



December 2023

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Presbyterian Church**

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A Message from Pastor Laura

“It was a full moon and, shining on all the snow, it made everything almost as bright as day - only the shadows were rather confusing.”

- The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis



The shadows are never gone in seasons of sunshine. That is most true at Christmas. Christmas is a season of intense metaphorical sunshine. We’re all either baking cookies or eating the cookies that have been baked. Gingerbread houses are decked

with the candy we manage not to snack on whilst building. The Hallmark Channel has become a staple on our television screens. We get gussied up in velvet finery, or outlandish sweaters, to attend concerts, ballets, parties, plays, the list goes on. Our radio’s declare this to be the most wonderful time of the year, teaching us how to wish a very Merry Christmas in Hawaiian. This is a season of sunshine, even as it gets dark by 5:00, because of the light we have in the birth of Jesus Christ.

And, yet, the shadows linger. The shadow lingers over our Christmas story. Mary is preparing to give birth in a strange town amongst strange people. Joseph is bearing more responsibility than he’d imagined when he’d proposed to her over a year ago. The families of Bethlehem are about to endure genocide at the hands of Herod. Need one say more? This story is about light that shines in the darkest of darkness, but dear God, are the shadows present!

Perhaps the shadows are present in your own life this Christmas. All of us are horrified by the shadows of war around the world. Rarely has the song, “let there be peace on earth,” felt so desperate in recent times. Some of us are experiencing our first Christmas without a loved one, a Christmas without financial security, Christmas with an empty nest, or Christmas pockmarked by estrangements from those we’d want to celebrate alongside.

(Cont. on page 2)

A Message from Pastor Laura (continued from page 1)

C.S. Lewis comforts us in Narnia stories, as well as in his theological books, with hope amongst the shadows. Lewis reminds his young readers that Aslan will return to conquer the shadows of our lives. Aslan is always with them in times of despair, temptation, and suffering. He will never leave them alone, ultimately taking away the shadows in

the fullness of time. So it is with the Messiah who is born to us this season. Jesus is always with us in our shadows, saying that we are not alone when we are sad at Christmas and that it is okay to feel sad. Jesus also promises to one day return to make a world that is new and where there will be only sunshine....without the shadows.

*Hail the Heaven-Born Prince of
Peace!*

*Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and Life to All He Brings,
Risen with Healing in His
Wings!*

In Christ's Love,

Pastor Laura

Christmas Dinner at SHUP

Did you Remember to return your RSVP?

If not, please contact Karin in the church office ASAP to reserve your spot today!

(412)561-6261 or sunsethillschurch@gmail.com



**Please Join Us for
Christmas Dinner**

Sunday, December 17, 2023

5:00 pm - Findley Hall

RSVP by November 29th

Main Course provided/please bring a side dish or a dessert.

Music Notes

By Shelby Gracey

During this Advent and Christmas season, we'll have a variety of special music in our morning worship services. Our Chancel Choir, Campanile Bells, and GPM are working hard on beautiful Advent and Christmas music. Also be sure to join us for our Christmas Eve service on December 24 at 7:00 p.m., which will include scriptures, carols, candlelight, and many musical selections throughout the service. It's such a blessing to be able to celebrate the coming of the Christ Child through beautiful, seasonal music!

"Just as the angelic announcement of peace was given at a time of much turmoil caused by the heavy rule of

the Roman Empire, so today does God's message of peace come despite life's stormy circumstances. The peace of Christmas, proclaimed by the heavenly chorus, is one of God's greatest gifts to mankind. 'God was reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). This message of reconciliation involves us on three different levels: peace with God, peace with others, and peace within ourselves. It is this blessed concept that Edmund H. Sears wanted to emphasize in his unusual carol, 'It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.'

"In the second stanza Sears stressed the social aspects of the angels' message – the hope of Christians

spreading peace and goodwill to others who are burdened and painfully toiling. The hymn was written in 1849, a time preceding the Civil War when there was much tension over the question of slavery, the industrial revolution in the North, and the frantic gold rush in California. The final verse looks forward optimistically to a time when all people will enjoy the peace of which the angels sang.

"This carol is one of the finest ever written by an American. After graduation from Harvard Divinity School, Edmund Sears spent most of his life in small pastorates in the East." (*Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*, Kenneth W. Osbeck, Kregel Publications, 2002, p. 361.)

It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth, to touch their harps of gold;
"Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heav'n's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing!

