
THE WESLEY HERALD

December 2023



December 1, 2023

The Hopes and Fears of all the Years

It was late December and a young pastor, barely 30 years old, took a trip to the Holy Land to recover from exhaustion.

It had been a very difficult year. There was widespread racial tension in the city where he served as pastor. There were armed conflicts, political upheaval, and on top of that, there was an epidemic. This discouraged minister traveled to Bethlehem to renew his faith and find some holy rest.

Who was this preacher? One might think it is one of our serving pastors given all the unrest in this world and this country, but this minister — lived in Philadelphia more than 150 years ago.

His name was Rev. Phillips Brooks. He was a giant of a man at 6'4", 300 pounds. His accomplishments were also large; he served two of the most prestigious Episcopal congregations on the East Coast (in Philadelphia and Boston) with more than 1,000 members each. He also lectured at schools of theology and preached the eulogy for President Lincoln.

Later in his life Brooks was elected to the episcopacy and served as the bishop of numerous congregations in Boston. But his enduring claim to fame is a Christmas carol that we all know, "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

When this exhausted pastor visited the Holy Land in December of 1865, he attended a Christmas Eve service that started at 10pm and went on until 3am. It was held at the site believed to have been the place of Jesus' birth, the "Constantine Basilica." He rode on horseback 5 miles from Jerusalem to get there.

As he galloped along the rolling hills where shepherds likely kept watch over their flocks and observing the star-lit sky, Rev. Brooks found hope and peace.

That very night he began pondering the words that would become a Christmas poem that he would later put on paper. Three years later, this poem was set to music and debuted at his church in Philadelphia on Christmas Eve.

Not unlike Rev. Brooks, we are all fatigued.



Bishop's Office

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We have experienced much sorrow, illnesses, a mass shooting in Lewiston, Maine, a horrific war in the Middle East giving rise to much anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic violence in our country. We watch with despair the continuing war in Ukraine. Our churches are not the size they were before the pandemic and the decline brings with it anxiety and many changes to our beloved congregations. COVID continues to circulate with new waves of variants.

However, “The hopes and fears of all the years” are indeed gathered in a special way at Christmastime.

Christmas brings a message of hope. God’s incarnated self in Jesus Christ has entered our lives. God, with gracious love for us all, is on a mission to save the world from sin and death.

The celebration of Christmas is not the festivities, the gift-giving, the decorations, or the family meals. It is the celebration of that hope, the hope of Jesus Christ, that does not disappoint, does not get old, and never gives up on us.

Let’s join God’s mission of bringing hope to the world. The good news of the Christmas angel was for all people. Hope comes when people stop living as if only some people matter. Fearing -the “other” and treating people as “less-than” is the mindset that makes for injustice, turmoil, and war.

Rev. Brooks was a bold advocate for the abolition of slavery. He got in trouble many times for his social justice preaching. The church of his day did not want to get involved in the politics of race, but Brooks took it on unapologetically. He once said, “Do not pray for easy lives, pray to be stronger people.”

Let’s bring hope for people who are hungering for the world’s resources as well as for inclusion and acceptance. Everyone can do something about that, not just at Christmastime but all year long.

The original “O Little Town of Bethlehem” included another verse that was eliminated from the hymn books once it began to circulate.

*Where children pure and happy, pray to the blessed Child
Where misery cries out to thee, son of the Mary mild
Where charity stand watching, and faith holds wide the door
The dark night wakes, the glory breaks and Christmas comes once more.*

Ending misery, according to this stanza, is done with love that looks out for those who are suffering and faith that holds wide the door to everyone. When we individually take responsibility for seeing those in pain and holding that door wide, we are doing the justice and mercy work of God, and we will experience the enduring joy and hope of this season.

Resources

- [“O Little Town of Bethlehem” by Charlene Mires](#)
- [Discipleship Ministries: History of Hymns “O Little Town of Bethlehem”](#)
- [Friday Reflection: The Priest who was Phillips Brooks by Peter Kountz](#)
- [O Little Town of Bethlehem: The Story Behind the Song](#) Dec. 15, 2016

Special Prayers for these Wesley Family, Friends, and Others...

Grace Woode, Ray Cournoyer (friend of Bill Robbins), John Davis (Ronna's husband), Sandra O'Driscoll, Kathy Freeburn (friend of Linda D'Acri), Jim Hoffman, Margaret Watson, Nana Boadi Amoah, Tim Murphy, Joseph Boateng, Anne Burrows, Al D'Ambra, Dot Ellis, Barbara Fletcher, Don Johnson (Phil's brother), Charles & Samira Kiefer, Bill Kilmer, Dorothy Norcross, David Samanen, Alicia Simoneau, Janet Terzian, Donald Tremblay; Barbara, Frank & the Vietze Family; Phyllis Yngve, Laura Zoldak, Susan (friend of David Potts), Malika Gujarati (family of Jim & Judy Hoffman), Margie (Linda Keister's sister), Page (Allison Hansen's sister).
Those who struggle with depression, anxiety, and alcoholism.

