

# First Presbyterian Church (PCA)

## First Press

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### FPC HOSTS HARVEST CHRISTIAN SCHOOL PROGRAM



tured above are Deb Wiener (Science), Joel Barr (English), and Rachael Minich (History). Two others, Janet Sikkink and Marlene Gray, serve at HCS in the Foster Grandparent program.

On Sunday afternoon, Dec. 3, FPC hosted the Harvest Christian School (HCS) Christmas Program, a privilege the church has enjoyed annually for a number of years. Three of FPC's own are teachers at HCS. Pic-

Rachael Minich was the director of this year's program which was entitled, *G. T. and the Halo Express: Ticket to Christmas*. Student Andrew Wiener (lower left) was in charge of the sound board. The Christmas story was told by the student body in a fun and creative way through song, Scripture, drama, and the like. Grace Wie-

ner had one of the key acting roles. Both Joel and Deb had singing parts.

Harvest Christian School is a member of ACSI and provides a Christian education alternative for children preschool through grade 12. Most of its older students opt for the PSEO option, and its graduates have proved highly successful with vocational and higher education goals.

Harvest is also a part of FPC missions budget.



### ALL CHURCH CHRISTMAS EVENTS AT FPC

There are several seasonal events this month which you should put on your calendar. First, each year, Ginnie Rootkie plans a special Christmas outing. On Sat., Dec. 9, we will be meeting at Giuseppe's in New Brighton for dinner then on to North Heights

Lutheran Church for the *Great Northern Union Chorale*. Next, we hope you plan on attending our own annual Christmas Choir Concert on Sunday, Dec. 17 at 7:00 PM, led by director Monte Dybvig. The theme, *Were You There on that Christmas Night*, will be depicted

through choral music and narration. Both adult and children's choirs will be presenting. Finally, do join us for our annual Christmas Eve Candlelight Service which will be Sunday, Dec. 24 at 4:00 PM. This is always a wonderful finale to our Advent season.

### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Brochures for the 2018 Bible Conference entitled, Aliens and Strangers: A Pilgrim's Progress to the Celestial City, are available at the church office.*
- *The WIC sewing group met at the church on Wed. morning, Nov. 8, to sew dresses and pants for missions projects.*
- *Presbytery of the Siouxlands will meet in Watertown, SD, on Fri. and Sat., Jan. 26-27.*
- *Our Annual Congregation Meeting will be on Monday, Jan. 22 @ 7 PM. All members are urged to attend. Guests are also invited.*

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## DECEMBER 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24/31	25/1	26	27	28	29	30

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- 3—Communion Sunday
- 3—Harvest Christian School Christmas Program at FPC, 2 PM
- 6, 13, 20—Release Time; Dinner-for-a-Dollar, 6 PM; Covenant Kids and Youth Fellowship, 6:30 PM
- 6, 13—Wednesday Choir Practices, 7:30 PM
- 9, 16—Saturday Choir Practices—9:30—Noon
- 9—Annual Christmas Outing
- 10—Trustee’s Annual Budget Meeting, 11:15 PM
- 11—Session Meeting, 7 PM
- 17—Christmas Musical, 7 PM
- 24—Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, 4 PM
- 25—CHRISTMAS DAY
- 31—Fifth Sunday Pot-blessing after church
- 31—New Years Eve Family Game Night, 6:00—9ish PM

## WE PREACH CHRIST BECAUSE...

In the days immediately following the Lord’s ascension into heaven, those who embraced the teachings of Jesus were not highly distinguished from the Jewish faith and the synagogues from which they came. Soon, however, they were singled out and persecution drove them to have an identity all their own. In these days they were called the followers of “the Way” (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9), probably a reference to Jesus’ teaching in John 14:6 when he said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” In Antioch, however, they acquired another name. Luke says that here “the disciples were first called Christians” (Acts 11:26). This was the name that stuck. Ever since, followers of Jesus have been called Christians and their movement, Christianity. And why not, for Christianity *is* all about Christ!