And ye, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow,
Look now! For glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing.
Oh, rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!

For lo! The days are hast'ning on, by prophet seen of old,
When with the ever-circling years shall come the time foretold
When Christ shall come and all shall own the Prince of Peace, their King.
And saints shall meet Him in the air, and with the angels sing.

Notes from Christian Education

By Taylor Strang

Days for Girls

In January 2023, our congregation took a step towards empowering women and girls by visiting the Pittsburgh Chapter of Days for Girls. We cut, sewed, and assembled essential parts of menstrual kits, knowing that our actions would make a real difference.

Now, almost a year later, we are proud to be providing housing to the Pittsburgh South PA Team in Wilson Hall. Days for Girls is an organization that is making a real impact by providing sustainable solutions and

education to break down the barriers related to menstrual health.

By launching a Days for Girls team, we are taking a significant step towards providing women and girls with the dignity and empowerment they deserve. The drawstring bags we will be making play a vital role in creating confidence and dignity for those managing their menstrual health. And, as we learned from Rev. Karie Charlton's Pittsburgh Chapter of Days for Girls, assembling these kits is a meticulous process, with every

item assembled to the highest quality.

We know that by working together as a team, we can bring about meaningful change through Days for Girls. We are excited to continue our work with this organization and to empower women and girls in our community and around the world.

If you are interested in joining or learning more about Days for Girls please email Taylor Strang at pittsburghsouthpa@daysforgirls.org.

Days for Girls Pittsburgh South PA

When?

Starting January 10th!

Wednesdays

10-2 pm

Last Sunday of
the Month

11:30-2:30 pm

Team

Donation List

- Polyester Thread
- 5/8" Grosgrain Ribbon
- Sewing Scissors
- Seam Rippers
- Sewing Lights
- Rotary Cutters
- Straight Pins
- 24 x 18 Cutting Mat

Where?

Sunset Hills United

Presbyterian Church

Wilson Hall

Enter through side door
of large parking lot

900 Country Club
Drive, Pittsburgh, PA,
15226

A Christmas Message

As we approach Christmas, I'm reminded of the magical atmosphere that surrounds us during this wonderful season. It's a time of wonder, joy, and kindness that brings us all together in celebration. Whether it's the glittering lights or the thoughtful presents, the festive spirit is infectious.

But Christmas is more than just material gifts. It's an opportunity to show love and kindness to others, to put a smile on someone's face, and to make unforgettable memories with friends and family. As we follow C.S. Lewis's classic tale of "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe" in our intergenerational Sunday School, let's take a moment to reflect on the importance of being there for each other, showing love, and cherishing the special bond that unites us.

Wishing you a blessed Christmas filled with love, joy, and peace.

Parent's Night Out

Get Your Littles in their PJ's for

Parent's Night Out

Children ages three through nine are invited to the church for a night out so their parents can shop, wrap, or even nap! While parents have their "grown-up" time, kids will enjoy dinner, activities, and a movie.

Friday, December 15th

6 – 9 pm

Sunset Hills United Presbyterian Church

To Register:

- Visit [Parents Night Out | Mysite \(shupchurch.org\)](https://shupchurch.org/parents-night-out) to fill out the online registration form or to download the registration form (physical form can be returned to the Nursery School or the Church Office).
- Email Pastor Laura at revlaurastrauss@gmail.com.

There is no fee for the event.

Freewill donations will be accepted at the door.

Register by December 8th.



Financial Updates

Donations

All donations for 2023 must be received in the church office no later than December 31, 2023 for them to appear on your 2023 Statement of Giving. It is best to mark on the check the year in which you would like your donation to be counted. If there is no designation, donations will be recorded in the year in which they are received.

Pledge Cards

If you have not already done so, please remember to turn in your 2024 pledge card so that the SHUP 2024 budget can be finalized. Cards can be mailed in to the church office, placed in the donation basket on Sunday or you can go to our website at: [Online Stewardship Pledge | Mysite \(shupchurch.org\)](https://www.shupchurch.org) to fill out your pledge card online.

Per Capita

2024 Per Capita has been assessed at \$36.35 per member. Please consider making a separate donation to cover the cost of each church member in your family. Donations that are specifically designated for Per Capita will prevent a reduction in the general budget.

