMBER 5TH, 11 AM

The Northminster Book Club will meet at Depot Grille on Thursday, December 5th at 11:00 a.m for our Christmas party. We are not reading a book this month, but asking everyone to bring a poem or story about Christmas that they can share with the group. We are also asking each person to bring a book (it doesn't have to be new, just in pretty good shape), wrapped in gift paper. We are going to exchange books with one another. This is a tradition from Iceland called Jolabokaflokkur, which translates to "Christmas book Flood." This tradition is celebrated on Christmas Eve in Iceland and involves giving and receiving new books. But its essence lies in the joy of reading them together - something that we do as a group each month.



LIFE TOGETHER

Keeping in touch with one another

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS:

- 3 Karey Garrison
- 3 Jackson Moore
- 5 Joan Porter
- 12 George O'Brien
- 20 Dolores Wright
- 24 Matt Brine
- 27 Gerald Bryant



DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

- 1 Ron & Judy Reyburn, 1962

PRAYER REQUESTS

*I sought the Lord, and He answered me;
He delivered me from all my fears.*
— Psalm 34:4

Several members have asked for prayers for needs that they'd prefer not to share publicly. Please lift up these prayers, knowing that God knows for whom you pray and what they need.

Bronwyn Harvey is home after successful back surgery last month.

Julie Lerner's hand and wrist surgery has been postponed until next year.

Jackie Hodges is home healing from a broken arm.

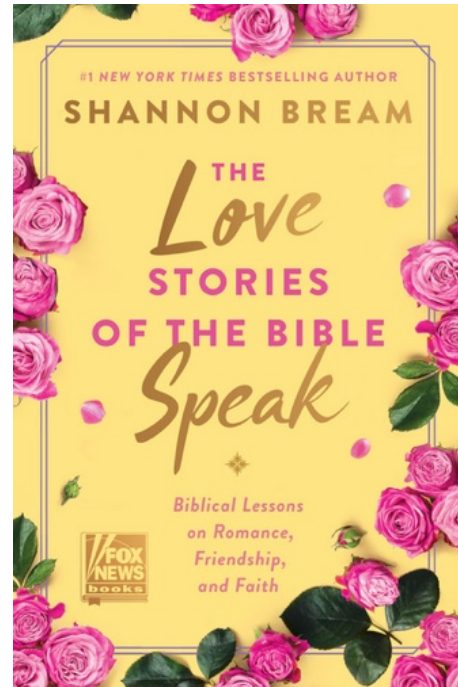
Beverly & George O'Brien are home healing from a car accident in which Beverly broke her femur.

Jimmy Wright asks for prayers for an upcoming MRI and followup procedures on his heart.

Remember others who cannot be with us in church: **Pat Callahan, Arlene Horton, Margie Seal, Dot Stinnett, and Dolores Wright.**

All active servicemen and women, law enforcement personnel, first responders.

WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY MEETS MONDAY, DEC. 2



The Women's Bible Study is in for a treat as we meet at 7pm at the home of Debbie Irvine for our December meeting. Debbie's address is 136 Shawnee Court and that is in Madison Heights.

Our Bible study will come from the lesson of Joseph and Mary - A Bond of Trust. Some of you may remember that we studied this lesson a year ago, but there is so much more to get out of this lesson. We also wanted to study something related to the "real" Christmas story. So read or reread Joseph and Mary, complete your workbook or look over what you did last year and come prepared to discuss Mary, Joseph and Jesus. As always, if you don't get a chance to finish your lesson, come anyway.

Looking forward to seeing you on Monday, December 2.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP REPORT 2024 GENERAL FUND

	October	Year To Date
Income	\$ 8,549	\$101,908
Expenses	<u>\$11,622</u>	<u>\$110,090</u>
Balance	\$ -3,073	\$ -8,182

DUAL CITIZENSHIP

By Rev. Bob Mills

Whether civil or liturgical, the ending of one year and the simultaneous beginning of the next annually invites us to reflect on where we've been and where we're going. This year, the month of December obligingly helps us accept that invitation. December 1st marks the start of the Christian season of Advent, while the 31st, as always, brings the calendar year to a close.

As 2025 approaches, I suspect many in this country will mentally leaf back through our 2024 calendars. When we do, much of what we'll see will be chaotic. The presidential campaign and election raised the bar on such election-year staples as confusion and despair. Hurricanes startlingly ravaged North Carolina and Tennessee, raising rivers to devastating, even deadly levels in unsuspecting places. Wars, rumors of wars, and kingdoms rising against kingdoms swirled around the airwaves and the Internet, leading many of our fellow citizens to cast a wary eye around their own neighborhoods as well as around the globe.

Mercifully for world-weary Christians, a month before the old civil year ends with New Year's Eve, a new Christian year begins. The season of Advent (from a word that means arrival or coming) isn't mentioned in the Bible, so it's not a sin if you don't recognize or celebrate it. But it's been part of the Church's worship and witness for at least 16 centuries, which leads me to think that many of God's people have found its observation beneficial.

One benefit I've found from following the liturgical calendar is that it provides a profound sense of stability in a world where change is constant and the rate of change continues to accelerate. The annual arrival of Advent is a welcome reminder that God still rules from His throne in heaven and that no matter the upheaval of topography or culture, His covenant with His chosen people will never waver, His steadfast love for us will never end.