Very early in my ministerial career, I fell upon Colossians 1:28 as the guiding light of a pastor’s office. I think on it often and have even had it printed on the stationary of the churches I have served. It reads, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” The text stress two important ideas. First, the goal of a faithful ministry is maturity among believers—or, that the body of Christ might

“grow so it builds itself up in love” (Eph. 4:16). Second, the means through which this is accomplished is a ministry of the Word where Christ is proclaimed as its central feature. For the Apostle Paul, Christianity was not about signs or wisdom—spectacle or philosophy—but about Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22). To the Corinthians he said, “We preach Christ crucified.” And again, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2). To the Colossians he simply said, “Him we proclaim.”

Christians recognize that Christ Jesus is the entire focus of Scripture (Luke 24:27; John 5:39). If this is indeed the case, then Christians must seek a sustained ministry that keeps the Lord Jesus before them all the time. It is not sufficient to simply say, “I want a church that preaches the Bible.” To be sure, this is both right and necessary. All the examples of preaching in Scripture served to elucidate the Scriptures. Paul could say to the Ephesians with confidence, “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Yet, Paul never said, “I preach the Bible.” Rather, and repeatedly, he said, “I preach Christ!”

For the foreseeable future, I would like to use this corner of the Newsletter to unpack this

simple phrase because there is more to it than meets the eye. Embodied in this affirmation is an approach to ministry, or better, a philosophy of ministry. It is a hermeneutic, an interpretation, a way of profitably reading the Scriptures. Jesus chided the Sadducees saying, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). Again he said, “They bear witness about me” (John 5:39). This is the challenge of the ministry—to display the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). This has been my commitment over the years. In months to come, I trust you will come to understand why.

## FPC HOSTS AN EVENING OF THANKSGIVING

FPC held its annual Thanksgiving Eve Service on Wednesday evening, Nov. 22nd. Although attendance was a bit down from previous years, the 40 or so attendees testified to a blessed and meaningful occasion.

The service traditionally includes Scripture, song, and testimony. This year musical presenters included Steven Keillor, Monte Dybvig, Elizabeth Sikkink, and a men's Quartet featuring, Steve Keillor, Larry Sederstrom, Monte Dybvig, and Robert Sikkink. Pastor Kevin led the service

with a Scripture reading from Psalm 107 and a devotional from Psalm 100:4-5, *Enter His Gates with Thanksgiving*. He noted that Thanksgiving is an opportunity for believers to 1) revive their hearts with gratitude—"Enter his gates with thanksgiving," 2) retune their focus in life—"Give thanks to him," and, 3) recount their many reasons for gratitude—"For the Lord is good." The evening also included an open microphone where a number of attendees shared testimonies of God's goodness and grace this past

2017.

FPC's annual benevolence offering received each Thanksgiving, was dedicated this year by the Trustees and Session to be divided equally among Haiti's Three Bears food program, Pine City's Pregnancy Resource Center, and FPC's capital improvement fund. Thus far over \$6800 has been received with more expected.

The joyous evening was concluded with a dessert and hot cider provided by the Loomis' in the fellowship hall afterwards.



### CONGRATULATIONS ARE IN ORDER FOR MAJ. BEN WIENER

FPC'S RULING ELDER BEN WIENER, ALSO MAJOR WIENER IN THE MN NATIONAL GUARD AND COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIR OFFICER, WAS RECENTLY AWARDED, BY MN'S US SENATOR AMY KLOBUCHAR, A FLAG FLOWN OVER THE MN CAPITAL IN HIS HONOR. MAJ. WIENER WAS RECOGNIZED WITH GRATITUDE FOR HIS SERVICE BOTH TO HIS COUNTRY, HIS STATE, AND LOCAL VETERANS.

## FPC PACKS 97 BOXES FOR PROJECT CHRISTMAS CHILD

Sat., Nov. 11, brought a

dozen volunteers to the



church to pack an assortment of Shoebox items for Project Christmas Child sponsored by Samaritan's Purse. The boxes will be sent

throughout the world to needy children as a token of Christ's love. This year we packed 97 boxes, another record for FPC. Much appreciation is due to Jeanice Mofatt who has spearheaded the ministry each year with the help of many others.

## ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS TO FEATURE REFORMATION

Beginning on Sunday, Dec. 10 at 8:45 AM, the Adult Sunday School class will feature a series of Reformation biographies. 2017 has been the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Our last Winter-Spring Bible Conference brought the Reformation into focus by dealing with the Five Solas, or the main principles of Reformed thought. As we conclude this year and enter the next, we

will feature 10-15 leading figures that helped shape the Protestant heritage. We will address a breadth of Reformers from a variety of traditions including the Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, and Anabaptist traditions. Among those under consideration will be:

Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, Martin Bucer, Martin Luther, Philip Melancon, William Tyndale, Lady Jane Grey,

Thomas Cranmer, John Hooper, Katharine Von Bora, Conrad Grebel, Balthasar Hubmaier, Menno Simons, and Phillips of Marnix.

Presenters will include Pastor Kevin, Chaplain Ross Haverhals, Dennis Minich, and Randy Smith. There is a place for all ages at FPC's Sunday School. Do join us as we begin this new and profitable series of studies.

### NEW YEARS EVE FAMILY FUN NIGHT!

JOIN US ON SUNDAY, DEC. 31ST @ 6 PM FOR OUR NEW YEARS EVE FAMILY NIGHT. DINNER WILL BE BUFFET STYLE, SO BRING A DISH TO SHARE. ALSO BRING SNACKS. THE EVENING WILL INCLUDE MOVIES, TABLE GAMES, FUN, AND FELLOWSHIP. SEE DEB WIENER IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS. THE EVENING USUALLY CONCLUDES AROUND 9 PM OR THEREAFTER.

### Bethlehem Star—What Was It?

An iconic Christmas card theme pictures a deep blue night sky with the humble village of Bethlehem silhouetted against a middle eastern horizon. Hovering overhead is the proverbial star made famous in the Gospel of Matthew. Each Christmas we revisit this remarkable story of Christ's birth and, along with it, a reconsideration of the mysterious star that guided Magi from the east to worship the Christ. In the Dec. 2017 issue of *Astronomy Magazine*, science writer Bob Berman comments, "Every December, hundreds of science professionals mix astronomy and religion, normally a no-no, in planetariums' 'Star of Wonder' shows, offering explanations for the star of Bethlehem. Was it a supernova? A comet? A conjunction?" (p. 10). Berman cynically continues, "Planetarium directors know their offerings are counterfeit. Privately, they readily explain to me that no actual celestial object could match the description in Matthew 2:2-10 of a star that moved across the sky but then became motionless." You may think it strange, but I heartily agree with Berman on this point—although for very different reasons. Let me explain!

Years ago, my family and I attended one of those "Star of Wonder" talks at the famous Griffith Park Observatory in Los Angeles. The annual presentation was also printed in the observatory's monthly *Griffith Observer*, vol. 39, no. 12 (Dec. 1975): 9-14. The difficulty in determining the precise nature of the Star of Bethlehem is twofold. First is the challenge of determining the date for the birth of Christ. At Griffith Park, the presenter respectfully took the biblical story at face value and argued for a possible date between 6-7 BC. Admittedly, discussions concerning this are too involved and complicated to be treated here. But, in short, the date of Christ's birth really cannot be established with any absolute confidence. Estimates range between 7 BC—4 BC. Any naturalistic explanation of the Bethlehem star would require us to know with certainty the date of Christ's birth.

The second problem with naturalistic interpretations concerns just what phenomenon would match the biblical narrative. For example, a dramatic meteor or fireball or

bolide would not qualify because it is too sudden and transitory—its over and done with in just a few short seconds. The Magi needed time to plan, pack, and travel. It would have taken months. Likewise, a comet also fails as a candidate for the Bethlehem star. The ancients ordinarily regarded them as portents of doom rather than harbingers of great joy. There is also no ancient record of such a heavenly wonder at the time of Christ's birth. Besides, if such a bright comet did appear, it would have been available for all to see under dark middle-eastern skies. Why then did Herod inquire of the Magi "what time the star had appeared" (Matt. 2:7). They could have simply said, "Go out and see for yourself!" A supernova, suggested by some, has similar problems. A supernova can indeed be dramatic. It's the sudden death of a super massive star having exhausted its process of nuclear fusion and, under gravity, collapses upon itself only to rebound in a colossal explosion. Its luminosity can increase a million fold only to fade from sight in a few weeks or couple months. Sound like a possible candidate? The problem is, it does move through the sky. Apparently the Star of Bethlehem did: "And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was" (Matt. 2:9).

