# ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 2 Issue 18

## Hope (Plans and Challenges)



What do you hope for this Christmas? Last week I shared that I was hoping for a Hallmark Christmas. A hope that is unlikely to happen according to my specifications. So instead, I'm choosing to hope for a joy-filled Christmas.

# Joy (Finding Treasure)



Over the past few years, I've grown fond of Christmas movies. I'm not talking about high-budget blockbuster hits, however. Instead, I'm fond of the Hallmark Channel, lower -budget, predictable movie studios crank out by the dozens. This suggests that I'm not the only one fond of this genre.

Does this mean that hope is a choice? Do you and I choose whether to have hope or not?

"In psychology, hope is a cognitive practice that involves the intentional act of setting goals and working toward them with purpose," writes Maya Shrikant. Her article featured the study of hope at Arizona State University's Hope Center.

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December 18, 2022



EVERYONE HAVE A WONDERFUL AND-SAFE WEEK!



I wrote in my Prayer Journal the other day that I wish for a Hallmark Christmas. The kind with a small town full of friends and a home full of family. You know what I'm talking about. I want a Christmas filled with

joy. Who doesn't?

So how does a Christmas of joy come about? Before you go to the store to buy fancy party invitations, let's talk about the differences between joy and happiness.

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# Joy (Finding Treasure) ... cont from page 1

First and sadly, joy is elusive for millions. And perhaps, for the vast majority, their inability to find joy is understandable and justifiable. This makes the Christmas season a time of intense sadness for many people. Perhaps this is the case for you?

But it's helpful to differentiate between happiness and joy.

Jamie D. Aten Ph.D. survived two significant and unexpected setbacks a few years ago. The first was Hurricane Katrina which hit shortly after he moved to southern Mississippi for a new job. The 2nd was a cancer diagnosis. Dr. Aten responded to the effect of these events by becoming an expert on the trauma caused by catastrophes. During the height of the COVID pandemic, he interviewed an expert on joy.

During their interview, Dr. Pamela Ebstyne King carefully differentiated between joy and happiness. She compared happiness to a feeling we might have while enjoying a favorite food that goes away soon after supper. In other words, happiness is dependent upon what is happening around us and to us.

This suggests that happiness comes from our reaction to events, people, places, things, and thoughts. For example, I might say, "I'm not happy that Cyndi ate the rest of the

chocolate chips." This is purely theoretical, of course. Nevertheless, happiness, and its opposite, unhappiness, are emotions brought on by external events and circumstances.

Joy, on the other hand, is much more complex and doesn't require anything external to us. Dr. King describes joy as "an enduring, deep delight in what holds the most significance" for us. This means that being unhappy is different than lacking joy. This is because joy is a feeling that comes from within us.

Mel Walker, writing for Christianity.com, says that "It is a natural human inclination to think that living through trials and negative circumstances would not be an occasion for joy. Choosing to respond to life's difficult situations with inner contentment and satisfaction doesn't seem to make sense."

And I agree. But Walker reminds us that Joy is a choice

A post using the handle
"Andre" made on PsychologyEducator.com concurs that joy is a
choice we each make. He writes,
"Joy is an unexploited reservoir
of potential that is always present
inside you. Basically, it is the attitude of your spirit and heart;
hence you can still feel joy in
tough times."

Mel Walker reminds us that God is the originator of true joy.

Christmas is the time of year when we might hear, "Jesus is the reason for the season," and then catch a glimpse of an eyeroll. The truth is that the sort of Christmas portrayed by Hallmark didn't emerge from Christian tradition. Instead, Christmas is a mixture of cultural influences, family rituals, and practices adopted and adapted by Christians in various ways.

However, Jesus is the reason for the joy that I want for Christmas.

And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the East. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where they child was.

**Matthew 2:9-10** 

I'm reminded of the story of travelers from the far East who arrived in Palestine sometime after Jesus was born. This group planned their trip using some undisclosed combination of ancient prophecy, astrology, and likely other influences. They were searching for a child, who they believed, was destined to be King.

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# In Our Prayers

Kevin Croom Sylvia Pittman Chris Freeman

Richard Oram



# FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Nancy Elston

Elaine Lamoreaux

Norma Buzzard



## **PASTOR BOOK CLUB NEWS**

Pastor Book Club is still meeting via Zoom, but we are also gathering in the Asbury Library Conference Room at 12Noon every Wednesday, unless otherwise noted.

Please call the Church Office for more information, as things could change (810-235-0016).

