**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
**410 Second Ave, Box 441**
**Sterling, IL 61081**
**Rev. Dr. Christina Berry**

# January

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**410 Second Ave.**
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A heart for God in the heart of Sterling.
**FirstPresbyterianSterling@live.com**
**www.firstpresbyteriansterling.org**
*Look for us on Facebook!*

# First Presbyterian Church
STERLING ILLINOIS

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Dearest friends,

Welcome to this new year! I recently saw a meme on Facebook that says, "Nobody claim 2021 as 'your year.' We're all going to walk in real slow. Be good. Be quiet. Don't. Touch. Anything." And while I laughed out loud when I read it, there is a part of me that feels pretty cautious about the future right now. It's just a small caution, though, because I'm so excited about the coming year for our church and our community.

One thing I'm excited about is getting my new star word for this year. Nan is sending them out to everyone, but if we miss you somehow, please contact the church and we'll get one right in the mail to you. We encourage you to keep this word someplace where you will see it every day. When you do, pause for a moment to consider your word. This word is "your" word for 2021 – a word for you to contemplate, to pray with, to explore, maybe even argue with! Whatever your word comes to mean to you, we hope that it will illuminate your spirit.

As we move into the weeks following Epiphany, we are in a season that is called "ordinary time," but of course, nothing is ordinary these days. You should have received a book from the church by now, mailed to you from the maker in Tennessee, called "No Ordinary Light." We will be exploring how this light that has come into the world makes our lives different, transforms and illuminates us like the star that drew the magi. We hope you'll use the activities, questions, and suggestions in the book to brighten your days in this season.

So, about 2021. It seems like so very long ago that we last worshiped together in person. As circumstances changed, I kept hoping that we'd be able to gather "soon," but it looks like we still have some time to wait. But the vaccine is going out to people, and (to stay with that theme of light) there is a light at the end of this long pandemic tunnel we've been in. I'm reluctant now to predict anything but the Next Steps Task Force will soon be making recommendations to the Session. Meanwhile, we continue to be together in spirit, and through the Holy Spirit.

Another thing to look forward to in this new year is that your Deacons will be dropping off a worship bag for you in January and another little surprise in February. We hope this encourages and delights you and helps you remember how much you are loved.

*(Continued on page 3)*

Watch for items coming up on the calendar in January: officer training; ordination and installation of officers; the annual meeting; the adult class moving to Wednesday night; most of all, fix your eyes on the extraordinary light of Christ that continues to shine in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.

"We're all going to walk in real slow. Be good. Be quiet. Don't. Touch. Anything." LOL! Happy New Year!

Pastor Christina

**Joys and Concerns**

Many thanks to the Deacons and the Mission Committee for their faithful and continued commitment to help others in our congregation and community.

Congratulations to Jordann Langner on completing all academic requirements to be a teacher – now, just student teaching, and she is on her way! We are proud of you, Jordann!

Best wishes, hugs and love for Morgan, Alan, and Marcoree as they make space for new family members in their household.

We give thanks to God for the good news from Mary and Barry about their grandson Elijah, and pray for continued health and healing.

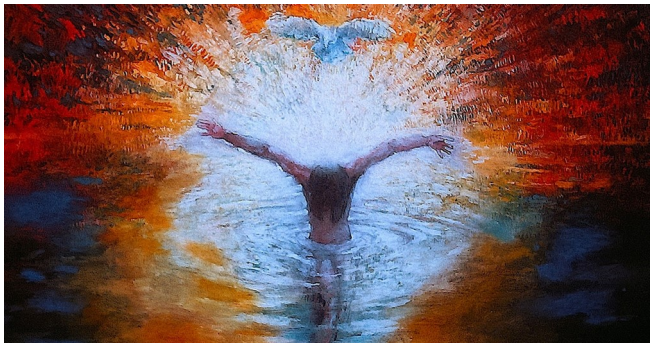
I want to say again (and again and again) how very thankful I am for the exceptional work done by our staff in this season. Worship Team Rex, Amy, Nicole and Erik, Nan and Tim; office administrator and a million other things, Samantha; custodians Mike and Kayla: all of you are amazing and I don't know what we would do without you.
Many thanks, too, to the Worship Committee - Audrey, Vicki, Jane and Dorothy - for your exceptional work in making this Advent and Christmas so memorable, so personal, and so outstanding. You are remarkable.
Thank you to every person who did a reading, sent a picture, sang with the choir (you were outstanding!) and prayed and sang along with us in these last few weeks. We are the church together.
Pastor Christina

