

Faith Speaks

For as long as I've been a Christian, I have heard the narrative that Christmas is something Christians stole from the pagans. Have you heard this?! So, according to some, the early Christians were basically holiday bullies going around stealing dates and practices from the pagans so that they could steal followers from them. The big two examples of this that we hear repeated are the date of December 25th and the Christmas tree.

Now, I'm sure that most Christians, when they hear this, just roll their eyes and say, "Give me a break. I don't consider my Christmas tree a pagan symbol, so it's not. End of discussion." And honestly, that's probably the right and logical attitude to have. But, I have met Christians who have sworn off celebrating Christmas altogether because they heard it was linked to paganism.

Well, ready for some good news? There is exactly zero historical evidence that Christians ever borrowed or stole any Christmas symbols or practices from the pagans. That's right. Zero!

First, let's talk about the date of December 25th. The claim is made that ancient Roman and Pagan celebrations like Saturnalia and Sol Invictus were celebrated on December 25th, and that, of course, is where the Christians got that date. Two problems with that. First, Saturnalia was celebrated on December 17th, so that's not going to work. Now, Sol Invictus was celebrated

on December 25th later, but the earliest inscriptions we have of that holiday place it in early December. Many scholars today think that what probably happened was in the mid-200s, Emperor Aurelian moved the date of Sol Invictus to December 25th to compete with the growing Christian community. So, the exact thing Christians are accused of is what the Pagans actually did!

But where DID Christians get the date of December 25th for the birth of Christ? That date probably comes from two Christian historians from 200 to 300 AD, Africanus and Hippolytus. These guys did chronological calculations on the gospels and the book of Daniel to try and find the date of Jesus' conception and birth. Both of them landed on December 25th. Were they right? Honestly, we're not sure. But we do know that the church has been celebrating the birth of Christ on that day since at least the early 3rd century.

Alright, now come gather around the Christmas tree with me. Or should we call it the pagan tree?! No, we shouldn't. The evidence that European pagans used evergreen trees for worship and decoration is shaky at best. Most of it comes from one man, a Scottish minister named

Alexander Hyslop. Hyslop argued that Christmas traditions like trees came from European pagan roots, which came from the cult practices of ancient Babylonians. But, Hyslop offers zero sources for any of these claims.

It's much more reasonable to assume that Christians started using evergreen trees as symbolic winter decorations because that's what they saw in scripture. Think about how many times cedar trees are mentioned in scripture. It's a ton! Usually, cedar trees are mentioned as a sign of the goodness of God (Psalm 148:9; Isaiah 55:13). God even tells his people that he wants his sanctuary to be beautified with the cypress tree (Isaiah 60:13). At some point in the 16th Century Christians in Germany began the practice of decorating their homes in the winter with cypress trees, and from there the tradition caught on. But, again, there's not a single link to anything pagan. So, no, you don't need to throw out your Christmas tree and tear down your stockings. And even if Christmas symbols did have pagan roots, I would still encourage you to (continued on page 2)



Church Staff

Pastor

Rev. John Cleveland

Church Administrator

Melinda Hawkins

Music Director

Nancy Lowry

Financial Secretary

Brooke Echols

Treasurer

Ronnie Burch

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2024

Session Members

John Cleveland
 Gregg Coniglio
 Keith Lovern
 Andy Martin
 Dan Patterson

Deacons

Randy Cononge
 Alan Dennis
 Cameron Dennis

Pray that the Lord will bless the preaching and teaching ministry of the church to gather and build up the saints, that God's word will grow and multiply, and that our witness, love, and holiness will increase by the power of the Holy Spirit.