This month instead of a companion book, our club will focus on the key themes often associated with Advent. Our study begins with divine love on the Wednesday after Thanksgiving. In the weeks following we will reflect on peace, joy and hope. This will take us through the end of 2022!



# COMING UP THIS WEEK DECEMBER 19 — DECEMBER 25

Dec 19 Mon 6:00pm Leadership Team

Dec 20 Tues 10:00qm-12:30pm

Food/Water Distribution

Asbury Christmas Food Box Giveaways

Angel Holiday Closet at South Flint

Soup Kitchen (by appts only 239-3427)

Dec 21 Wed 12 Noon Pastor Book Club

11am-12Noon Food Giveaway at

South Flint Soup Kitchen (No appointments needed)

Dec 22 Thu Angel Holiday Closet at South Flint

Soup Kitchen (by appts only 239-3427)

Dec 23 Fri

Dec 24 Sat

Dec 25 Sun 10:30am

New Beginnings

Contemporary Worship

(We are live on <u>Facebook</u> and our newly launched <u>YouTube channel</u>. You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at <u>FlintAsbury.org</u>.)

# Upcoming Worship Series "Wonder"



What do you want for Christmas this year? This is a question that millions of parents ask children as they figure out their gift list and budget. And the answers vary widely, influenced by commercials, friends, and family members.

As we age, our list changes, and at some point, we quit thinking about wanting gifts wrapped in paper altogether. But experiencing the excitement of a child unwrapping a gift at Christmas never gets old.

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Book Club News

We completed our reading and study of *Pray Like Jesus*.



by The Rev. Dr. Robert L. Morris, Jr., the week before Thanksgiving. Our series,

*Pray*, examined six prayers, said by Jesus, that help us

# **Asbury Staff**

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel Pastor & Exec Dir Office Manager Connie Portillo Sulvia Pittman Empowerment Arts Jim Craig Board & Leadership Chair Exec Chef & Dir Opers Kevin Croom Mike Sampson Farms Manager Chris Freeman South Campus Bldg Mgr Israel Unger Finance Director Kim Sims Connections Supry Terrance Williams Arts Center Mgr Katelin Maylum Sr Prog Mgr Local Foods South Flint Soup Kitchen become more consistent prayers.

As we move into Advent, more commonly known as the Season of Christmas, our focus shifts toward the birth of Christ and the events that led up to God's choice to live among us.

Instead of a companion book our small group will focus on the key themes often associated with Advent. Our study begins with divine love on the Wednesday after Thanksgiving. In the weeks following we'll reflect on peace, joy, and hope. This will

## Leadership in Worship & Service

Tony, Mirium Anthony, Jim Jonathon, Terrance Mirium Cyndi Christine & Norma

Welcome Team Ushers Production Team Children Worship Leader Cafe take us through the end of 2022.

Scripture tells love is at the heart of the wonder of Christmas:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another. If any one of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in you? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth (1 John 3:16-18).

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# Upcoming Worship Series - "Wonder" ...cont from pg 4

Welcome to our new worship series, *Wonder*. In this series, we dive into the wonder of Christmas. Spoiler alert! We're likely to discover the wonder of Christmas isn't found in stores or under a Christmas tree. Instead, the wonder of Christmas is found in relationships.

Our series begins with the wonder of God's love for each of us. A love that isn't unwrapped once each year on a particular day. God has special gifts uniquely chosen for each of us. Gifts that we are sure to cherish.

Out of God's love for us comes a peace that we're at a loss for words to explain. Unlike treaties between nations and neighbors, Christ offers a lasting peace that isn't based on toleration. Instead, the peace of Christ comes out of God's love for all creation.

We often hear expressions like Christmas joy as a way to differentiate that special feeling that the season of Christmas offers. For some, it is the simple pleasure of watching a child drop a coin in a red kettle. For others, it is the taste of treats prepared for the occasion. Whether it is decorations that bring us joy or a simple "Merry Christmas" said by a stranger, joy is one of the wonders of Christmas.

However, not everyone feels the love, peace, joy, and hope of Christmas. For some, memories steal their wonder. For others, loneliness creeps into their spirit and snatches away their sense of wonder. Please know that whatever mood comes upon you, God is with you.

And this offers hope to all. A hope based on a promise found in a manger that changes everything. Perhaps this is the greatest wonder of all. That God chose vulnerability over power. And grace over accountability.

