

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for God has remembered the humble state of his handmaiden...for the Mighty One has done great things for me...God has scattered the proud...brought down the rulers from their throne, and exalted those who were humble...God has filled the hungry with good things... God has come to the aid of Israel, to fulfill the promise made to Abraham.*

The Gospel According to Luke

*When King Herod heard this he was disturbed. When he called all the chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. In Bethlehem in Judea they replied...Herod was in a furious rage, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and the vicinity who were twelve years old and under.*

The Gospel According to Matthew

The gospel passages from Luke and Matthew dramatize two ways people can respond to God's active presence in their lives. Luke tells us Mary was perplexed yet receptive to the mystery of God's activity in her life. Matthew tells us Herod was suspicious and unreceptive to any activity that threatened his power and control. As Mary's understanding deepened, her gladness increased until she burst into a song of joy and hope. As Herod became more suspicious, his anger grew until he burst into a fit of violence and murderous rage. Mary offered herself to God on behalf of her people. Herod killed his people in order to resist God.

Mary and Herod illustrate two extremes—complete submission and total resistance to God's will. Most of us don't live on either end of this spectrum but somewhere in the middle—somewhat submissive and somewhat resistant to God's will. In a sermon a few weeks ago, I noted that each one of us has a bit of Mary and Herod inside of us. Each one of us has some of the humble servant and some of the control freak in us.

In his book *Will and Spirit*, Gerald May contrasts the dispositions of *willingness* and *willfulness* in a manner resonant with the biblical characters Mary and Herod. Willingness is self-surrender to God's will. Willfulness is insistence on directing, controlling, or manipulating our lives and all life around us. Mary is willing. Herod is willful.

May writes, "willingness and willfulness do not apply to specific things or situations. They reflect instead the underlying attitude one has toward the wonder of life itself. Willingness notices this wonder and bows in some kind of reverence to it. Willfulness forgets it, ignores it, or at its worst, actively tries to destroy it. Thus willingness can sometimes seem very active and assertive, even aggressive. And willfulness can appear in the guise of passivity."

As May notes, self-surrender is difficult and problematic. Surrender in and of itself is not necessarily a good thing. To whom or what do we surrender ourselves? What effect does self-surrender have on our personal freedom, individual will, and responsibility as moral agents? How do we know when we are surrendering ourselves to God and not to some deviously destructive force? When does self-surrender align us to a spiritual power that liberates, strengthens, and fulfills us? When does it allow us to avoid

life's demands and our deepest calling, or simply merge us anonymously with a crowd of conformists living the illusion of control? Self-surrender takes an incredible amount of spiritual discernment and no small amount of risk.

It's fascinating to read the gospels as dramas in which willingness and willfulness play out as major themes. Who are the willing characters? Who are the willful ones? Who are the characters that struggle with their desire to surrender and their need to be in control? Jesus is clearly the archetype of the human being who surrenders completely to God, yet even he agonizes over his surrender in the garden of Gethsemane. And though men obsessed with control kill him, Jesus turns out to be the most powerful character in the drama. His surrender to God, even unto death, brings him powerful new life.

The Mary and the Herod of the birth narratives offer us two interesting characters to ponder—one willing, the other willful. Perhaps if we look deep within, we'll find them in ourselves. If we listen carefully, we'll hear them. The one a bit perplexed, yet willing to surrender and serve. The other fearful, and jealously fighting every threat to power and control. During the Christmas season, may the Mary in each one of us serve and magnify God, and may our Herod come tumbling down off his throne.

*Tom*

### **TRUSTEES CORNER**

Trustees have approved a contract with Evan Tanaguchi's architectural firm to work up potential solutions to the problem of accessibility of the church as requested by the Centennial Committee. The 2006 proposed budget has been left intact so far, pending the outcome (or income) of the rest of 2005. Adjustments may need to be made in early January. Additionally, evaluation of the funding amount for Seminary Support for 2005 is being revisited with a final decision to be made in early January as well. This is in response to the 2005 annual meeting request to increase the amount, if possible, at the end of the year. It looks like parking meters are going to be installed on San Antonio and maybe the cross streets as well. There is debate as to whether this will be good for the church or not. Additionally, members of trustees, coordinating council and centennial committee are in negotiations with the Co-op to try to obtain some weekday and Sunday parking privileges in the garage that will be constructed diagonally SW of our church. Construction will be completed in August 2006.