# Weekly Devotions

**January 3—No Ordinary Light: Epiphany**

| | |
|---|---|
| Theme | An epiphany is a sudden manifestation of the divine. It is no ordinary light, as Jesus was no ordinary baby. |
| Text | Matthew 2: 1-12 Drawn by the light of a star in the east, the magi come in search of the child born "King of the Jews." |
| Context | Herod's interest in the child is malicious – he feels threatened by this baby and wants to kill him. So he orders every baby boy under the age of two to be murdered. |
| Challenge | When empire is challenged by God's extraordinary light, how do we ordinary people respond? |
| Prayer | Shine the extraordinary light of your grace upon us, O God. Amen. |

**January 10—No Ordinary Light: Baptism of Jesus**

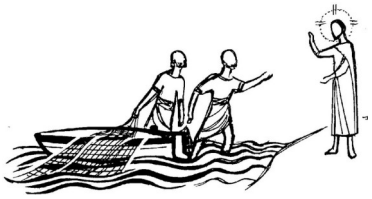


| | |
|---|---|
| Theme | Jesus' baptism demonstrates that God is doing something new, and that John has prepared the way for Jesus. |
| Text | Mark 1:4-11 Jesus comes to be baptized, and John feels unworthy to do so. God's Spirit shines upon Jesus as the beloved. |
| Context | Baptism marks us as beloved, and places a claim upon us. |
| Challenge | How do you understand yourself as God's beloved, and how does God's claim on you show in your daily life? |
| Prayer | Shine the extraordinary light of your love in us and through us and among us, O God. Amen. |

**January 17—No Ordinary Light: Calling**

| | |
|---|---|
| Theme | Jesus recognizes Philip and calls him, and Philip recognizes Jesus as one in whom there is no deceit. |
| Text | John 1: 43-51 Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael. |
| Context | John's gospel begins with the designation of Jesus as "the true light, which enlightens everyone." |
| Challenge | When Jesus calls you, it is because he sees in you a disciple. What do you see in Jesus, when you hear his voice calling you? |
| Prayer | Shine the extraordinary light of your true wisdom on us, O God. |

**January 24—No Ordinary Light: Calling**



| | |
|---|---|
| Theme | Jesus calls everyone to repent and believe the good news. |
| Text | Mark 1: 14-20 Jesus calls the fishermen to come and follow him. |
| Context | John has been arrested and now Jesus' ministry has begun in earnest. He is preaching the good news and calling his disciples. |
| Challenge | In what ways has Jesus asked you to "leave your nets and follow"? |
| Prayer | Shine the extraordinary light of your good news on this world, calling us to you and giving us faith to believe, O God. |

**January 31—No Ordinary Light: Jesus' Amazing Authority**

| | |
|---|---|
| Theme | This man Jesus is no ordinary teacher. He speaks with authority in a way that amazes everyone who hears him. |
| Text | Mark 1: 21-28 At the synagogue where he has gone to teach, a man with an unclean spirit approaches Jesus. Jesus casts the unclean spirit out, and even the spirit recognizes his authority as the son of God. |
| Context | Jesus has gone to the synagogue and begun to teach and preach. Those who hear him are amazed at his power and authority. |
| Challenge | What or who is in authority in your life? How does the voice of Jesus rise above all earthly authorities? |
| Prayer | Shine the extraordinary light of your authority into our world, and help us to listen to the voice of Jesus, O God. |

Happy New Year Friends,

2021 is here and for many of us, it did not get here fast enough! Every New year brings the opportunity for a time of reflection. As we take time to look back over 2020, we are reminded that a lot can happen in 365 days! That said, I'm excited to share some things that are already in the works at FPC.

Many of you have already received a mini book called "No Ordinary Light". This little book is packed full of Scripture and activities to use as we all remember to *always walk in his light*. One of the first activities is chalking our door. Chalking our door, or homes, is a traditional Epiphany practice done by Christians around the world. It's a reminder that our homes are a blessing, to all who live, love, enter, work, or play in them. You'll find directions on how to do this in your own home, along with many other interesting things to do during the coming weeks.

These past few years during our Epiphany worship, we have passed out star words and have heard from many of you that you'd like us to continue this tradition. Your "Star Word" has been mailed and you should be receiving it soon. Your star will have a single word printed on it. We hope that you will place your star in a location that you'll see every day. Each day, take time to think about what significance this word has in your life and how God might be speaking to you through this star.

We also encourage you to continue to join us in our Christian Education classes:

Children's Zoom Sunday School will resume on January 10th and we will be using some of the fun activities from the "No Ordinary Light" booklet.