I pray that you will join us each Sunday morning at 10:30 am. We share our weekly episodes on our *YouTube channel*. We go live at 10:30 am. You can find these links along with more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our *website* at *FlintAsbury.org*.

**Pastor Tommy** 

"The Wonder of Christmas" is licensed from **SkitGuys.com** and provides much of the content for this series.

In their research, the Hope Center staff discovered that hopeful students succeed more often in school and are more likely to participate in community activities. But there are substantive differences between hope, wishing, and optimism.

According to Crystal Bryce, Associate Director of Research at the Hope Center, "Hopeful people are able to set goals, identify ways to reach their goals and feel as though they can do the work to achieve those goals." Their research supports that hope is a choice.

John Parsi, Executive Director of the Hope Center, says, "Hope is an active process." The Hope Center works with children, youth, college students, and communities to help them become hopeful and achieve their dreams.

But the group recognizes that hope is contextual. For example, a lot of Christians associate hope with faith. And the writer of Hebrews tells us that to have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for and to be certain of the things we cannot see (Hebrews 11:1). Interpreting these words without additional context can lead us to conclude that hope is having faith in God to deliver on our hope. Rather than setting goals and doing those things that help us achieve that which we hope for.

In scripture, faith and hope often intersect during times of peril. And there's plenty of peril in scripture. Take, for instance, the exile of the Judeans by the Babylonians. With their homes and cities sacked, hope that depended on their power alone was elusive. They saw no way to make plans to return as long as their captors held power over them.

To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see.

Hebrews 11:1

Ancient prophecy addressed their anxiety by describing a belief that their fate depended more on God than their own efforts or captors' will. The 80th Psalm is a prayer in response to this belief:

Bring us back, O God! Show us your mercy, and we will be saved! How much longer, Lord God Almighty, will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have given us sorrow to eat, a large cup of tears to drink (Psalm 80:3-5).

Ben Yosua Davis writes in a reflection that "Hope is sometimes just a choice: a choice we make with clear eyes, one that we make even when the outcome is not assured...I don't have to feel hopeful to choose hope. Rather, it's a decision I make daily in cooperation with God to live out of hope, to practice hope, and to trust that it will be enough."

In his reflection, Davis shares his thoughts on a lesser-known hymn, originally written in Spanish and titled "Cuando El Pobre," translated as "When the Poor Ones." Written by Jose Oliva, the lyrics celebrate the willingness of persons lacking enough for themselves to choose to share the little they have with others. Oliva writes:

When the poor ones, who have nothing, still are giving; when the thirsty pass the cup, water to share; when the wounded offer others, strength, and healing; we see God, here by our side, walking our way.

Osheta Moore reflects, "Advent gives space for our most raw emotions and guttural cries for God."

Moore reminds us that the story told by Advent begins amid conflict when the people ask, "Where is God?"

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Life Group Questions & Notes:
To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see By faith, we see the world called into existence by God's word, what we see created by what we don't
Hebrews 11:1, 3 (GNT, MSG)
NOTES FROM WORSHIP
QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS
1. Read Hebrews 11:1, 3. Is your view of faith similar to what you read? In what ways is your view of faith similar or different than what you read? How do faith and hope come together for you?
2. Read this week's article titled <i>Hope</i> . Do you see hope as a choice? What do you hope for? How does your faith affect your hope? How do your beliefs about God affect whether your hopeful and what you do about your hope? How do your views of hope inform what you do with and for your community?
3. How can the members of your group help you this week and on-going to help you to be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God? Pray for each other to have the Holy Spirit bless you with more courage.





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supporting the Feed Flint campaign. Thank you for taking the time to see what we're

doing and considering how you can help.



# DECEMBER GIVEAWAYS



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The peace offered to us through Jesus Christ is beyond human understanding. We catch a glimpse in Psalm 23 with peaceful meadows, flowing creeks, and a cup that runs over with abundance. Jesus does not offer the peace available in this world. His is a peace that last forever and comes through unconditional love.

Christmas joy is much more than presents under the tree. Christmas is about the joy that Mary felt when the angel explained that she had been chosen to give birth to the Son of God. It is the joy felt by shepherds working in the field and learning of the birth of the Messiah. Christmas joy is the discovery made by travelers that a King was born who will save the world.

And out of this comes hope.

I invite you to join us each Sunday for worship as we explore the wonder of Christmas. Each Wednesday, we'll dig deeper into the themes of Christmas.

