

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER



The Come Back

Big things come from small places whenever God is on the move. Well at least we notice these more than the big things coming from the expected places. Large churches with plenty of momentum continue to grow as more people show up and want to be a part of a growing movement. We expect this. But when a church is headed the other direction we expect the decline to continue until the church reaches the breaking point. Oh, we believe in resurrection. And the prevailing wisdom is that resurrection is more likely than turnaround. We understand the cycle of death bringing on life. This idea hits really close to home.

The Prophet Micah made a startling prediction. The Messiah wouldn't come from the usual short list of large event venues



like Jerusalem. Rather, the Messiah would come from the village of Bethlehem, the smallest town in Judah. The runt of the litter. Elsewhere, we would learn that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem but be raised in an even more unlikely place. Nazareth. After all, nothing good ever comes from Nazareth, so they say. Then the surprise. Big things come from small places whenever God is on the move. The birth of Jesus is a come-back story.

Breaking News

In my article for last week's message I introduced John the Baptizer as *Weird Uncle John*. My reference point was the weird relative that we all have and the likelihood that one or more of us are the weird relative that others have. John was likely a cousin of Jesus. And there

is little doubt that John was the weird one in the family. And for a lot of us, John was an interesting character.

What is it about John the Baptizer that makes him so interesting? What makes John weird? Is it the foreshadowing of his life to come by his father, Zechariah's prophecy? Is it the

When Jesus is present "The last shall be first" replaces the "nothing ever good comes from..." saying. This is the usual whenever God is on the move.

I often hear people talking about the times when Flint was on top of the world. The Flint of today is not the Flint of yesterday and the Flint of the future will not be the Flint of the past. Our economic power is closer to the bottom than the top today. Our neighborhoods continue to decline. Can anything good come from Flint? The answer is a resounding yes. While it is a common belief that history repeats itself, the reality

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way he dressed, his diet? Could it be that John had a way with words? John the



Baptizer was apparently not one to soft pedal the truth and his message cut to the heart of the matter.

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Volume 18 Issue 23

December 23, 2018

Special points of interest:

Asbury Café is Open!

Asbury Café is opened for lunch on Fridays from 10:00am-2:00pm outside the Worship Center on the main floor.



These selections will also be available on Sunday mornings before and after worship.



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Breaking News ...cont. from Page 1

There is a lot written about John in the Gospels. He makes an appearance in all four Gospels and both Matthew and Luke talk about John in five different chapters. We know about John's birth from Luke, his death from two of the Gospels, and his purpose is told in all four Gospels.

All of John's attributes combine into a person who gathered crowds. They came from all over to the desert located East of Jerusalem to see and hear this man who some said might be the Messiah himself. But John knew that he was no Messiah. His job was simple. To prepare the way for the coming of the real Messiah who would baptize with Spirit and fire, and who would bring divine justice to the people. While this claim still leaves a lot to the imagination, John was clear on one thing — preparation begins with repentance.

What if John, like so many of the illustrations in scripture, is a metaphor? What if his calling is an illustration of our calling? What if John has passed the

baton to each of us to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah? If not, then who is preparing the way for Jesus' return? How does the prophecy of Zechariah fit our circumstances? Are we called to be weird, like John the Baptizer?

When someone steps outside the cultural norm and holds up a mirror for the rest of us to see ourselves plainly we generally don't respond graciously.

Tell all the nations what he has done! Tell them how great he is! Sing to the Lord because of the great things he has done. Let the whole world hear the news.

Isaiah 12:4-5 GNT

We are more likely to respond the way we did on the school playground.

"Well so do you!" In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus highlights this human reaction contrasting the criticism levied at John the Baptist with the criticism used against himself. Both John and

Jesus called for repentance and a new way of living in the world.

