

Murray Presbyterian Messenger

January 2018

Murray Presbyterian Church

P.O. Box 196, Main Street Murray, NE 68409

www.murraypresbyterian.org T: (402)235-2754

Featured This Month: New Sermon Series



Maybe you've seen the latest Star Wars movie—or other releases in this blockbuster series. Now find out what *the Bible* says about Star Wars themes—and how this modern-day epic saga can shed new light on the gospel message!

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Upcoming Events

January 1

January 2

Breakfast Club at Hyvee 8:30am

January 3

Afternoon Bible Study 1:00pm

January 7

Youth Group at Murray Christian Church

January 18

Open Hearts Kitchen Volunteering

January 21

Annual Congregational Meeting

March 2-3

Murray Presbyterian Women's Retreat

Registration opens soon.

In this Issue

Featured This Month p.1

Church Life & Worship: p.2-3

Worship Opportunities p.3

Pastor's POV p.4

Mission & Outreach p.5

Church Life & Worship p.6

Just for Fun p.7



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Women's Retreat

"The Invitation"

Women's Encounters With Jesus

Save the Date: March 2nd - 3rd, 2018

9th Annual Women's Retreat

Retreat Leaders: Rev. Suzanne Gorhau & Pastor Kathy Noble

Hosted by Murray Presbyterian Church

Lied Lodge, Nebraska City

Christian Education Julie Nickels, Team Leader



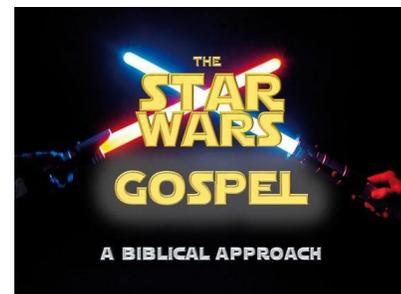
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Worship Opportunities



January 7
"Beyond the Force"
John 1:1-14

January 14
"Jesus and the Jedi"
John 3:13-17

January 21
"Resisting the Dark Side"
John 6:1-15

January 28
"Returning to Your True Self"
John 10:11-18

February 4
"A New Hope That's Real"
John 16:19-24, 33



As this newsletter goes to press, Advent is coming to an end—and for my son, John, it's been a rather intense season of waiting this year. He's not necessarily been waiting for Christmas or even the arrival of the Christ Child. No, the object of his longing has been the release of the eighth Star Wars movie (which, in keeping with our family tradition, we will be going to see on New Year's Eve.) So, John's Advent chorus this year has been, "Come, Thou Long Expected Jedi." He's obviously not been alone. For the third year running, a Star Wars movie is on track to be the biggest box office hit of the year (expected to gross over \$1 billion worldwide). For anyone my age or younger, Star Wars has been perhaps *the main cultural phenomenon* of our lifetimes. Not only is it the most successful movie (and merchandising) franchise of all time, it's spawned a highly devoted fan base. And along with all the other elements involved in that appeal, there is a very strong spiritual component. The *Atlantic* began its review of *The Last Jedi* observing: "For at least two generations the Star Wars saga has served as a kind of secularized American religion." And in fact, that's what George Lucas had in mind when he came up with the Star Wars concept. He says movies have replaced family, church, and the arts as the main vehicle for transmitting values and meaning. So he wanted to create a myth for the modern age. And it's obviously taken hold. Someone's observed: "Hardly anybody can answer the easy Bible questions on Jeopardy anymore, but almost everybody can tell you about Obi-Wan Kenobi, Darth Vader, Yoda, and the Force."

So how do we, as Christians, respond to this development? One option is to do what I spent most of my life doing (before John came along) and ignore the whole thing. But as one Christian writer helpfully pointed out, "Christians cannot afford to be *out of touch* with popular films if they are to remain *in touch* with the swirling currents of contemporary society."

Another approach is to denounce things like Star Wars. Back when I was in seminary, one of my main theology professors was a guy named Norm Geisler—aka "Stormin' Norman." The first Star Wars movie had just come out and Stormin' Norman (a leading figure in evangelical Christian apologetics) made it his life mission at the time to go around warning Christians about the movie's dangerous undercurrent of Eastern spirituality. (The Seminary student newspaper responded with a hilarious series of cartoons called the "Hardy Har Wars", featuring Obi-Wan-Ken Normi going up against the dark menace of Barth Vader.)

Stormin' Norman may have been a little over the top in his critique—as he often was. But the point is entirely valid. The style of spirituality in the movies is predominantly that of the Eastern religious traditions, combined with some Christian elements. (George Lucas has described himself as a "Buddhist Methodist.")

But rather than denouncing this feature of the series, a more fruitful approach might be to constructively engage with it. That's the sort of response I think the Apostle Paul demonstrated on Mars Hill when he used the words (and concepts) of popular Stoic philosophers to connect with an audience of Athenian skeptics (Acts 17). In much the same way, we should at least make a good-faith effort to understand something that represents such an unprecedented cultural phenomenon and find the gospel parallels.

That's what we'll be trying to do this January with a series of Sunday morning messages called "The Star Wars Gospel: A Biblical Approach." We'll be looking at a handful of key themes in the Star Wars saga—and then seeing how they connect with the Christian message as it's presented in the Gospel of John. I first did this series two years ago back in Fremont Ohio—and it went over so well it even got written up in the local newspaper! Folks here in Murray who knew about that experience have been encouraging me to repeat the series here (and, needless to say, John has been the strongest advocate!)