### **Two BIG Dates to Remember**

**January 22:** Micah 6 worship service, 3 pm, All Saints Episcopal Church

**January 29:** Congregational Church of Austin UCC Annual Meeting with vote on Proposed By-Laws change regarding voting on new members.

### **Chairs of our Boards**

Trustees:

Pam Tucker

Deacons: Liz Nash  
Christian Education: Jennifer Howicz  
Christian Outreach: John Goff

## **OUTREACH ALERT FOR JANUARY**

### **Freeze Night**

The freezing weather has begun, and so has the Freeze Night shelter. Please help out by donating storable food items, such as frozen casseroles or lasagnas, chips or other snacks, orange juice and hot chocolate packets. We are also always in need of fresh socks and underwear for Freeze Night guests.

### **Front Porch Lunch**

Front Porch Lunches are moving to twice monthly (first and third Thursdays), and with it a higher level of organization and efficiency (or so we hope). Instead of food donations, we are now asking for monetary donations (\$50 will cover one lunch). Food will be purchased by the Outreach board from these funds. Please consider sponsoring one or two lunches a year. Volunteers will also be better organized by scheduling several months in advance. If anyone is interested in volunteering to serve at a Front Porch Lunch and is not already on the volunteer list, please contact John Goff.

## **FREEZE NIGHT MINISTERS FOR JANUARY**

- 1 Sun Tom/Robin, Ben White, Cecile Adam
- 2 Mon John Goff, Matt Blackstock, Sara Ross
- 4 Wed Tom/Robin, Dennis Murphy, Chester Rosson
- 7 Sat Tom/Robin, Will Heimbach, Reuel Nash
- 9 Mon John Goff, Ben White, Sara Ross
- 11 Wed Tom/Robin, Doyal Pinkard, Will Heimbach
- 14 Sat Tom/Robin, Will Heimbach, Jennifer Howicz
- 15 Sun Tom/Robin, Reuel & Ellie Nash
- 16 Mon John Goff, Matt Blackstock, Sara Ross
- 18 Wed Tom/Robin, Dennis Murphy, Chester Rosson
- 21 Sat Tom/Robin, Will Heimbach, Cecile Adam
- 23 Mon John Goff, Ben White, Sara Ross
- 25 Wed Tom/Robin, Doyal Pinkard, Ben White
- 28 Sat Tom/Robin, Will Heimbach, Liz Nash
- 29 Sun Tom/Robin, Reuel & Ellie Nash
- 30 Mon John Goff, Matt Blackstock, Sara Ross

## **PERSONALS by Pat Oakes**

The Advent/Christmas season was a lot brighter on Friday, Dec. 16. The Deacons organized a lovely carol and communion service followed by lunch for

everyone (thanks to Southerncare Hospice for the great food). Twenty-three folks were in attendance ranging in age from eight (Katie Lemley) to ninety-two (Earl Cornwell). Transportation was provided for those who needed it. Many of the folks there don't get to church often any more, but it was so wonderful to see them and catch up on their news. In attendance were (other than Katie and Earl) were Lois and John Drachenberg, Vic Appel, Cathy Hubbs, Stella Morrison (wearing her Dancin' Grannies jacket), Mathis Blackstock, Louise Whitworth, Dave and Sara Ross, John Towery, Mary Charles Williams, Marie Scheel (Weldon is doing fine but did not feel like getting out in the cold), Liz Spencer, Jean Decker, Ben White, Florence Castle (playing the carols for us--what a joy!), Pat Oakes, Liz Nash, Lynne Lemley, and Tom and Alex VandeStadt. Tom invited Lois, John Towery, Liz Spencer and John Drachenberg to participate in the readings and everyone enjoyed singing the carols.