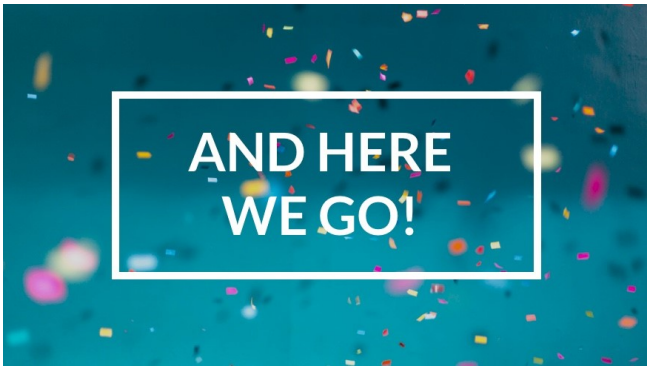
Confirmation Zoom Bible Class will also resume on January 10.

The Adult Zoom Bible Study Class will be moving from Sunday mornings to Wednesday nights at 6:30 and will begin a new study on the epistles to the Galatians and Philippians. The class will resume on January 13.

The Zoom Wednesday Morning Bible Study will continue to meet on Wednesday mornings.

Friends, as you can see, we have been planning and are eager to join you as we all grow in the knowledge and love of God.

Peace,
Nan



**Adult Bible Study Class**

The Adult class that had been meeting on Sunday morning on Zoom is moving to Wednesday nights at 6:30. After meeting on Sunday mornings at 11:00 when we were gathering in person, we shifted to Zoom in that same time frame. When confirmation Bible class started, we moved to 9:30 AM. We've decided that we will continue to meet weekly on Zoom, and will begin a new study on the epistles to the Galatians and Philippians.

**Wednesday, January 13 6:30 PM on Zoom**

We will be using a book in our study that we have ordered from Westminster/John Knox Press. Our friend AJ will be curating some supplemental articles for us as we work through these books of the Bible.

Here's what the publisher's site says about the books: "The letters to the Philippian and Galatian congregations illustrate well the passion and intensity of Paul's writing. Together these letters provide a compelling portrait of a complex original thinker who probably was the most significant missionary of his day, a theologian and social critic of rare power and insight whose legacy continues today to spark heated debate. Yet if we can catch even a little of Paul's vision, we are likely to be transformed. We may find ourselves called, like Paul himself, to a fresh vision of what God is doing in the world and to participation in the crucified body of Christ."

If you would like to participate and are not already part of this adult study group, just notify Pastor Christina or email the church office, and we'll make sure you have a book and the Zoom link.

https://www.wjkbooks.com/Products/0664227465/philippians-and-galatians.aspx

**OFFICER TRAINING**

If you are a member of the Session or the Board of Deacons, please plan to attend our officer training on Zoom on January 23 from 9:00-1:00. We promise it will be so much fun you'll want to do it again. (Well, maybe not THAT fun.) We will learn about our roles as spiritual leaders of the congregation, organize our work for the upcoming year, and hear an update from the Next Steps Task Force. And of course, we'll play PresbyJeopardy.

**ANNUAL MEETING**

The Annual Meeting of the Congregation will take place on Zoom at 1:00 PM on Sunday, January 31, 2020. We will make sure that you have access to the Annual Report prior to the meeting, in which we will vote on the Pastor's terms of call, elect Trustees, and elect new members to the Nominating Committee. If you are responsible for a report, please get it turned in to Samantha as soon as you can!

**Sacrament of the Lord's Supper**
January 3, 2021

***We gather for the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday in January. For your participation at home, you'll need some juice and bread, in any form.***

Leader: The Lord be with you
**People: And also with you**
Leader: Lift up your hearts, wise people of God
**People: We lift them up to the Lord**
Leader: Let us give our thanks and praise to the one who beckons us to come
**People: It is right to give our thanks and praise**

Leader: Shining and radiant God, on that first bright morning of creation, you spoke and your glory filled the earth. You beckoned us to come to you and journey alongside you, and we could have lived with you in endless light and glory. But we wandered away, down other paths, on journeys of our own making, losing our way and straying into the wilderness of sin. You sent prophets to light the way, but we did not listen. Finally, through the darkness of our despair, you sent Jesus, to shine out in the darkness and lead us back to you. So we join our voices with those wise ones from the East, who came to worship you.

**Response:**
**We three kings of Orient are**
**Bearing gifts we traverse afar.**
**Field and fountain, moor and mountain,**
**Following yonder star.**

Leader: You are holy God, and blessed is your son Jesus Christ, our light and our guide. He came from heaven and walk the road of the cross, walking to Calvary and to the house of death, the rising and making a path from the tomb toward you, so that we can find and follow the path to new life in him. So, as we prepare to journey with him this year, we speak of that mystery called faith, revealed to us through Christ, the morning star of love; the radiant star of resurrection; the constellation of hope.