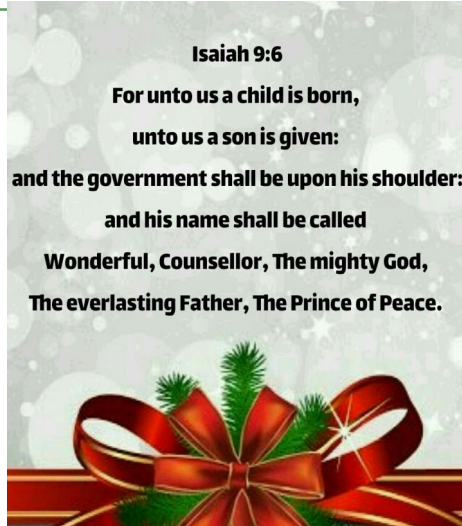
For the following, pray for health, comfort and fellowship with God during a period of sickness, that the Lord will give them faith, patience, joy and submission to his will.

- ◆ **Chris Ober:** continued cancer treatment
- ◆ **Myra Echols:** cancer
- ◆ **Jordan Israel**
- ◆ **Jimmy Ellington**
- ◆ **Mary Ellington**
- ◆ **Faith Strickland:** emphysema
- ◆ **Bonnie McEachern:** heart failure
- ◆ **Richard Ingram:** chemotherapy
- ◆ **Kathy Rewerts:** torn rotator cuff
- ◆ **Kay Horvath:** In Memory Care Center
- ◆ **Wilson Station EPC in Tennessee**
- ◆ **Children in Foster Care**
- ◆ **Our Shut-Ins**
- ◆ **The Lost**
- ◆ **Our Elders and Deacons**
- ◆ **President Biden and Congress**
- ◆ **President elect Trump**
- ◆ **Supreme Court**
- ◆ **Persons serving in our Military**
- ◆ **Law Enforcement Officers**

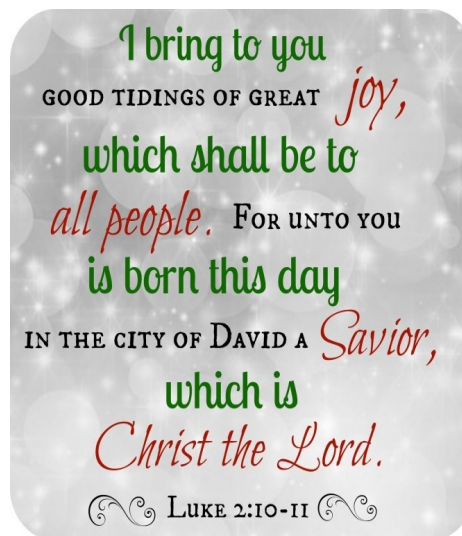
Sympathy
Family of Jimmy Brock

Please pray for our missionaries:

- ◆ **Phil and Diane Thrash**
- ◆ **Gary and Jackie Burnett**
- ◆ **Santosh John**
- ◆ **Keith and Rachel Keller**
- ◆ **Jeff & Veronique Kim**
- ◆ **Jenny Coon**
- ◆ **Mike Rasmussen**
- ◆ **Grady Davidson**



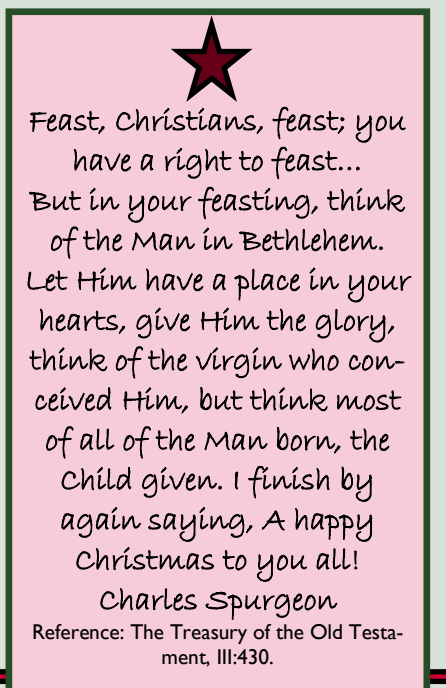
If you have a prayer request or a praise report that you would like to have included in the next newsletter, please email them to: faithepcrus@gmail.com by Tuesday, December 31st. This would include any NEW or OLD requests that you would like to have included. This section is renewed monthly.