**David Cleaver-Bartholomew** started attending our church in 1982, went to seminary from 1984-86, and then was our intern from 1986-87, working with John Towery. In July of that year, David and Dena Cleaver were married in New Haven, CT, and John went and participated in the wedding. Our church was David's sponsoring church throughout his ordination process. This past September, David was called to be the Association Minister for the Eastern Ohio Association (EOA) of the Ohio Conference of the UCC. Ohio is structured a bit differently from many conferences in that each Association is like a Conference in that each Association is much more autonomous and independent than in other Conferences. For example, each Association calls its own Association Minister instead of the Conference calling an Associate Conference Minister and assigning that person to cover a particular Association. Also, OCWM funds go first to the Association and the Association decides what percentage to retain and what percentage to pass along to the Conference. There are currently 99 churches in the EOA with approximately 11,100 members and last year's OCWM contributions were over \$800,000. This is an interesting calling with a steep learning curve and certainly different from being in the local church. David reports that his wife Dena, Audrey (now 11 years old), and Lydia (now 8 years old) are doing well. Dena, an ordained Episcopal priest, will be looking for a post in an Episcopal church starting the first of the year. The girls are very much involved in dance, especially ballet, so they are preparing themselves for another Christmas performance of The Nutcracker. David's new email addresses are: [davidc-b@sbcglobal.net](mailto:davidc-b@sbcglobal.net) and [davidcb@eoaucc.org](mailto:davidcb@eoaucc.org).

Former members **Steve and Jeanine Neuse** were in Germany in early December enjoying their grandchildren and son Micah. Their daughter-in-law Kara arrived on Dec. 9 for a four day pass. Bryce and Jayce were happy to see their mommy. They went to a German St. Nick evening at Jayce's school. The children and their families went searching for St. Nick along a trail at a golf course. After he was discovered they returned to a barn-like structure for musical and verbal greetings to St. Nick. Each class presented something and then he gave the children stockings. Goulash and chicken nuggets with fries were served. They visited Bryce's school on base where he is enjoying kindergarten. They drove to Verdun one day, but unfortunately the weather did

not cooperate. They did manage to see some sights. They also shopped at a French grocery store (fresh salmon, great French bread, etc.). Then they went on to Barcelona for a few days. It sounds like a good time was had by all.

Wednesday evening, Dec. 7, was a freeze night for the church. That means that homeless youth came to stay in the basement overnight. Life Works staff and volunteers from the church run the program. That icy, sleety night, **Tom VandeStadt and Dennis Murphy** were the church volunteers. After serving supper and getting the 10-12 young people settled down for the night, Tom and Dennis headed home. Tom slipped on the ice and fell flat before he even got into his car--no injuries, fortunately. Tom followed Dennis as they headed north on MoPac. When they to the overpass at 2222, MoPac was closed, so they got off and headed north on Burnet. Dennis was grateful for the lack of traffic as he found himself skidding several times into oncoming lanes. The usual 25 minute trip took him a hair-raising hour and 20 minutes to get home. Tom made it home unscathed, too. The angels were working overtime that night!

**Nodie Murphy** went to New Orleans for Thanksgiving. She reports that she hardly knows what to say or where to begin. "It has mostly been said before--the devastation is unbelievable, the silence is eerie and depressing. It's true that such a disaster does bring people together, regular routines are so disrupted that you tend to notice things and get out of your ruts. But it puts tremendous strains on families. The suicide rates are up; abuse rates and divorces will probably result as well. I want to trumpet that I am very proud of our son Seth, who accompanied me on my trip and who cleared almost all the brush out of the huge yard at my mother's house. The pile of debris he constructed extended above his head and took up half a block! (Pictures available on request!) My job was to clean the back screened-in porch, including all the broken glass, mold, wrought iron furniture, plants, etc. I'm sure they appreciated our help, but especially Seth's, because the phone company wouldn't come fix the lines until the limbs were removed. My sister Julie made Thanksgiving dinner for those of us who were there, then she and her husband Herb left for a few days in Florida. On December 4th, my mother and sister returned to New Orleans and are staying with my sister until the refrigerator is delivered. A friend is repairing the 14-foot ceiling in the dining room, hoping to have it ready for the Christmas Eve party which we traditionally host at the house. Tuesday night my sister Debbie kept the family awake by sobbing throughout the night. Mother always says Debbie feels what others feel, only more so. We were tremendously blessed by having two houses so lightly damaged when compared to the rest of the city. But the stress is overwhelming. There is a wonderful challenge to rebuilding an entire metropolitan area, but sometimes you wonder how on earth it can be done. I came back and got sick, but Seth seems OK except for a few physical injuries that are healing fine." Welcome back to Ned Murphy who moved back to Austin from San Antonio on December 17th.