In Luke, Chapter 7 and in Matthew, Chapter 11, Jesus says: John the Baptist came, and he fasted and drank no wine, and you said, 'He has a demon in him!' The Son of Man came, and he ate and drank, and you said, 'Look at this man! He is a glutton and wine drinker, a friend of tax collectors and other outcasts!' God's wisdom, however, is shown to be true by all who accept it." (Luke 7:33-35 & Matthew 11:18-19).

However, there is one difference in the last verse of these two. In Luke, the Good News Translation says that the proof is those who accept it and in Matthew, Jesus says that the proof is in the results. Both point to those of us who claim to be believers. That the truth of Jesus Christ is evident in us. This truth also concludes that the truth of our belief is seen by others in what we do and don't do. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus emphasized that the Kingdom of God is within us and the evidence of its existence in us is seen in how we respond.

Each of us are called to prepare the way for the return of Jesus Christ. Much is written about what we are to anticipate at that time. Promises of eternal life with Lord Savior are contrasted with judgment and death. John the Baptist had a certain "edge" about him. He had a sense of urgency. John knew that the Kingdom of God was at hand and his purpose was to prepare the way by sharing his testimony as evidence of the truth.

The Come Back... cont from page 1

is also that it is different people, in most cases, different circumstances and what happens is not what happened before, although there are similarities.

In the Gospel of John, Nathanael asks a question of his friend Philip that foreshadows the come back theme. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Rather than answer his friend's question, Philip offers Nathanael a simple invitation "Come and see." Nathanael was invited to find out for himself. To make his own observation and come to his own conclusion. We are likewise invited to come and see.

"Come and see" is an invitation that appears throughout scripture. It was the

invitation to the shepherds that made their cameo appearance in the story of Jesus' birth. It was the invitation that the astrologers from the far East accepted that led them to Bethlehem. It is the invitation that we often offer to people we invite to Asbury.

"Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," answered Philip.

John 1:46 GNT

This invitation appears in one of our worship songs, *Noel*, written by Chris Tomlin. The Chorus begins with *Noel, come and see what God has done.*

Breaking News.. Cont. from page 2

Like John, like Jesus, we will be criticized by some regardless of how we dress, what we eat or drink, and with whom we choose to spend time. But consider this possibility. Each of us has a deep, insatiable yearning to know Christ but many are still searching. Perhaps they have heard the good news and even claim to believe it. But they are holding tightly onto the trappings, the imposers, that claim to offer satisfaction.

This emptiness is haunting and drains them of their joy. For many, denial is the only escape left. Denial com-

This Christmas give the gift of life. Give your testimony ...

bined with reducing that which we know, that which we claim, by reducing us. To the "norm" we are weird. We value others as more important than ourselves. We give without expecting anything in return. We love even in the shadows of hate.

This Christmas give the gift of life. Give your testimony that Jesus Christ, the Son of God was born, lived among people and will come again. Be weird. You don't need to dress like John the Baptizer. Be the person God made you to be. **Merry Christmas!**

Pastor Tommy

In Our Prayers

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Curtis Young | Christopher Lewis |
| Rachel Bastine | Sarah Tanner |
| Norma Buzzard | Elizabeth Wright |
| Virginia Bigger | Judy Tanner |
| Barbara McIvor | Mary Lyons |
| Jonathon Misner | Richard Oram |
| Nancy Auger | Merle Supernaw |
| Austin & Mary Suffle | |
| Shirley Craig | |

FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| Sharon George | Mary Russell |
| Elaine Lamoreaux | Mary Nations |



Prayer is at the heart of our beliefs

COMMUNITY HELP CENTER

Our Community Help Center at Asbury UMC will be Closed during the week of December 24th. But will re-open on Wednesday, January 2, 2019 with distribution of water from 10am-2pm

From Pastor Tommy McDoniel and the Asbury staff to you...

HAVE A SAFE AND WONDERFUL MERRY CHRISTMAS

AND THE BEST OF THE NEW YEAR TO COME!!