If you prefer to avoid groups or live too far away, I encourage you to join us via Zoom for our Wednesday gatherings. Alternatively, you can call in by phone, be heard, and hear what others say by calling (929) 436-2866 -- enter the meeting ID, 282 039 5568#.

We are a diverse group, delighted when new people join us. I hope that you will join in on our discussion.

You can contact our office with questions, by phone or simply type your question on our website's homepage — FlintAsbury.org.

**Pastor Tommy** 

Robert L. Morris, Jr.. Pray Like Jesus: What We Can Learn From the Six Recorded Prayers of Jesus.. Bloomington, IL: Westbow Press, 2019.

## Joy (Finding Treasure)

Understandably, their first stop was the existing king. I admire their moxie. After consulting with his own experts, the king sent them on their way, saying, "Go and make a careful

search for the child" (Matthew

2:8). And they did.

As the story continues, we read, "When they saw the star that had guided them, how happy they were, what joy was theirs!" (Matthew 2:9). The group searched for happiness and found joy.

This is the experience of everyone who searches for joy and discovers that Jesus Christ is God.

However, joy is a divine gift that springs from our connection to Jesus Christ. Mel Walker argues that all things happen for a reason. So experiencing joy begins with recognizing that God is at work in our lives even amid unhappiness.

Perhaps, but I'm not sure that every bad thing we experience is God's choice. Instead, I believe that God, out of unconditional love, offers us the gift of choice. But all creation is connected, so individual choices have consequences that affect everyone else. And suffering often comes out of consequences from choices we did not make.

... cont from page 2

Nevertheless, joy is always within our reach. And the testimonies of spiritual giants who spoke of joy in the presence of unhappy circumstances bears witness to joy's perpetual presence.

I pray that you experience joy both during this Christmas season and beyond. Even when happiness is elusive.

And as far as my hopeful Hallmark Christmas. I pray that the joy Christ has given me will prevail even as plans fail and invited guests choose other options.

I invite you to join us for worship. And if you have a prayer request you can submit your request online on our website *home page*. In addition, prayer request forms are located around the church and during water and food giveaways.

You can join us each Sunday in person or online by clicking the button on our *website's* homepage - *Click here to watch*. This button takes you to our *YouTube channel*. You can find more information about us on our website at *FlintAsbury.org*.

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**Pastor Tommy** 

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Mel Walker. "What Is Joy in Christianity?" © <u>christianity.com</u>, November 7, 2019. Retrieved from: *link* 

# Summer is getting into full swing at the farm!!!

Coming soon, the farm's new twist on a CSA Food Box!!!!

Bring home only the veggies you love!

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We were stoked to be kicking off our very first Asbury Farms Sliding Scale Food Box Program last week! Get the most local, organic, delicious produce!! Grown on the East Side!

Pick what veggies you want, how much you want and pay what you can between \$12.00 — \$24.00.

Every Saturday from 11:00am to 1:00pm 1601 Jane Ave Flint MI

Look for the big banner that says "SALE" ...

Exiled by their captors, it was clear to them that the world was broken and in need of salvation and restoration. However, the people longed for deliverance for generations before the Messiah was born.

The residents of Flint are familiar with longing and waiting. The people of Ukraine are familiar with death and destruction delivered by ruthless adversaries. The families mourning the loss of children gunned down with weapons manufactured for that purpose know tears. "Our stories personally and collectively mirror the story of Israel," writes Moore.

I'll never forget a line from a prayer I said after learning that my first grandson would not live to see his first birthday as a result of a hereditary disease. As I prayed with my daughter, her husband, and his other grandparents, I began my prayer with, "only God bears the burden of foresight."

Humans cannot predict the future. But we can have hope in the future and faith that God is with us. But our hope comes out of our belief that God lived among humanity. A belief that the birth of Jesus was both confirmation of God with us and our hope for salvation and restoration.

God said, through the Prophet Isaiah, "the Lord will give you a sign: a pregnant young woman will have a son and will name him Immanuel." God is with us regardless of our situation or circumstances. God offers salvation and restoration irrespective of our past.

This is the hope we celebrate at Christmas. This is the joy-filled Christmas that I hope for. And for me, my hope is supported by plans to gather with others for worship. Both on Christmas Eve and again on Christmas Day.

Hope is a choice to set goals supported by actions informed by a faith that assures us that God is with us through it all.

I invite you to join us for worship. And if you have a prayer request you can submit your request online on our website *home page*. In addition, prayer request forms are located around the church and during water and food giveaways.

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**Pastor Tommy** 

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Nashville: The Upper Room, 2021.

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