

Murray Presbyterian Messenger

December 2024

Murray Presbyterian Church
P O Box 196 Murray NE 68409



Upcoming Events

Sundays

10:00 am: Morning Worship

Thank you for your ongoing financial support of Murray Presbyterian! Contributions may be deposited in the offering plates during worship services, mailed to the church at P. O. Box 196, Murray NE 68409 or made online at www.murraypresbyterian.org. Click on the "Give Now" button at the bottom of the homepage.

Featured This Month: Christmas Services



December 15: Advent Dinner

December 24 (5:30 pm): Christmas Eve Service

December 29 (10:00 am): "Christ of the Carols"

See page 4 for details

In this Issue

Featured This Month, p.1

Pastor's POV, pp. 2-3

Worship Opportunities, p. 2

Board of Deacons, p. 4

Worship & Family Life, pp. 4-5

Mission & Outreach, pp. 5-6

Page 1 of 6

Murray Presbyterian Church, Murray, NE
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One of the things we're reminded of during the Advent season is how the Old Testament anticipated the coming of Jesus. That's an aspect of the Bible that I have understood in different ways during the course of my lifetime.

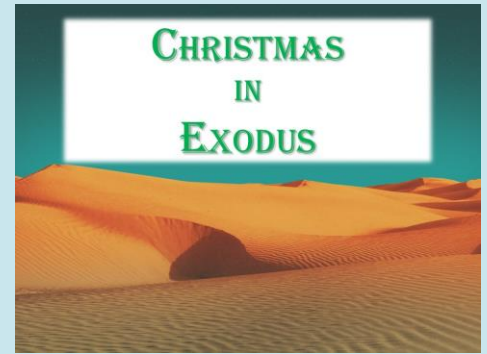
Growing up in a conservative Christian environment, I had the impression that the Old Testament contained a whole bunch of specific, detailed predictions (300 in all, by some counts) about the life and ministry of Jesus, all of which came to pass exactly as written. It was an era in which a psychic named Jean Dixon had gained a considerable amount of notoriety for her purported ability to predict the future. Supposedly, she had predicted events like the assassination of President Kennedy years before they took place. That was the way in which some people thought the Old Testament foretold the coming of Jesus. And it was often cited as incontrovertible proof of the Bible's divine inspiration.

Then, I got to seminary and started studying some of those Old Testament verses in their original historical context. Suddenly, it didn't seem so clear and obvious anymore! In many instances, these so-called predictions of Jesus actually seemed to be referring to someone else or to be talking about things taking place at the time when they were written.

Take, for example, the verse often heard in this season of the year about a "virgin" giving birth to a child named Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14). Turns out the Hebrew word used there may not actually mean "virgin." (That idea crept into the text through a later translation into Greek.) In any event, it seems clear from the surrounding context that little Immanuel was born right around the time the prophecy was given (see vs. 16). Or what about the prophecy concerning the flight of the infant Jesus into Egypt (Matt. 2:15)? Turns out, in its original context the "son" referred to in that verse (Hosea 11:1) is the nation of Israel and the departure from Egypt is the Exodus.

When the gospel writers said these Old Testament verses were "fulfilled" in Jesus, they evidently meant something quite different from the way the predictions of a psychic (like Jean Dixon) are allegedly "fulfilled." One prevalent explanation: the Old Testament prophecies are "fulfilled" in the sense that they are given a "fuller meaning" than the one that may be apparent on the surface.

But the fact that one widespread understanding doesn't stand up to careful scrutiny doesn't mean that Old Testament expectations of the coming Messiah are any less profound or incredible. Having been immersed in the Bible for purposes of teaching and preaching it for a quarter century now, I am continually amazed at how it all fits together. It's not just a matter of isolated verses predicting something that happened centuries later. It's that the totality of the Bible tells one overarching story. And it's a story that all converges in Jesus.



What does the coming of Jesus into our world mean for us? The Apostle John gave the clearest theological response to that question in the first chapter of his gospel. And he summed it all up with images and terminology taken from the Old Testament book of Exodus (the book we have been studying for the past three months). Come see how those Exodus themes help us to understand Christmas better!