**Asbury Worship Series
Weird
Make Christmas weird again**

It's that time of year again. The red kettles and bell ringers are out. Black Friday, cyber-Monday is now cyber-week, Christmas decorations and concerts. A time when our emotions can move back and forth from reckless exuberance to dark depression. Witness a random act of kindness brought on by the spirit of the season while listening to a favorite Christmas song and our outlook for human-kind soars. Check our bank balance while

making out our gift buying list and darkness settles over us.

It is also that time of year when I find myself explaining what "Advent" means. Advent is a rather odd sounding word that is for the most part, insider church talk. Although Advent Calendars are quite popular since they allow us to count down the days to Christmas.



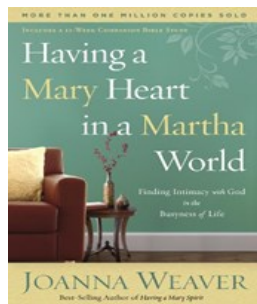
"Advent" comes from a Latin word — *Adventus*. It means arrival. So advent doesn't have to be a church word. We could be talking about the "advent" or the "arrival" of any event or special guest. But this Latin word was derived from an ancient Greek word that appears in scripture — *Parousia*. This word actually means "being present" and refers in Scripture to the return of Jesus or second coming. So the word Advent has special meaning for Christians even if we don't use the word.

So as Christmas, we use the word "advent" to talk about our expectation of Jesus' arrival as we prepare to

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Book Club News

Do you consider yourself a busy person? Are your days generally filled with things to do? Are there some days where you feel like you are falling further behind? These are questions that according to the author of our next book could be proceeded with "You may be a Martha if..." Perhaps you not a Martha-type. Instead of busyness that never ends you take time to "smell the roses" and talk to strangers and manage to be the target of rolling eyes and harsh comments about not doing your share of the chores. Well, "You might be a Mary if..."



10:38–42, John 11:1–44, and John 12:1–11. Scholars suspect that Jesus frequently stayed with the two sisters and their brother Lazarus, but these are the three stories of Jesus visiting them that we find in scripture. One thing is clear in terms of their type-casting, Mary is not Martha and Martha is not Mary. They are two very different people who both want to know and serve Jesus Christ.

This study offers an invitation for everyone of us who feels like we just aren't godly enough... or loving enough... or that we just aren't doing enough. Our lives today really are not all that different from that of Mary and Martha in the New Testament. Like Mary, don't you also long to sit at the Lord's feet... but the daily demands of a busy world just won't leave you alone? Like Martha, don't you love Jesus and really want to serve Him... yet don't you often struggle with weariness, resentment, and feelings of inadequacy?

On Wednesday, October 31, we begin our next book titled *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*. Mary and Martha are named in the Gospels in three places: Luke

Just like the story told by Luke, Jesus comes right into the midst of your busy Mary/Martha life and extends the same

invitation He issued long ago to the two sisters of Bethany. Tenderly He invites you to choose "the better part" of life. A joyful life of "living-room" intimacy with Him. An intimacy that flows naturally into serving Him. Come learn how can you make that choice. In this study we will learn how all of us, Marys and Marthas alike, can draw closer to Jesus Christ, deepening our devotion, strengthening our service, and doing both with less stress and greater joy.

Author Joanna Weaver' book has sold over a million copies and her books and Bible studies have been used by hundreds of churches, life groups and individuals. Our time with Joanna's book will be guided using a ten week study guide that she provides along with short video clips from her companion DVD. Joanna is the mother of three children and the wife of a pastor in Montana so she has plenty of experience in the church environment. While this book is written from a woman's perspective the story and lessons are equally applicable to all gender identities.

We encourage you to come to our Wednesday gatherings. Our small group hopes to widen our circle and so we hope that you will join in on our discussion. We meet each Wednesday at Noon. Come join us for a light lunch, fellowship and discussion. Our food selections have been fantastic and we always have plenty to share. And we are always on the lookout for our next book, video lesson or topic. Your participation and suggestions are greatly appreciated.

Pastor Tommy

* Weaver, Joanna. *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World: Finding Intimacy with God in the Busyness of Life*. CO: Crown Publishing Group, 2000.