Christmas Eve Worship Service



Christmas Joy

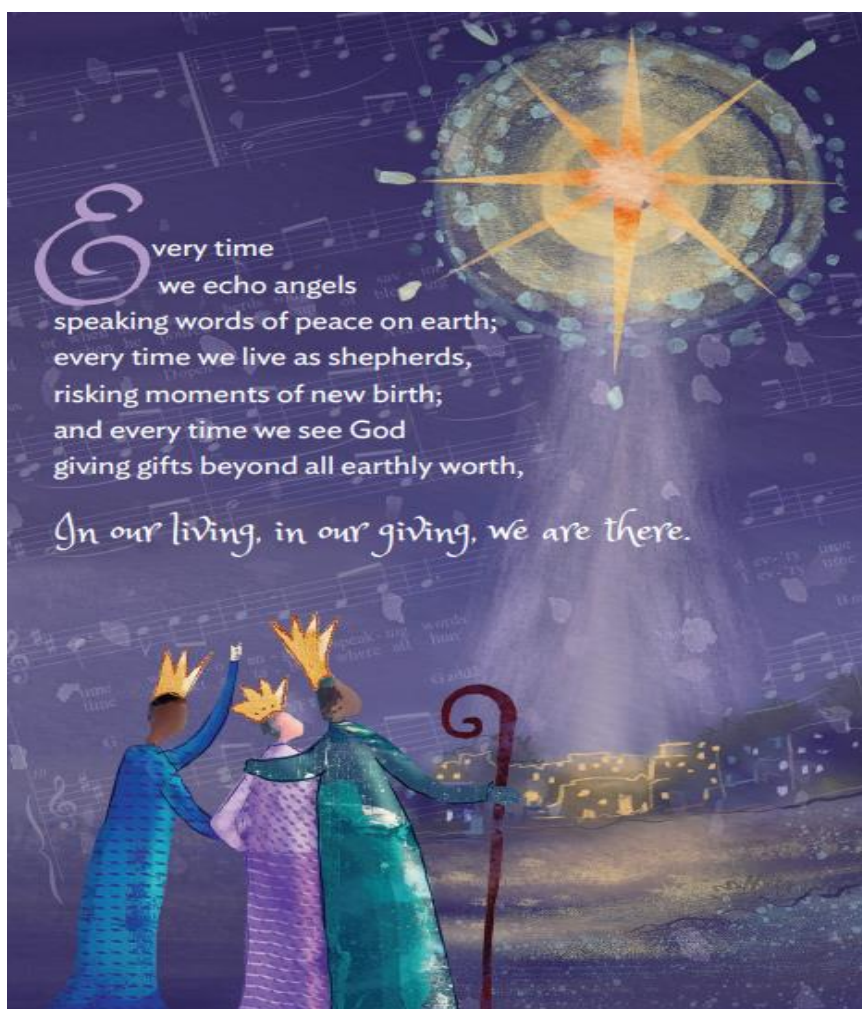
CHRISTMAS JOY SPECIAL OFFERINGS



LEADERSHIP, PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE
DEC. 3RD – Dec. 24th



What Child is this? THE PERFECT GIFT.



Every time
we echo angels
speaking words of peace on earth;
every time we live as shepherds,
risking moments of new birth;
and every time we see God
giving gifts beyond all earthly worth,
In our living, in our giving, we are there.

**WHEN WE GIVE TO THE CHRISTMAS
JOY OFFERING, WE SHARE OUR
LOVE WITH THE LEADERS OF OUR
CHURCH – PAST, PRESENT, AND
FUTURE.**

50%

of your gift makes it possible for
students to learn and grow in faith
at Presbyterian-related schools
and colleges equipping
communities of color.

50%

of your gift assists current and
retired church workers and their
families with critical financial
needs.

Ways to Give

- ✱ Through your congregation - use one of the special envelopes in the pews on Sunday, mail in a check (be sure to write Christmas Joy on the memo line) or use the www.tithe.ly app.
- ✱ By credit card online at [Presbyterian Special Offerings \(pcusa.org\)](http://PresbyterianSpecialOfferings.pcusa.org).
- ✱ Text CHRISTMASJOY to 91999.

Mission Opportunities



Christmas Stockings

During the month of December, we will be collecting small, travel-sized toiletry items (deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, etc.) that will be distributed to Familylinks. Familylinks is an organization in the South Hills that services youth, adults, and seniors. Their mission is to positively impact lives through integrated community, behavioral, and social programs. They have recently expanded their emergency shelter capacity by 50% and are always in need of personal care items for their shelter visitors. During each of the four Sundays of Advent, stockings will be hung on the ends of the pews down the center aisle of the sanctuary. Please place your items right into the stockings when you come in for worship. The stockings will be emptied following worship each Sunday, and all items collected will be distributed to Familylinks in early January. Thank you for participating in this important mission and ministry!