Dec. 8: "The God Who Came Down Off the Mountain"
(Exodus 40: 33-38;
John 1:1-5, 14)

Dec. 15: "The God Whose Glory is Revealed"
(Exodus 33:15-23;
John 1:14, 16-18)

Dec. 22: "The God of Grace and Truth"
(Exodus 34:4-9;
John 1:14, 16-18)

Dec. 29: "Christ of the Carols"

There are a multitude of themes and literary motifs running through the Old Testament: the temple, the sacrificial lamb, the righteous sufferer, the ideal Davidic King, the covenant, etc., etc. In the Old Testament, they often run on parallel tracks, not necessarily intersecting in any way. Often, there are discordant elements. (For example, how do we reconcile God's grace and forgiveness with the severe sanctions threatened against those who violate the covenant?) There is also the sense that the Old Testament story, by itself, is incomplete. It is pointing beyond itself to something yet to come.

Then, we get to the New Testament, and suddenly, all those threads come together. The elements in tension are reconciled. The sense of anticipation finds fulfillment. Jesus is the missing piece that makes sense out of it all. I have sometimes compared it to the experience of reading a mystery novel. Scattered throughout the story there are a myriad number of details that a casual reader might overlook. The plotline involves various quandaries that don't seem to admit of any easy resolution. (How could the victim have been shot when no one was seen entering or exiting the confined space in which he was found?) Finally, you come to the very end of the story and Sherlock Holmes or Hercules Poirot or whomever the detective is reveals what really happened. Suddenly, it all makes sense! All those little clues that maybe seemed unconnected or irrelevant at first are now tied together to form a coherent explanation. That's why the dog started barking at midnight. That's why there were footprints in the freshly fallen snow. That's why the candelabra was moved off the mantelpiece. There is a way to resolve all those seemingly inexplicable dilemmas.

It takes a very clever mystery writer to craft a story with all those plot twists and scattered clues ultimately being tied together at the end. But can you imagine a book like that being written by scores of writers over the course of a thousand plus years? The only time something even remotely similar to that happened in the 1940's when President Roosevelt challenged a collection of celebrated mystery writers to produce a collaborative book. One wrote the initial chapter, then the others kept adding chapters until it was finished. Not surprisingly, the resulting book (*The President's Mystery Plot*) was pretty disjointed!

The fact that the Bible could achieve such a remarkable degree of unity and convergence is a remarkable demonstration of its inspired character. Jesus is the thread that holds it all together. As we continue on our Advent journey this year, I hope you'll join us in worship as we trace one tiny element in that storyline, connecting the Old Testament book of Exodus with the coming of Jesus. And may you and all your loved ones have a very joyous and blessed Christmas!

Leadership

Session

Moderator

Rev. William McConnell

Clerk of Session

Debra South

Class of 2024

Kenny Drake

Denise Ayers

Class of 2025

Sharlyn Deterding

Debra South

Class of 2026

Tanner Miner

Kyle Nickels

Deacons

Class of 2024

Kathy Friedli

Sherrill Konfrst

Julie Nickels

Class of 2025

Ryleigh Hill

Stacey McConnell

Karla Remmers

Project Angel Tree



The area around the Christmas tree in the back of the sanctuary is filling up with presents donated for needy families in our community. The angel tags (handcrafted by **Anna Mallet**) disappeared in record time this year! If you took one or more of the tags, thank you for your participation in this annual project. Please bring all gifts (unwrapped) to the church building by **Sunday, December 15**, with the angel tag attached.

Advent Dinner



You don't want to miss the annual Advent Dinner (turkey, ham, stuffing, and all the fixings) taking place immediately following worship **on Sunday, December 15**. Please bring a favorite side dish or dessert and join us if you are able!

Worship & Family Life Sharlyn Deterding, Team Lead

Christmas Services



The **Christmas Eve Service of Lessons and Carols** takes place **December 24 at 5:30 pm**. As always, the story of Jesus' birth will be told through Scripture, carols, and reflections,

leading up to the candlelight singing of "Silent Night." Please plan to make this special and meaningful time of worship a centerpiece of your Christmas celebration this year!

Christ of the Carols will be the theme of worship on the First Sunday of Christmastide (**December 29 at 10:00 am**). The service will revolve around carols, interspersed with meditations on how the lyrics point us to important truths about Jesus.