**Response:**
**O star of wonder, star of night,**
**Star with royal beauty bright,**
**Westward leading, still proceeding,**
**Guide us to thy perfect Light.**


*(Continued on page 9)*

Leader: Holy God, you love both wise and foolish. Send down your Spirit of wisdom upon those gathered around this Table, and on the gifts of the bread and the cup, that they might make us your faithful and loving children, ready to seek your light and your path, and travel the road you set before us.

**Response**
**Glorious now behold Him arise,**
**King and God and Sacrifice.**
**Alleluia, Alleluia**
**Sounds through the earth and skies.**

**Words of Institution**

**Sharing the Bread and the Cup**

**Prayer After the Supper**
Leader: Maker of Stars, you have fed us on the bread of hope and refreshed us with the cup of grace. Now as we go from this place, help us to travel another road, to defend the weak, to speak for the voiceless, to assist those cast aside. Send us forth to enter the houses of the strangers in our midst; to enter the despair of the lonely and forgotten; to enter the hearts of everyone we meet and invite them to join us, and you on this journey.

**Response**
**O star of wonder, star of night,**
**Star with royal beauty bright,**
**Westward leading, still proceeding,**
**Guide us to thy perfect Light.**

**Mission Committee is At Work!**

The Mission Committee has been working hard to respond to various needs in our community and our congregation. They've given gift cards for Christmas to families and provided some extra Christmas cheer. They covered a month of rent for a family in which the head of household is out of work and awaiting unemployment funds. They purchased a chest freezer for Sinnissippi's Women's Recovery House in Amboy, and we are so grateful that Knie Appliances delivered it to Amboy with no delivery charge. Along with Deacons and Christian Education, they've supported the purchase of the "No Ordinary Light" books. They continue to keep Buddy Bags operating. The Committee is ready to help out as opportunities come available in the new year, so please contact Mary Jo or Diana if you know of needs.

**Food Pantry in Rock Falls**

Are you or anyone you know in need of food? First Christian of Rock Falls (506 5th Ave) Food Pantry is open for drive up service in the back parking lot Mondays from 1-3 by appointment only. Please call up to a week in advance to reserve your time. 815-626-2271 You are eligible for a box of canned/packaged goods and meat once a month and produce once a week. Only need to see I.D. once if you are new.

It's time to work on a new directory! Fill out the form below and turn it back in to the office. Your choice of email or snail mail. The faster the forms come in, the faster the directory comes out.

## Directory Updates

We are updating the directory and the member database, and would like you to verify current contact information and birthdays for you and your family.

Names _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Cell _____

Email _____

_____

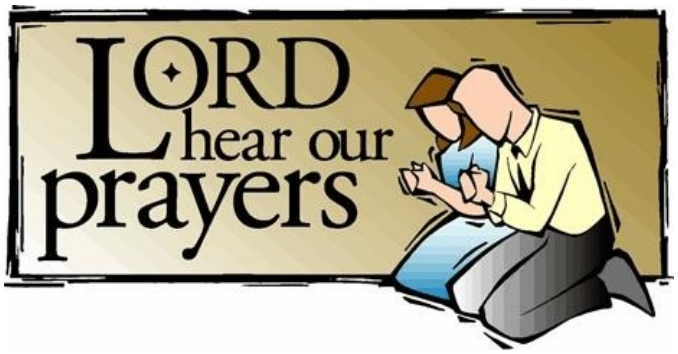
Birthdays _____ Anniversary _____

_____

_____

_____

***Please pray for:***
*At Morningside -* Fay Densmore, Don Olson
*At Parkway Center* - Bill Griswold
*At Resthave -* Ann Musgrove
*In the Service* - Brad Gericke, Brandon Shultz, Payton Lowe
*Prayers for* - Phil Sinroll, Jessie Witt, Lucy Ettinger, Pat Conklen, Barb Stern, Mickey Gage, Debbie Musgrove, Ross & Marlene Jennings, Mary-Terrie Snavely, Joan Velde, Ron & Jackie Williams




# Don't forget to turn in your pledge for 2021!

**January**
01/01 Jill Clark
01/02 Christina Berry
01/07 Abbey Zacharski
01/11 John Van Osdol
01/12 Joplin Sell
01/13 Ronald Pease
01/15 Lisa Zacharski
01/17 Lillian Ebersole
01/18 Wyatt Ebersole
01/18 Damen Whiles
01/20 Zachary Linton
*Jim & Cathy McPherson (A)*
01/21 Jamie Boze
01/26 Cynthia Cassens
Brad Zacharski
01/27 Sean Tedrick
01/28 Ryan James McPherson
01/29 *John & Barb Van Osdol (A)*
01/30 Lynn Hammer
Shirley Van Wyhe

**With the ongoing pandemic, Samantha is in the office Mondays and Fridays 9-12. Never fear, she is working from home! So if you need a question answered, feel free to email the church and she'll get back to you.**