Traditionally, the Church has used Advent to remember and celebrate both Jesus' Incarnation and His promised return, that is, His first and second comings. In the first two weeks of Advent, Christians reflect on the Second Coming. This is a time of preparation; a time for confessing our sins and praying the Lord will come quickly. In the last two weeks of the season, we shift our focus to Christ's first coming, to the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, to the mystery that Mary's baby lying in the manger was, is, and eternally will be the Son of God.

In this transitional month, as we look not only at our past but to our future, I pray we'll ponder Paul's words to the Christians at Philippi, "*But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Phil. 3:20). Paul isn't telling the Philippians to withdraw from civic life. That would contradict Jesus' teaching that we're to be the world's salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16).

Rather, Paul is reminding his readers, as Advent reminds us, that our citizenship in any earthly realm is merely temporal, therefore temporary. Even now, our true citizenship, our eternal home, is in heaven.



GOD IS ON THE MOVE IN CENTRAL VIRGINIA!



Through the ministry of Young Life, hundreds of teenagers are touched by the Gospel each week in our area. Young Life is a non-denominational, para-church ministry that began in 1941 aimed at introducing high schoolers to Jesus Christ. In 2024, Young Life is active all across the globe with programs for middle school, high school, college students, as well as teenage mothers.

In Central Virginia, Young Life has groups meeting in 8 area schools (7 high schools and 1 middle school). On November 15, Central VA YL held its annual placement night. This is when all the leaders in training are placed at the schools where they will serve. 29 Liberty University students joined dozens of their classmates as official leaders after spending 11 weeks in training.



In Amherst County, we are blessed to have four new college students join the five leaders already in place at the high school. Please be in prayer for these amazing 9 young adults who will be ministering to our students. Already this fall, ACHS Young Life has had weekly club meetings and Bible studies as well as a fall weekend at Rockbridge.

Worship Schedule Change Beginning Sunday, December 1

- 9:30 AM - Sunday School
- 10:30 AM - Coffee & Conversation
- 11:00 AM - Worship





DECEMBER 2024 MISSION FOCUS: Christmas Food Baskets

MOE Committee requests that everyone contribute to the annual Christmas Food Boxes for area needy families.

If you have names of people/families that should receive one of these boxes, submit names and number in family, address and telephone numbers to Pastor David or the MOE Committee. These must be submitted the first Sunday in November so that they can be reviewed.

Eight or nine churches in the area participate in the collecting, packing, and distribution of food. These foods include soup, canned fruit or vegetables, breakfast items such as pancake mix and bottles of syrup, peanut butter, jelly, (best if these two items are not combined), canned meats, etc. Non-perishable packaged foods that include most of the ingredients are also welcome.

Monetary donations are always needed. It is usual to spend more than \$3,000 buying bulk hams at a discount. Hundreds of pounds of apples are gotten from Fitzgerald Orchard at a good price.

There will be a food collection location in the narthex.

Volunteers will also be needed to pack boxes at Amelon U.M. Church in mid-December.

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Remembering or honoring a family member or friend with a poinsettia displayed in the church has been a long-standing tradition in our Northminster congregation. Once again, we are ordering poinsettias to help decorate our sanctuary for the Advent-Christmas season. Northminster members and friends are welcome to donate in memory and in honor of loved ones.

To participate, please sign your name on the church bulletin board and fill out the form provided for payment. Poinsettias are **\$10.00 each** and the deadline is **Sunday, Dec. 8**. Please contact Anne Wilkins if you have questions.





DECORATING THE CHURCH FOR CHRISTMAS

Saturday, December 7 9 a.m. – 12 noon

Christmas is such a special time of year – a time of celebration, family, and the birth of Jesus. We also delight in decorating the house of our Lord. With this in mind, you are invited to join us as we prepare our church to celebrate His birth.

Once again, we will gather together to decorate beautiful trees with Chrismons, set up Advent candles, wreaths, and banners as we enjoy light brunch refreshments, Christmas music playing in the background, and above all, each other's company.

Members and friends of all ages and all decorating skill levels are welcome. If you plan to attend, please sign the sheet in the bulletin board so we can plan for delicious brunch items. See you there!

Please note: some preliminary work will also be done during the week ahead of Saturday, such as bringing down decorations from the attic and assembling trees. Please indicate if you can assist with these tasks. We will arrange times at your convenience for this preliminary work.

See Anne Wilkins for questions about decorating the church.

BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR JESUS

Sunday, December 8, after Worship

Join us after worship on Sunday, December 8 as we celebrate Jesus' birthday! In all the celebrations of the Christmas season, it's sometimes easy to forget that it is also the day Jesus was born. We'll have birthday cake, treats, and more to help us remember that Christmas is about the miracle of the incarnation... and the day of Jesus' birth!



CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

Tuesday, December 24, 7 p.m.

On Christmas Eve, we invite you to join us for a family-friendly candlelight service celebrating the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. This service of song, carol and Scripture provides a wonderful opportunity to get a sense of how eager the Hebrews were for the coming of the Messiah so long ago and reminds us how eager we are for his return. We look forward to seeing you there!

CHRISTMAS CAROLING

Sunday, December 22, 4:00 to 6:30 p.m.

Join us for our annual tradition of caroling to our homebound members. We'll meet at the church and carpool together as we enjoy fellowship and make a joyful noise singing our favorite Christmas tunes. This is a great opportunity for folks of all ages to come together as we spread some Christmas cheer!



Merry
CHRISTMAS

CELEBRATE HIS BIRTH



Northminster Evangelical Presbyterian Church
106 Clearview Rd
Madison Heights, VA 24572



First-
Class
Postage
Here