Tower & Rose Window Lightings & Altar Flowers

The Rose Window lighting for December is given in loving memory of my parents, Henry and Katherine Williams by Susan J. Williams, their daughter.

The Tower lighting for December is given in loving memory of Jean and Calvin Williams by Debbie, Gail, and families.

Altar flowers... If you'd like to place flowers on the altar on a particular Sunday, please stop at the welcome office and sign up in the book. Please be sure to fill your name in on the day, then take an order form and submit it to Debi in the office with a check.

Announcements

Advent Devotionals are now available in the Narthex. Youth and Adult devotionals are the same. Please stop by and take one.

January Herald: *There are always extra copies of the Herald in the Narthex by the Welcome Office.*

The January Herald will be part of the January 7th bulletin; however it will be posted by January 5th. Please send all articles to me no later than December 27th. *Thank you, Debi*

Poinsettia Orders due by December 3rd!

Unfortunately, we had to find a new supplier for our holiday flowers. Fortunately, I found one that would take us this late. Therefore, ALL orders MUST be to me by today. I need to give him final numbers by Wednesday, December 6th. PLEASE be sure to send your order in as soon as possible! The cost of the flowers is \$12 each. They do look beautiful!



Bulletin Boards in Brewer Hall... We are ready to fill the bulletin boards in Brewer Hall now. If you would like space, please call or email me in the office and let me know what committee/group you would like space for. I'd like to be able to have the boards ready by December 15th, so please let me know by Monday, December 11th. Thank you!

Debi Reynolds (office@wesleyworc.org)

From Carty Cupboard

The Thanksgiving gift card distribution was a big success!!! The gift cards were donated by people from Wesley, Epworth, and United Congregational churches, a few kind folks, and the Worcester County Food Bank. I was also able to purchase some through Hope for Housing with a generous grant we received. We were able to give 105 families \$40.00 in gift cards and they were all very happy. To everyone who donated gift cards we thank you. I would also like to thank Allison Hanson for getting the Hope for Housing cards for us, and Edith Isaac for helping to sell them with Allison on Sundays.

I would personally like to thank the volunteers of Carty Cupboard Food Pantry for their dedication of time and kindness to those in need. To Louie and Bobby D'Acri, Bill Robbins, Phil Johnson, Donna Nelson, Edith Isaac, Alana Caless, Susan Williams, Mark Muncey, Declan, and Harry Spencer, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You all make what we do so very much easier.

The volunteers of Carty Cupboard served 517 families this month! However, for the first time ever the Worcester County Food Bank doesn't have the amount of food we need to fill the bags we pack each week for those we serve. **We really need your help!** Please help us by donating a box of cereal each week to Carty in the basket in Brewer Hall. It can be hot or cold cereal, either will help to make a complete bag for our clients. We can also use thick plastic bags like the ones from Shaw's, and paper grocery bags with paper handles, like the ones from Trader Joes. Thank you!

To those of you who donated meals in a can and hearty canned soups, you made it possible for us to pack all the bags we needed this month for our single clients. I can't thank you enough, it really made a big difference! To those of you who continue to donate throughout the year, we really appreciate your support and kindness, we really couldn't do this without your help.

Thank you!

Nancy Spencer

Here's a Chance to Prevent Homelessness

It's a simple idea -- buy your groceries (or your coffee or toiletries) and help a local family stay in their home. You'll be joining area stores in contributing to a fund that gives grants to families facing eviction. One back rent payment, utility bill or storage unit fee can keep families out of the shelter system and all the disruption to their children's schooling.

Here's how it works: When you purchase gift cards from Big Y, Shaw's, Stop & Shop, CVS, Dunkin Donuts, Panera, Starbucks, Amazon, Target or TJ Maxx/Marshalls/Home Goods, a percentage of that card's value is donated by those stores to Central Mass. Housing Alliance. Families come to CMHA seeking assistance, and since this program began, hundreds of families have received aid.

Look for the birdhouse in Brewer Hall -- at a table near the stage -- after church services. Cards are for sale every Sunday and by email to AChis4788@aol.com. Order by Monday, December 4 for pickup on Sunday, December 10; or order by Monday, December 18 for Sunday, December 24 pickup after the morning service.

Come choose a Sunday to help with card sales -- it takes a team to tackle a challenge as big (and fast-growing) as homelessness.

GOD MOMENT

If you could share a story of seeing God's work in your life, please tell me or email it to me. The story can be anonymous or signed, and all are invited to participate. Betsy (betspenn35@hotmail.com)

A God Moment

Mark Muncey is a leader of Wesley's Tech Team which makes our Sunday services available to be watched after each service ends. This capability started via Zoom and now uses other technologies. Mark had the persistent idea that perhaps another area church could help us with the changing technologies. He started researching this and discovered that the church right next door, across State St., has the same system as Wesley. Also, James, the First Unitarian Church's Assistant Music Director, is an "IT guy" (an information technology professional who works on computer systems). James is very eager to help Wesley! He even loaned Wesley a cable which we needed until Mark could get one of our own. Mark says, "The kingdom of heaven on earth is full of people who are anxious to help each other."