Leadership in Worship & Service

Welcome Team Tony, Mirium,
Ushers Anthony, Jim
Production Team Mark
Children Mirium & Emily
Worship Leaders Cyndi
Café Christine & Norma

Jim Craig Leadership Chair
Connie Portillo Office Secretary
Kevin Croom Farm to Table
Israel Unger Business Operations

Asbury Café

Plan to meet outside the sanctuary each Sunday before worship for coffee, tea, snacks, conversation and so on. The music will start when it is time to wrap up and head in for worship.

Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel Pastor
Mark Vorenkamp Children & Youth
Sylvia Pittman Worship Arts

Asbury Worship Series ..Make Christmas weird again.. Cont. from page 4

celebrate Jesus' birth along with celebrating the promise of His return. One really interesting point for me is that Jesus didn't really go anywhere except metaphorically. He is still present with us. While we more precisely say that it is the Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus, that is present, we also claim that Jesus, the Holy Spirit and God are One and the same. This must seem rather weird to non-believers.

Speaking of weird, I read an article this morning titled *Make Christmas Weird Again.** At first I thought that this would make a great title for our worship series for this season. I still think that it is a good title but perhaps too many words. So its our subtitle. I like the one or two word titles that leave a lot more to the imagination. So I called our series *Weird*. I do agree with the writer. Christmas is a season that has evolved in weird ways. Christmas is weird enough to make a great topic for a worship series.

Pastor Caleb offers one way of describing the "Christmas story"

Visits from other worldly messengers, a preteen pregnancy, a burdensome road-trip, the worst hotel luck of all time (one star Yelp reviews for every chain in Bethlehem), barn animals as doulas (birth coach) and shepherds as attending nurses, whispers of ancient prophecies, and the idea that this little baby,

being washed in the water from a cow's trough, is the very son of God.

So in an effort to "make Christmas weird again" here at Asbury we plan to tell the Christmas story using a play titled "Dusty the Donkey Seeks His Destiny" that tells the story through the eyes of Mary's donkey. This original play, written by our own Terrance Williams with assistance from Sylvia Pittman and yours truly will debut on Christmas Eve. You won't want to miss it. The parts that feature the donkey are only loosely supported by Scripture but the overall story is right out of Scripture.

So what if we spent our "Advent" — our time of preparation looking at other stories through the eyes of the animals that made travel and other chores easier? Would this make our Christmas weird again? Perhaps next year.

Our theme Scripture for this series comes from the Prophet Jeremiah. God is reminding us that the divine plan is that we will return to God with all of our heart. We will be all in. We will surrender our earthy ambitions to God's will entirely, realizing that God may have a purpose in mind that will shock us and certainly a plan that will surprise us once we surrender. But trust is the key. Total surrender.

We believe that the prophecies found in Scripture that announced the coming arrival of a Messiah are referring to Jesus Christ. The controversy begins with different interpretations and expectations of what God had in mind. Not unlike the weirdness of this season we call Christmas. It is reasonable to conclude that the controversy was setup at the beginning when our first parents disobeyed the only rule that God gave them. Their reaction to their shame created a seemingly impenetrable barrier between them and God. This is where the Messiah comes in for Christians. To break through this barrier.

But Messiah for some may have more to do with freedom from oppression. And it does. For others, the Messiah will bring relief from hunger, poverty or homelessness. And it does. Whatever our idea of what the Messiah is expected to do, whatever salvation means to us, affects what we expect from our Messiah and affects how we relate to the weirdness of Christmas. But ultimately, whatever "extras" we believe that the Messiah bring, reconciliation to God is where salvation begins for us.

Going back to Pastor Caleb's provocative explanation of the weirdness of Christmas we find a few of the points of the controversy. Preteen pregnancies surely cannot be a good thing. But they happen. There should always be someplace for a couple in distress to find a room for the night. A Red Roof Inn at least, Super Bowls and other special events not withstanding.