Coat Drive

The Mission Commission is currently collecting lightly used and new men's coats.

If you have a coat that you would like to donate, please drop it in the bin located in the closet in the Findley Hall entrance (across from the restrooms).

All coats will be donated to the Jubilee Kitchen.

Thank you for your participation!



December Information

Adult Sunday School

9:00 am - Library

The class will continue their study of *The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis.

Sunday Worship

10:15 am

If you are not able to join us in person, a video of the service will be posted to our YouTube channel on the Monday after the service: [Sunset Hills Church - YouTube](#). You can get a copy of the bulletin by clicking on the link on the homepage of our website www.shupchurch.org.

Findley Hall Bible Study

Monday's – 1:00 pm

The Findley Hall Bible Study will finish their video study of “The Chosen” season 3 on December 4th.

They will hold their Christmas luncheon in Findley Hall on December 11th.

Wilson Hall Bible Study

Tuesday's – 1:00 pm

The class will be studying the Epistles, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Their last class for 2023 will be held on December 12th. They will begin meeting again in 2024 on January 9th. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Carole McCullough at (412)343-5758.

Peanuts Square Dancing Club

Tuesday's - 7:00 pm

The Peanuts Square Dancing club will meet in Crystal Hall. Everyone is welcome, no partner or previous experience is needed. There is a cost of \$5/class.

Campanile Bells Rehearsal

Tuesday's - 6:30 pm

Bells will have practice in the sanctuary.

Chancel Choir Practice

Tuesday's - 7:30 pm

Chancel choir will have practice in the choir room.

Yoga - Morning

Wednesday's – 9:15 am - Crystal Hall

Instructors from BreaheIn2It Yoga will hold their last class of 2023 on December 20th.

They will hold their first class in 2024 on Tuesday, January 9th at 9:15 am in Crystal Hall.

To sign up or learn more, please visit: [Online Stress Management & Anxiety Relief Programs \(breathein2it.com\)](#).

Tai Chi

Wednesday's – 6:30 pm

Gurney Bolster, certified Tai Chi instructor, will hold the last Tai Chi class of 2023 on December 20th.

The next session will begin on Wednesday, January 10th at 6:30 pm in Crystal Hall.

If you are interested in learning more about these classes, please contact Gurney at: gurneybolster@gmail.com.

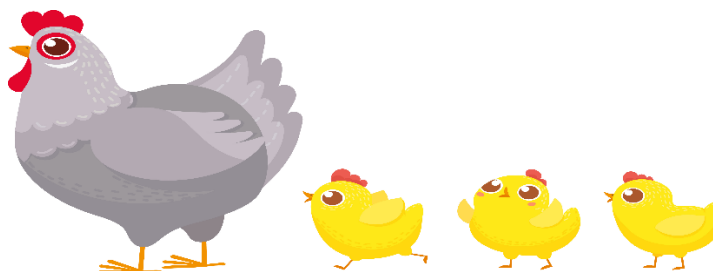
Yoga - Evening

Thursday's – 7:00 pm - Crystal Hall

Instructors from BreaheIn2It Yoga will hold their last class of 2023 on December 21st.

They will hold their first class in 2024 on Thursday, January 11th at 7:00 pm in Crystal Hall.

To sign up or learn more, please visit: [Online Stress Management & Anxiety Relief Programs \(breathein2it.com\)](#).



Rev. Dr. Strauss's Dissertation

Pastor Laura Dissertation entitled “As a Hen Gathers Her Chicks,” will be made available in early 2024 to the congregation. She will be using her dissertation for a sermon series of the same name through the season of Lent, February 18 – March 17, 2024.

December Birthdays

- 1 Colby Sembrat
- 5 Tim Fako
- 12 Dick Fleming
- 13 Anna Daniels
- 19 Dave Kastner
- 21 Emmie D'Amico
- 24 Carol McCallum

Prayer List

Dee Borman



Prayer Circle

We ask that every week you take a moment and add these people to your daily prayers.