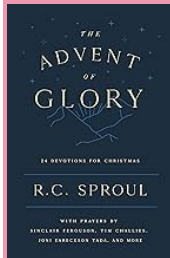
(continued from page 1) string up your lights and hang your bulbs. Why? Because we are FREE IN CHRIST! One of the problems with these sorts of discussions is they can miss the point of what a Christian is. A Christian is someone who, by God's grace, has been set free from the LAW and SIN. Christian, you are free when it comes to the festivals and feasts. The gracious and free law you are now bound to is to do everything in the name of Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him, whether you are eating or drinking or whatever you're doing! No one gets to pass judgment on you because of how you choose to decorate your house or what holidays you choose to celebrate. All the judgment due you was poured out on Christ.

Let me end with this freeing quote from the Apostle Paul. "Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day" (Colossians 1:16). Merry Christmas, everyone!

Pastor John



From the Pastor's Shelf...



**“The Advent
of Glory: 24
Devotions for
Christmas”
– R.C. Sproul**

Sara and I are excited to dig into this new advent book this Christmas season. Of course, if you enjoy Sproul, you'll enjoy this. But what I'm most looking forward to are the daily prayers at the end of each reading. They are prayers offered up by well-known and loved Bible teachers like Sinclair Ferguson and Joni Eareckson Tada. For myself, there is something really encouraging, fresh and inspiring about reading other people's prayers. Snag a copy off Amazon for 8 bucks and keep your mind fixed on Christ this Christmas.

Sometimes, the narrative of Jesus' birth can be so familiar that “the words just slip over us,” Dr. R.C. Sproul observed. This Christmas, take time to dwell on the birth of Jesus Christ, that this season may be filled with awe and wonder at the incarnate Son of God.
Ligonier.org

Fellowship News

Girlfriends of Faith

**All Ladies of Faith!
Come and enjoy a
Christmas fellowship
together on Saturday,
December 7, at 11:00 a.m.
We will meet for lunch
and laughter at the Olive
Garden Italian Restaurant
located at 1961 Jonesboro
Rd, McDonough. No sign-up
or reservation needed
- just come!!**

Women's Bible Study

**Will begin on Tuesday evening,
January 14, 6:30 pm – 8:00
pm. We will be studying
the book of 1 Peter, using
study material by Jen Wilkin
called, "1 Peter, A Living Hope
in Christ". There is a sign-up
sheet in the Narthex
and books available for purchase. Any questions may be
directed to Becky Fowler or
Pam Fraticelli.**

Men's Bible Study

**Our Men's Bible Study has
completed the book of Titus.
We will be taking a break until
January. Contact Gregg
Coniglio for more
information.**



**Join us on
Sunday evening
December 15th
At 6:00 pm
for an evening of
singing Christmas Carols
and sharing cookies.
Come and enjoy some Christmas
fellowship, singing and
bring cookies to share!**

BOOK NOOK

Check out the bookshelf in the Narthex.
We have excellent books available for your Christian growth.

The November regular Session meeting was held on Thursday, November 24th, at the church at 5:30 PM.

The Session held a Zoom meeting with Garrett Burch from Land Engineering to design the preliminary layout for the future use of the Faith Church's land. Garrett will present the first draft in the next few weeks.

Updating the church directory was discussed, and John will start the process.

The nomination process for Deacons and Elders for 2025 was discussed. John will produce nomination material to distribute to the congregation.

The Session approved the payment of the sprinkler system's five-year inspection fee of \$1,400.00.

The Session discussed the new salaried position for managing Faith's social media and suggestions for posting information about Faith Church.

Prayer needs were discussed and lifted to God.

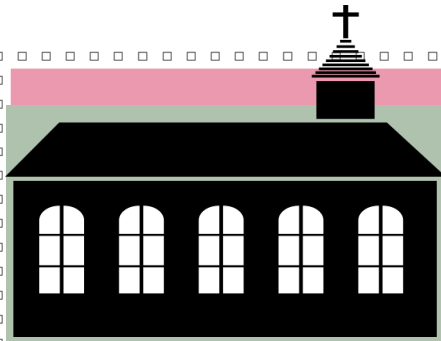
Our next Session meeting is December 12th, 2024.