This seemed like the logical time to do it. We can hopefully capitalize on the interest generated by the latest movie release. And—get this—it's even a *liturgically correct* time of the year to do this series! Starting with the first Sunday in January, we're designating our Sundays by the weeks that have elapsed since Epiphany. And what's the main symbol of Epiphany? Why, it's a star! Epiphany is all about celebrating the light that's come into our world of darkness—precisely the imagery that lies at the heart of the Star Wars saga.

So if you know some Star Wars fans, why not encourage them to join us this month? And if you're *not* a Star Wars fan, don't worry about getting lost in the technicalities. I'm not well-versed in the particulars of the movies myself. John has been my tutor and he coached me through a Star Wars marathon the last time around. I try to keep the movie references simple and explain them when I can. The real point of the series isn't to make us all Star Wars experts. It's to help us know Jesus better by demonstrating how the gospel addresses basic spiritual needs that these movies illustrate.

I look forward to seeing you this month—and may the Force be with us!



A Note of Thanks



To our Murray Presbyterian Church Family,

Once again, we've been overwhelmed by your generosity this month. Thank you very much for the financial gift that was presented to us on behalf of the congregation. As is our customary practice, we will use it for some things that benefit our whole family. (We used last year's gift for memberships to the Henry Doorly Zoo and Fontenelle Forest and to purchase a family television set.) We were also very, very touched by a gift from an anonymous donor (or donors) intended to make it possible for our daughter to come visit during the holidays. We did our best to make arrangements for such a trip, but there was too much unpredictability in her job to allow it to happen this time. But it meant a great deal to us that folks in our congregation would be this concerned about our family. For these gestures and for everything you do to enhance our experience here in Murray, we extend our deepest gratitude.

Bill, Stacey, and John

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Page 4 of 6

A NOTE OF THANKS

Murray Presbyterian,

Thank you all so much for the boxes you sent for the holidays, the packages were quickly emptied by the Soldiers in my unit. We recently had a large increase in the number of people on island and items were greatly appreciated. I know that it took a lot of time and effort to prepare the packages, from the Huskers basketball goal, hygiene items, to the homemade cookies and hand-written cards. It is also a large comfort to know that my family has the support of a wonderful church family. I have done several deployments and I can honestly say, this one has been the easiest. Knowing that there is a support structure if, and when needed makes it easier for those of us who are gone. We greatly appreciate the packages and we will be home in a few short months. Merry Christmas and I will see you soon.

Ssg Jason Poston

JDG S2

x8356



Murray Presbyterian has been invited to serve meals on the third Thursday of every month at the Open Hearts Kitchen of Plattsmouth.

A sign-up sheet for each month is provided in the back of the church. You may contact Ann Wieringa for further information at (402)980-9466

Individuals and families may serve for part or all of the service hours.

NEXT DATE: January 18 4:30-7:30 P.M

YOUR MISSION DOLLARS AT WORK:

At its December meeting, the Session approved year-end giving to some of our long-standing mission partners.

- Christian Solidarity International (The organization Rev. Heidi McGuinness serves)
• Salvatore Clinic in El Cortijo, Guatemala
• Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Conestoga Chapter
• (Contributions were made earlier in the year to Calvin Crest and CSI.)

In addition, funds from the special mission account were sent to the Presbytery's General Mission Fund (divided between the Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly).

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Leadership Teams

Worship and Family Life

*Sherrill Konfrst, Team Leader

Amanda Anderson, Jeff Anderson, Rebecca Gillaspie, Linnea Hill, and Laraine Young

Mission and Outreach

*Ann Wieringa, Team Leader

Jennifer Corrick, Sharon Rivas Stacey McConnell, Diana Puls, Sara Remmers

Christian Education

*Julie Nickels, Team Leader

Properties and Finance

*David Schwindt, Team Leader

Ray Avidano

Gary Reike



Lots of hours are spent in a church kitchen. We have the best kitchen helpers in our church! A very special thank you to Cindy Loftin and Laraine Young for all your special help for the Advent dinner. A big thank you to all the teenagers for the clean-up help. You guys are awesome!! Thanks from the Church Life and Worship Team and the congregation!



January 3 Breakfast Club at HyVee 8am

Afternoon Bible Study January 2

On the first Tuesday of the month join us in the social room at 1:00 p.m. for a topical Bible Study based on the book "Growing Older and Wiser," by Dale and Sandy Larsen. It's never too late to join invite a friend!! See Sherrill Konfrst for more details.

Devotional Prayer Gathering

Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. Anyone is welcome and there are no study materials. Devotions are from *The Prayer Bible* followed by a time of prayer. Come as you are able.

January 3 , January 10 , January 17 , January 24, January 31

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Session

Moderator

Rev. William McConnell

Class of 2017

Ray Avidano (Clerk)

Gary Rieke

Class of 2018

Julie Nickels

David Schwindt

Class of 2019

Sherrill Konfrst

Ann Wieringa

Deacons

Class of 2018

Lindsey Drake

Joyce Johnson (Moderator)

Jen Simmerman (Treasurer)

Class of 2018

Jennifer Corrick (Correspondence)

Peggy Etherington

Lee Hill (Secretary)



Free copies of **Our Daily Bread** devotional are available in the back of the church.

Take one for yourself and share one with a friend!