ADVENT GIFT BOXES OR BAGS

As an Advent mission this year at Wesley, you are again invited to create Advent Gifts of small, needed items. Please place items from the list below in a shoebox and include a Christmas card. You can bring to Brewer Hall your wrapped gift box by December 24th and the gifts will be distributed at the December 30th Community Supper. Any remaining will be given out at the January 7th Community Breakfast.

We have shortened the list below to include only the most needed gifts which are easily recognizable to folks from other cultures. Also, we found that cans of fruit & vegetables were too heavy for homeless people and single serve cups were more usable. We have some backpacks left which we will give to homeless folks when they are putting the items in their pockets. Please use shoeboxes (not boot boxes) and the gift is complete when the shoebox is full. *There's no need to include all items on the list.* Also add a plastic fork, spoon & knife which a homeless person would need. Questions? Ask Linda D'Acri or Betsy Pennino.

Recommended Items:

- * Toothbrush & toothpaste
- * Bar or small bottle of soap
- * Tissues or Antibacterial wipes
- * Wash cloth
- * Socks
- * Gloves
- * ChapStick or lip balm
- * Band-Aids
- * Pens or pencils
- * Tablet of paper/small notebook
- * Cereal bars
- * Juice boxes or small juice bottle
- * Single serve applesauce cups (pull-top)
- * Goldfish or cheese crackers
- * Dried fruit
- * Hot cocoa packets
- * Canned tuna with pull-top
- * Meal in a can (pull-top)
- * Dark chocolate

"Christmas... a gladdening of hearts, a renewing of faith, a sharing of love."

DID YOU KNOW?

Throughout the weeks of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas and as we also anticipate the future coming of Christ, the lectionary Old Testament readings come from the prophets. In the Christian tradition the prophets are considered to have been predictors of the future whose words spoke of future events in the culmination of history and foretold the coming of Jesus as Messiah. It should thus be no surprise that most of the scripture readings for our Advent Lessons and Carols service on December 10 in morning worship will be from the prophets.

The concept of the prophet as someone who is a channel of communication between God and humanity permeates the Old Testament. The etymology of the word *prophet* is unclear, but possibly means “one who calls” or “one who is called”. Other closely related terms used in the Bible include *visionary*, *seer*, and the simple title *man of God* (although not all prophets were male!)

In the traditional division of the Hebrew Bible a distinction is made between the earlier historical books such as Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, which are referred to collectively as the *Former Prophets* and the prophets who were called after the division of the kingdom of Israel and are known as the *Latter Prophets*. The classic age of Hebrew prophecy was the 400 years of Israelite history during which the books of the Latter Prophets were written. The Latter Prophets are further divided into the *Major Prophets*—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—who wrote longer books, and the *Minor Prophets* (or simply the *Twelve*, as that is how many there are)—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The prophets came from many different walks of life and from many different geographic locations within both Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel. What they had in common was the task of delivering God’s messages to the people, messages that still speak to us centuries later as we hear their words read in worship.

Submitted by Deborah O’Driscoll

WESLEY STAFF & LEADERSHIP TEAM

Pastor	Rev. Byungmoo Lee	Carty Cupboard Food Pantry	Nancy Spencer
Interim Organist	Ronna Davis	Education Committee Co-Chairs	Joseph Fletcher
Chancel Choir Director	David Potts		Ivy Hammond
Ghanaian Choir Director	Desmond Cheetham	Youth Bible Study	Joseph Fletcher
Director of Children’s Ministries	Rhianna Burke	Finance & Stewardship Co-Chairs	William Wong
Church Business Administrator	Matt Crane		Peter Hansen
Church Secretary	Debi Reynolds	Financial Secretary	Earl Flagg
Building Superintendent	Tim Murphy	Church Auditor	Cynthia Fletcher
Assistant Building Superintendent & Sunday Security	Phil Johnson	Ghanaian Association	Paul Hayfron
Custodians	April Dylewicz	Hospitality Chair	Linda D’Acri
	Gerard Piscitelli	Medical Ministry	Ron Ramsay
Head Usher	David Dagle	Mission Coordinator	Betsy Pennino
Communion Steward	Earl Flagg	Staff-Parish Relations Co-Chairs	Chris Flagg
Wesley Tech Team	Mark Muncey		Judy Hoffman
Church Council	Brent Drajesk	United Women in Faith Co-Chairs	Allison Hansen
Board of Trustees	Gary Robinson	Music Committee	Barbara Ingrassia
		Worship Committee	Debbie O’Driscoll
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