And whoever heard of a child being born in a barn. How unsanitary!

But it happened, we claim, and even weirder is that this family is the "Holy Family" who gave birth to and raised the Son of God. This seems rather far-fetched. Yet, Millions of people have held firmly to the belief that this is what happened. And it seems rather strange to mix this event up with a man in a red suit visiting houses around the world with presents. But we do. And this is really weird.

Neither this series nor this article is about the history of Christmas and how this holiday that initially recognized the winter solace — the time when the days start becoming longer, nor are they about how this holiday became both a religious holiday and the hope for retailers to make most of their profits for the year. But, this series honors all of our weirdness and presumes that if we are created in God's image, perhaps God has a thing for weirdness and for weird people like us.

This is the bottom line, isn't it? The question of whether God has a thing for people like us has a lot to do with how we view God, the world and this weird holiday season we call Christmas. Some folks feel like the idea of a Messiah that comes in with guns blazing. Yet Jesus did not have a carry permit. It's doubtful Jesus owned any form of weapon. Perhaps a pocket knife.

Some folk's idea of a Messiah is someone who followed all the rules. But, Jesus followed the heart of God which sometimes led Him to stand against rules as the world interpreted them. Some folk's idea of a Messiah is a king who has the finest ride, a 747 to jet around the world and an army that does his bidding. But Jesus had none of that. He was born into a poor family in humble surroundings and hung out with people who a lot of folks wouldn't give them the time of day. If Jesus had used tweets they would be life giving and full of love rather than hateful and destructive.

The truth is that God does have a thing for people like us. Worriers, carefree and careless, over sensitive, overly critical and fairly described by a list of non-flattering adjectives that would take too much time to write down, people. This is the good news that Jesus Christ came to share with us. There is nothing that we have done that disqualifies us from the love of God and actually there is nothing that we can do that will nullify God's love for us.

I invite you to join us each Sunday during this Christmas season and help make Christmas weird by knowing and sharing the story of the Messiah and God's plan for us.

Pastor Tommy

Coming up this week

- Dec 24 Mon**  **Dec 25 Tues**
Dec 26 Wed 12Noon Pastor Book Club
 6pm Beginners Bible Study
Dec 27 Thu 6pm Worship Band Practice
Dec 28 Fri 10am-2pm Asbury Cafe Open
Dec 29 Sat
Dec 30

SUNDAY

- 9:30am Café Opens
 10:30am New Beginnings
 Contemporary Worship

Last Week for Worship:

Attendance 29 Offering \$ 443

Join us in discovering how a very special donkey,
Dusty discovers his own destiny and helps bring the Son of God into the world.

DUSTY THE DONKEY, SEEKING HIS DESTINY

The Christmas Pageant



December 24, 2018 6pm-7pm

Asbury United Methodist Church 1653 Davison Road, Flint
48506, 810-235-0016

FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE ...



OUR VERY OWN TOM ALLEN WAS QUOTED IN AN ARTICLE TITLED,
"EARTHKEEPERS BRING JOY TO THE WORLD" PUT OUT BY THE
MICHIGAN CONFERENCE NEWSLETTER.

IF ANY ONE IS INTERESTED IN READING THIS ARTICLE, THERE ARE
COPIES IN THE ASBURY CAFÉ!

Asbury Farm to Table



While turning blight into beautiful and productive landscape is good on its own, transforming a food desert into abundance is life giving. But Asbury wants to make sure that produce is available on the tables of our residents. Our culinary arts and nutritional education programs offer residents the know how just as our farms offers nature's bounty. In addition, the Asbury Café is a culinary experience accessible to our neighbors and anyone with an appetite. Our "pay what you can" approach means that no one is turned away. Those who can help either on the farm or in the café are offered special MyFlintStones tokens that can be used either in the Asbury Café or in exchange for produce to prepare at home.