Faith Presbyterian EPC Session

John Cleveland, Moderator
Dan Patterson, Clerk
Gregg Coniglio
Keith Lovern
Andy Martin



We are breaking until Sunday, January 5th at 2:30 - 4:00 Grief Share is a Christ-centered support group for those mourning the loss of a loved one. The program absolutely free and open to all who wish to join and participate. Visit this link below to learn more and register:
<https://www.griefshare.org/groups/247024>
Contact Dody Morris for details.



Calendar

- ◆ December 1 The Lord's Day
- ◆ December 1 Communion
- ◆ December 7 Ladies Fellowship
- ◆ December 8 The Lord's Day
- ◆ December 14 Youth Christmas
- ◆ December 15 The Lord's Day
- ◆ December 15 Carols and Cookies
- ◆ December 22 The Lord's Day
- ◆ December 24 Candlelight Service
- ◆ December 29 The Lord's Day



November 2024

Financial News

Donations

\$30,382.00

Expenses

\$25,633.84

P.O.P. Fund

\$900.00

Mortgage Principal

\$728,647.87

There is no connection between the worship of idols and the use of Christmas trees. We should not be anxious about baseless arguments against Christmas decorations. Rather, we should be focused on the Christ of Christmas and giving all diligence to remembering the real reason for the season.

John MacArthur



Are you a 4th to 12th grader?

You don't want to miss out on the fun and excitement!

Our next Hangout is Saturday,

December 14th
at 6:00 pm

We will be having a Christmas Party at the Cleveland's!

Outreach News

NEED HELP?

If you have a need that arises, or know of anyone that is in need, please reach out to our Deacons for assistance. They have the ability to reach out to the congregation on your behalf as well as physically meet your needs, or they can point you in the right direction for help.

Deacons of Faith
Randy Cononge
Alan Dennis
Cameron Dennis



Volunteers Needed For Fellowship Time!

If you would like to provide refreshments, there is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board by the kitchen. Speak to a Deacon if you have any questions!



Mission of the Month

Helping In His Name Food Pantry

www.helpinginhisname.org

Needs

boxed cereal, breakfast items, canned ravioli, spaghetti-o's, ramen noodles, vienna sausage, canned meat, peanut butter, jelly, canned soups, crackers

Please place your items in the mission box in the back of the sanctuary. Thank you for always giving so generously to those in need!



Are you sending out Christmas cards this year? If so, a "mailbox" is located in the narthex for you!

The box has alphabetical folders inside. Place your cards by LAST NAME in the appropriate hanging folder. Then everyone can collect their cards from the folder. Simple and Easy!



John 1:14

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Christmas is based on an exchange of gifts, the gift of God to man – His unspeakable gift of His Son, and the gift of man to God – when we present our bodies a living sacrifice.

Vance Havner

Reference: The Vance Havner Quote Book. Christianity Today, v. 31, n. 18.

UPDATE FROM
JENNY COON

Marhaba,

As we begin this week of Thanksgiving, I am acutely grateful for God's tangible and felt presence with me during some very difficult and dark times. I know that your prayers are sustaining me, and I thank you for so many of you interceding that I will never know. As we anxiously await news of talks of a cease fire, the strikes continue throughout the South and East, and here in Beirut. There are still nights I awake to my house shaking and the loud sounds of explosions, with more and more innocent lives lost and homes destroyed.