Most agree that the only possible naturalistic explanation for the Bethlehem star is a conjunction of planets. This was the proposal of the Griffith Park lecturer. Planetary arrangements within particular constellations for specific dates in the past—even two thousand years ago—can be easily calculated. Within the time frame suggested by the Griffith Park presentation, Jupiter and Saturn passed in close conjunction in the constellation Pisces. It was suggested that this was significant for eastern star gazers as it would have announced the arrival of a great historical figure. But, who knows? The problem with interpreting the heavens in this way is, you can make them mean anything you want them to mean. Furthermore, the ancients did not clearly distinguish between astronomy—the science of the heavens—and astrology—the belief that the arrangements of stars and planets provide meaning for human events.

But the Hebrew Scriptures were clear that astrology was bunk and not to be meddled with (Isa. 47:13)! Would the Lord have used a dubious religion which he had previously forbidden to announce the birth of the Messiah?

So what are we left with? Supernaturalism! Christians believe and the Scriptures teach that the universe, though ordered by natural law, is nevertheless open to be acted upon by divine intervention. Thus, when God said, "Let there be...", there was! That numerous attempts have been made to supply naturalistic explanations for extraordinary events in the Bible is not a new exercise. The Red Sea did not really divide, but a strong wind rather drained the swamp. Jesus did not really walk on the water, but on stepping stones just below the surface. He did not really rise from the dead, but rather passed out only to be revived in the tomb. The Star of Bethlehem was not really a miracle of God, just a happenstance in the heavens that led Magi on a wild goose chase.

So we return to the original question: what was the Star of Bethlehem. The answer is, we don't know for sure. But what ever it was, I would put it in the same category with the pillar of fire that led Israel during its days in the wilderness (Ex. 13:21). It was the manifest glory of God; it was a miraculous phenomena from God; it was meant for the Magi; and in the end, it served its divine purpose in leading them to the Christ where they worshipped and adored him as Savior and King.

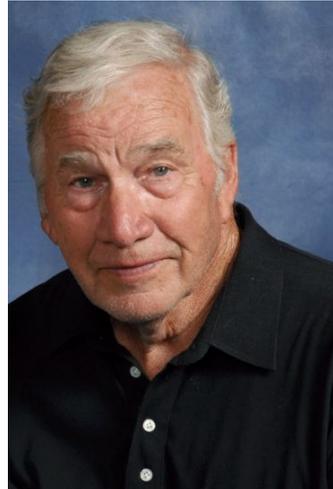
In his *Astronomy Magazine* article, Bob Berman is willing to accept an intelligent universe (middle eastern mysticism), but unwilling to accept an intelligent designer (Christian supernaturalism). That is the difference here! He is correct in cautioning against naturalistic explanations for divine events. But he is incorrect in insisting upon a universe that cannot be acted upon and reordered from without. The Christian faith recognizes a world where God's acts for his glory and our good, both providentially—through ordinary means—and on occasions miraculously—in extraordinary ways. For such things, scientific and astronomical explanations fall short.

## JIM RYPKEMA AT HOME WITH THE LORD

James Albert "Jim" Rypkema (86) went home to be with the Lord on the evening of Thanksgiving, Nov. 23, after being hospitalized in Cambridge and at Abbott Northwestern. Jim was a 21 year veteran of the US Air Force. After he retired, he was involved in a number of avocations which included that of farmer, piano repair, marine deputy, estate care taker, foster parent, and Civil Air Patrol. Jim's real passions were hunting, fishing, and gardening. He will also be remembered for his holiday fudge and special salsa recipe, both of which he was generous in sharing with others.

Jim's association with FPC began as early as the 1940s where his father, Hannes Rypkema, was a ruling elder and instrumental in starting Grindstone Lake Bible Camp. Jim was a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. In 1996, Jim returned to Pine City with his beloved wife Joyce of 53 years. He settled on his old home place north of town.