We proudly accept MyFlintStones

The Asbury Café is open Fridays 10am to 2pm & Sundays 10 am to 12 Noon

ASBURY CAFÉ MENU

Open Fridays 10am to 2pm

Pay what you can

DELI SUBS

Lettuce, onions, tomato plus choice of ham, turkey or beef

STIR FRY

Local grown garden vegetables sautéed with love and herbs

GARDEN SALAD

Local grown greens & vegetables. Ham, turkey or beef upon request

WRAPS

Lettuce, onions, tomato plus choice of ham, turkey or beef

MUFFINS

Chef Kevin's special recipe with fruit, love and other delights baked in.

SMOOTHIE

Assorted flavors of the day

COFFEE

Regular or decaf

Welcome to the Asbury Community

1653 Davison Rd
Flint, MI 48506



NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
FLINT, MICHIGAN
PERMIT #151

Phone: 810-235-0016
Fax: 810-235-0016 (call first when faxing)
E-mail: FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com

Neighborhood Connection



We envision a community in love with God, each other, and our neighbors evidenced by the transformation of ourselves and our neighborhood. We are a center for worship & spiritual growth, a center for connections and a center for health & wellness.



Our goal is a
every resident
sions for the
grow into citizens who contribute to building and maintaining a vibrant neighborhood, and all residents are able to enjoy safety, good health, a culture that fosters life long learning and satisfying lives.

revitalized community where
can use their talents and pas-
common good, where children

We believe that such an ambitious goal can never be attained without God's grace and abundance and Christ calls each of us to be disciples willing to share our witness through words and acts.

The Come Back... cont. from page 2

"Noel" simply refers to a birth. In this case, the birth of the Messiah that fulfilled ancient prophecy and changed the game entirely. God would live among us as one of us taking on our pain, our worries, our struggles and even death. But God would pull off the greatest come back of all conquering even death. Come and see what God has done.

And speaking of a come back. Mary was a young teenager living in Nazareth. Her family was a lot like the norm in our neighborhood where over 70% of children are living in poverty. Another favorite Holiday song of mine is titled *Mary Did You Know*. This song poses the question that many of us have wondered about. Did Mary grasp the magnitude of her come back story? A line in the song asks if Mary realized that when she kissed her little baby that she kissed the face of God? Mary did you know?

My experience is that we don't know. That we have no idea the magnitude of what God is going to do. Instead, we fret over the "what if" questions of too little, too late. Our expectations compare God

to our standards of achievement. And if we are near the bottom our expectations

Come and see what God has done.

aren't much. And quite often, at least for a while, our expectations are proven out. We hope for a crowd and we get a hand full. We hope for a breakthrough and something breaks that deflates our hope like a popped balloon.

I am hopeful that we will fill the room on Christmas Eve at Asbury. I am convinced that if enough people knew what I know there would not be enough room for everyone to sit. But my expectations are tethered with years of experience that our best efforts are simply not enough for a come back. Yet, I see God's handiwork all around me and mostly in the people, who like me, are putting in their best efforts to honor the event that changed the world for the better. And most, like me, do not expect that this will be the time that God shows off. But we are all hopeful.

"Come and see." Our rehearsals have at times been stressful, but most of the

time we are laughing and we are amazed what God has done through each of us. If you are already committed to being a part of our Christmas Eve musical at Asbury, you are truly blessed. God has seen fit to tell His story through you. Let that sink in for a moment.

If you didn't know about *Dusty the Donkey Seeking His Destiny*, our musical that you are invited to attend on Christmas Eve, you are truly blessed because you know about it now. "Come and see what God has done." Come and laugh. Come and sing. Come and watch. Come and be amazed as the Holy Spirit opens your heart to the story of the greatest come back of all time.

Meanwhile, on this 4th Sunday of Advent, the last Sunday before our celebration of the birth of Christ, consider accepting Philip's invitation that he offered to Nathaniel. "Come and see." We are in the midst of witnessing an epic comeback. And you are invited to be a part of it. Not just a front row seat, but a place in the field. A starting position. Come and see.

Merry Christmas! Pastor Tommy