Leadership Teams

Worship and Family Life

Sharlyn Deterding, *Team Leader*
Deb South, *Session Rep.*
Christina Dolvin
Linnea Hill
Julie Nickels
Sherrill Konfrst
Laraine Young

Mission and Outreach

Kyle Nickels, *Team Leader*
George Collins
Melanie Honaker
John McConnell
Stacey McConnell
Dana Stahl
Ann Wieringa

Christian Education

Denise Ayers, *Team Leader*
Sharlyn Deterding
Kathy Friedli
Julie Nickels
Linnea Hill

Properties and Finance

Kenny Drake, *Team Leader*
Sharlyn Deterding, *Session Rep.*
Dave Friedli
Linnea Hill
Norm Koester
Gary Reike
Michael Stahl

Pastor Heidi Anniversary Celebration



On **December 1**, we celebrated the 35th anniversary of **Pastor Heidi McGuinness's** ministry in Murray, which began on December 1, 1989. In a follow-up message, Pastor Heidi wrote:

I do so want to thank you again for the privilege and the joy. Thank you also for the honorarium which I very much appreciated. It allowed me to put it towards other funds to purchase lactating goats along with their little kids for Pastor Mary, who lives in a very remote area between the two Sudan and whom I've known for 24 years. She always takes in the most vulnerable, most recent refugees fleeing the violence in the North of Sudan. Malnutrition has set in among the babies.

God bless your worship service tomorrow your family, and the church,

Heidi

A Special Celebration



Happy Birthday to **Peggy Etherington!**

Mission & Outreach

Kyle Nickels, team lead

Fire Department Dinner



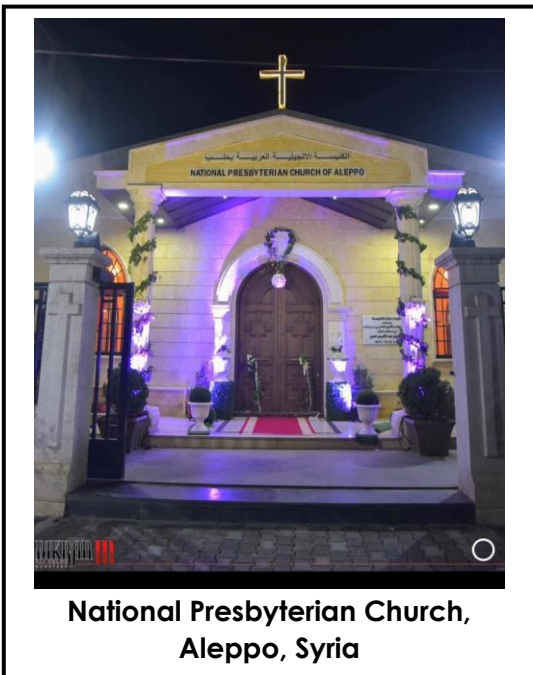
Some members of the team which prepared a lasagna dinner for our local Murray Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department on **November 12**.

A note from the Department reads:

"Dear Murray Presbyterian Church, We are grateful and humbled by your faithful support of MVFD. We look forward to your meal every year. We were able to share some of the ice cream with another EMS service that stopped by the station. It was a hit! We appreciate your time and the effort that it takes to provide such a delicious meal. Thank you!"

Syria Update

The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), our Presbyterian / Reformed sister denomination, has 20 congregations and eight pastors in Syria. On December 8, the Outreach Foundation, a Presbyterian-related mission organization, posted the following update:



**National Presbyterian Church,
Aleppo, Syria**

"A land yearning for peace yet has never seen it. Peace to the Middle East, with all it holds, and to all who live in it." These words, circulating on social media and spoken from the depths of sorrow, reflect the grief and hope of Middle Eastern people amidst relentless turmoil. Just days after a U.S.-brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, a major escalation in the Syrian war took place last weekend, casting a shadow over fleeting hopes of stability in the region.

This past weekend, Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city, was seized in a lightning offensive by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a rebel force formerly linked to Al Qaeda. In less than 48 hours, the city fell almost without resistance from the Syrian army and its allies. On Friday, Aleppo's residents slept under the government's sovereignty. By Saturday, they awoke to a city under new rule.



Presbyterians in Aleppo Above: worship on Dec. 8 (Sunday after city fell to rebels); Below: decorating for Christmas (Dec. 11)

For years, many believed the Syrian war was effectively over. But now, the unexpected eruption of violence has saturated the nation with fear, uncertainty, and a deepening sense of hopelessness. It is a profound and overwhelming reminder of how swiftly fragile peace can crumble. This is the harsh reality that our partners in the region live every day as they continue to serve faithfully amid these dark times. The Christian community is bearing an agonizing cost—many once again weighing the heartbreaking decision to leave their homeland in search of safety and a better future.

Yet, even in this darkness, our friends in the Middle East cling to the unwavering hope found in Christ. His everlasting glory and sovereignty remain the radiant light. As we approach the season of Christmas, we invite you, our beloved supporters, to join us in prayer for our brothers and sisters in Christ. May God's goodness, mercy, and justice illuminate these dark days. May the Prince of Peace turn sorrow into joy and swords into plowshares. Together, let us pray for the dawn of lasting peace.