I want to share with you about two women I visited this week that we have helped at Balassan. "S" is a young lady that stumbled into our clinic by accident searching for help. She had managed to rent a room down the street from us with her elderly mother and 7 year old daughter. She came in during a particularly chaotic moment and to by honest my first thought when I saw her was "I don't have time for this." I had a patient waiting for me, another in front of me discussing x-ray results, and my staff all engaged with other patients. But something in her eyes softened my busy mentality and made me stop and listen. She wasn't looking for money or food, although she clearly was in need. She simply had heard on the street that we were a safe place that she could go for help that she could trust and wanted to know more. We visited her

later that week and she shared how she and her mother ran a small grocery store which helped them survive after her husband left. They were content and even in the first wave of bombings in the south, they stayed when many left. But finally the inevitable came and they were forced to flee as she described frantically grabbing her daughter, wet washcloths to hold over her mouth for the smoke, and her mother's bag of medicines before jumping into a relative's car and literally fleeing under the bombs. Her relatives were all scattered at different makeshift shelters or relatives and I couldn't escape how scared she looked. We connected her to our church and various resources and promised to visit again.

"A" is a young Syrian single mother of a very outgoing 5 year old daughter. She fled the war in Syria and then a very abusive husband only to find herself fleeing another war and losing yet another house to air strikes. She came to our clinic with nothing but the clothes on her back. We gave her blankets and warm clothes for her daughter and sat and listened to her story of tragedy after tragedy. Her mother and sisters were still in refugee camps in Jordan. She also had no where to go, no where to turn, and clearly much trauma under the surface she had yet to process. We connected her to our church, and with our psychologist at Balassan.

They are the reason we continue to persevere. With each patient I treat, or patient we welcome at the clinic with a smile, or blanket we distribute, we are tangibly showing the love of Christ and

planting a seed that we pray will be harvested in the future.

Thank you for your prayers and continued support.

Pray for peace.

With gratitude,
Jenny



We have distributed over 100 mattresses/pillows/blankets to the displaced in our community



The aftermath of airstrikes as seen from my car driving back into Beirut



I am so proud and honored to serve with this courageous and caring Balassan team.



To the glory of God, Faith Presbyterian Church has been called together to faithfully proclaim the Gospel, to make and equip disciples for Christ, and to advance God's Kingdom in our families, community, and world.



Faith Presbyterian Church is a congregation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (www.epc.org) and the Presbytery of the Southeast (www.epcsoutheast.org).

HAPPY DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS!



Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 4:7-10

Tammy Martin	12/03
Donna Crumbley	12/04
Brooke Echols	12/04
Sandra Echols	12/06
Randy Cononge	12/07
Nate Hawkins	12/07
Cindy Peters	12/09
Jeremy Evans	12/11
Dorothy Knowles	12/14
Caroline Echols	12/17
Tracy Cononge	12/18
Skeet Echols	12/22
Betty Brown	12/23
Melinda Hawkins	12/24
Audrey Harper	12/26
Gene Morris	12/31

Our Church Website:
www.FaithMcDonough.com

Church Email:
faithepcrus@gmail.com

Church Phone Number:
770-648-5288

Mailing Address:
Faith Presbyterian Church EPC
1185 East Lake Road
McDonough, GA 30252

CHOIR NEWS

If you would like to join our choir, contact Nancy Lowry! We would love for you to join us!



CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

If you are interested in joining Faith Presbyterian Church (EPC), you may do so by a profession of your faith in Jesus Christ, by a re-affirmation of your faith, or by a transfer of your membership from another church. Please speak with the an Elder if you have any questions about joining.

December 2024

Sun

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

<p>1 Communion 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Fellowship 10:30 Worship</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>7 <i>11:00 am Ladies Fellowship</i></p>
<p>8 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Fellowship 10:30 Worship</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>11</p>	<p>12</p>	<p>13</p>	<p>14 <i>6:00 pm Youth Hangout</i></p>
<p>15 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Fellowship 10:30 Worship 6:00 Cookies And Carols</p>	<p>16</p>	<p>17</p>	<p>18</p>	<p>19</p>	<p>20</p>	<p>21</p>
<p>22 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Fellowship 10:30 Worship</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24 <i>5:00 pm Candlelight Christmas Eve Service</i></p>	<p>25 </p>	<p>26</p>	<p>27</p>	<p>28</p>
<p>29 9:00 Sunday School 10:00 Fellowship 10:30 Worship</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>31</p>				