Jim's memorial service was held at FPC on Friday, Dec. 1. Pastor Kevin officiated speaking from Luke 2:15, *Let Us Go Over to Bethlehem*. His daughter Karen Moore sang, *No One Ever Cared for Me Like Jesus*. His sister Janet Sikkink of FPC played the piano and



organ. Military honors concluded the graveside service at Rose Hill in Hinckley. Nearly 150 were served for lunch by the women of FPC.

### SOUP AND SANDWICH LUNCH AFTER SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP TO BEGIN IN JANUARY!

IT HAS BEEN A TRADITION AT FPC FOR OVER TWO DECADES TO HOST SOUP AND SANDWICH LUNCH AFTER CHURCH DURING THE COLD DAY OF THE MONTH OF JANUARY. ON THE FOUR SUNDAYS OF JAN. 7, 14, 21, & 28, WE ASK THAT 4-5 PEOPLE SIGN UP TO BRING A POT OF HOMEMADE SOUP. A SIGN-UP LIST WILL BE IN THE FOYER. EVERYONE ELSE IS ASKED TO BRING A PLATE OF SANDWICHES, CRACKERS AND CHEESE, CHIPS, OR BARS OF SOME KIND TO SHARE.

THE EVENT WILL CONCLUDE ON FEBRUARY 4TH WITH OUR **COLD DAYS HOT CHILI COOKOFF**. ON THAT DAY, SIGN UP FOR CHILI WITH EVERYONE ELSE BRINGING THE EXTRAS. AWARDS WILL BE GIVEN FOR THE TOP THREE ENTRIES BY POPULAR VOTE.

## WIC ENJOYS ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BRUNCH

The annual WIC Christmas brunch was hosted at the home of Kathy Kendall on Saturday morning, Dec. 2nd. Fourteen women attended for the enjoyable time of fellowship. Ginnie Rootkie led a devotional reflecting upon

what the nativity might have been like for Mary and Joseph on that first Christmas night. This year's Christmas offering was also received and dedicated to a new position for the Covenant College Chapel program to support and en-

courage women students. The total received was \$135. Kathy Kendall reported that everyone seemed to have a great time. Brunch was served afterward and included egg bake, muffins, fruit, and more.

## FORMER MEMBER CONTRIBUTES TO ENCYCLOPEDIA

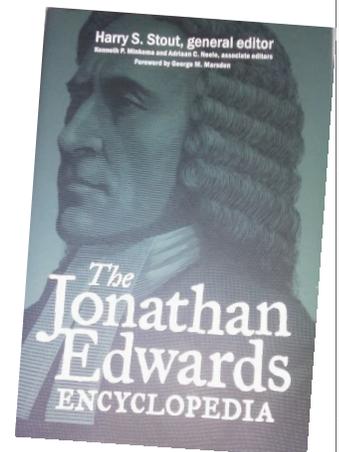
Steven Carr, former youth worker and member at FPC, recently joined a number of contributors in the newly published and highly anticipated volume, *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia*, published by Eerdmans and edited by Yale's Harry S. Stout.

Steve, the son of Pastor Kevin and Kathy Carr, is an ordained minister in the Re-

formed Church in the United States, serving a congregation in Rogers, AR. He is listed among the field of ministers and scholars for his essay under the entry, *Unpardonable Sin*, found on pages 583 and 584. Rev. Steve Carr says, "Edwards's research into the nature of true religion and of how the Spirit works in true believers necessitated his having to come to terms with the

nature of the unpardonable sin."

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) is regarded by many as the most astute theologian America has produced. His works comprise 26 printed volumes. Most of his original manuscripts are held by the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University.



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
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**First Presbyterian Church is a  
member congregation of the  
Presbyterian Church in America**

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WE'RE ON THE WEB:

[WWW.FIRSTPRESHINCKLEY.ORG](http://WWW.FIRSTPRESHINCKLEY.ORG)

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*"TRUE TO THE SCRIPTURES, THE  
REFORMED FAITH, AND THE GREAT  
COMMISSION"*

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HINCKLEY, MN 55037

# Christmas Eve Service

Sunday, December 24th @ 4:00 PM

## Christmas Choir Concert

Sunday, December 17th @ 7:00 PM