<u>Week of:</u>	<u>Praying for:</u>
Dec 3 rd	Chris Gardner William & Barbara Geary
Dec 10 th	Gus & Sandy Gill Ryan & Andrea Gracey
Dec 17 th	Dr. Rev. Bill & Shelby Gracey Davod & Carla Greenfield
Dec. 24 th	David & Karen Heim Kailey & Lyla Rose Hepburn
Dec 31 st	Karl Hetrick James Hudak

Office Closed

December 26th, 27th & Jan. 1st

The church office will be closed on these days in December and January.

Nursery School Closed

Dec. 18th – Jan. 2nd

The Sunset Hills Nursery School will be closed from Monday, December 18th through January 2nd.

SHIM Food Donations

December 2024

This month, we will be collecting **Paper Products.**

**Sunset Hills Book Club
December Book of the Month**

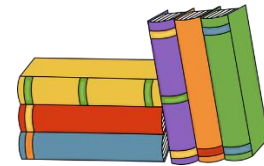
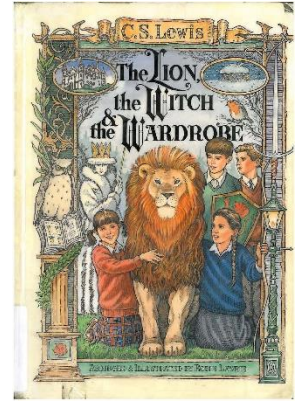
The Lion, the Witch & The Wardrobe

By C.S. Lewis

Oct. 27th – 7:30 pm

Four adventurous siblings—Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie—step through a wardrobe door and into the land of Narnia, a land frozen in eternal winter and enslaved by the power of the White Witch. But when almost all hope is lost, the return of the Great Lion, Aslan, signals a great change . . . and a great sacrifice.

Open the door and enter a new world! The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe is the second book in C. S. Lewis's classic fantasy series, which has been captivating readers of all ages with a magical land and unforgettable characters for over sixty years. (Amazon Book Description)

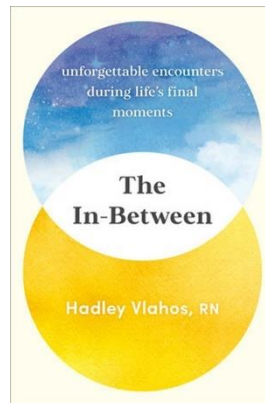


January 2024

The In Between

by Hadley Vlahos

Meeting on January 31st

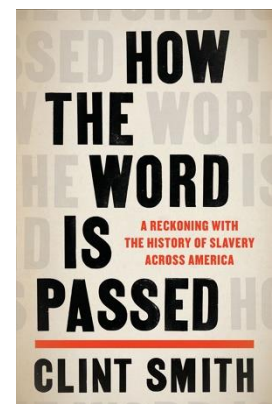


February 2024

How the Word is Passed

by Clint Smith

Meeting on February 28th



Coming in January



Un-Hanging of the Greens

January 7th - After Worship
Everyone is invited to join the
Deacons to help put away
our holiday decorations.



Movies
with the
Minister

Sunday, January 7th **The Boys in the Boat**

Join Pastor Laura for an afternoon at the movies! We will also meet after the showing to discuss the movie.

Showtime and gathering place will be announced during the Jan. 7th worship service.

Attendees are responsible for the purchase of their ticket and dinner.

Officer Training

Saturday, January 20th

Pastor Laura will hold Officer training on Saturday, January 20th from 9 am – 5 pm at the church. Lunch will be provided. All attendees are encouraged to bring a snack to share.

The Session of Sunset Hills United Presbyterian Church has called for the annual congregational meeting to be held in the sanctuary after the worship service on Sunday, January 21, 2024.

- To hear and receive the reports of the commissions and organizations of the churches.
- To hear the report from the Nominating Committee and to elect Elders and Deacons.
- To elect members to the standing Nominating Committee.
- To receive the budget as information.
- To approve the Pastor's Terms of Call.
- To hear and approve the report of the Corporation.
- To elect minute readers for the congregation/corporation meeting.



Chili Cook – Off

Sunday, January 28th

After Worship

Findley Hall

Do you make the best Chili?

Wanna' Prove it?

- Bring your chili in a crock pot and drop it off in the kitchen to be plugged in before the worship service starts.
- Be sure to bring any extras that your chili might need (cheese, sour cream, chives, corn bread, etc.).

Prizes will be awarded by the Neighborhood Outreach Committee.