In December, **Fran and Rambie Briggs** traveled to Denver for the occasion of their niece Dea's graduation from nursing school. She has been in a one-year RN program--whew--in which she did very well. She and her husband Peter plan to stay in Denver. Many of you will remember that Dea lived with Fran

and Rambie for 3 years. Otherwise, they have been occupied baby-sitting the Fracasso grandchildren while their parents traveled to Marfa for one of Michael's performances. Stella and Giovanni helped assemble and decorate the Christmas tree. The bubble lights were a real hit.

**Rizer Everett** stays busy and involved with all kinds of activities--like watching an excellent TV interview by Charlie Rose with the Dalai Lama who stated that he is hopeful that good relations between China and Tibet can be worked out--or viewing the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade in the morning and enjoying a fine dinner in the evening as a guest in the home of the Householder family. He is helping young Henry Householder to improve his ability to play the game of chess. At age ten he has a good understanding about the basic moves of the game, so they plan to meet each week to review the strategy to be used in the middle and end games. While taking friend Johanna Householder to the Skin and Cancer Clinic where the doctor performed the removal of a lesion from her left cheek, Rizer read aloud an excellent article from the December 2005 issue of the *Smithsonian Magazine*. The title of the article is, "The Evolution of Charles Darwin" by Frank J. Sulloway who made nine trips in thirty years to the Galapagos Islands 600 miles west of the coast of Ecuador. Darwin made his trip to the Galapagos Islands in 1835 but did not publish his revolutionary theory until 1859. Sulloway concludes that Darwin did some deep thinking during those years about how new species of plants and animals arise naturally, by a process of evolution, rather than having been created -- forever immutable -- by God. He also had a funny story about himself and Hildegard, his late wife. He said, "I certainly remember the Christmas in 1941 when we were living in the former nightclub north of Jackson, MS. Hildegard had many cookies hanging on the Christmas tree, and the mice were eating the cookies. So, we would chase the mice off the tree into the lighted kitchen next door. The mice would run along the counter top and slide off the end of the counter top into the folds of the umbrella that was stashed next to the counter. I would then grip the folds of the umbrella, take it out to the driveway, and stomp the mouse to death as I dumped it onto the driveway. We caught and killed 23 mice on one of the evenings." Ingenuity at its best!!

According to **Vic Appel**, Costa Rica is a fantastic place to visit. He has recently returned from a 9-day bus tour of the country along with 23 other members of the UT Retired Faculty and Staff Association. Costa Rica is a Central American country that is only several hundred miles in width, with borders on both the Pacific Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. Despite the fact that it lies squarely in the temperate zone and has extensive rain forests, much of the country is kept cool by the 6,000 to 8,000 foot elevation of the western mountain range that runs through the middle of it. Its elevation, heavy rainfall (100" per year), and volcanic soil make it an ideal place to grow coffee -- which natives claim is the best in the world. Costa Rica is far from an underdeveloped land. It is one of the few true democracies in Latin America, with voting rates which put us to shame. It has a 95% literacy rate among its population. Many ex-patriots from the U.S. and other European countries make it their home. It has an amazing bio-diversity of both plants and animals, which it zealously guards as a

national treasure. Fully one fourth of the country is set aside as animal and plant preserves, national parks or forests. It has multiple industries including tourism, banana, coffee, citrus, and sugar plantations. It welcomes U.S. corporations, so it is not unusual to see McDonald's, Denny's Burger King, Sears Roebuck, Costco, Wal-Mart and other familiar names in the cities. Vic found that there were many highlights on his trip. He truly enjoyed going on a "cable car" ride in the canopy of a large rain forest; seeing how they process and pack bananas at a Del Monte plantation; seeing how they roast coffee beans, buying hand-carved, rosewood replicas of their wildlife; getting close to a male iguana primping before females; swimming and walking along the pristine, Pacific beaches; visiting the two active volcanoes in the country; and lounging at the natural hot springs near the craters. The Caravan Tours Company which planned our trip took them all across the country, provided them with first class hotel and eating facilities at a moderate price. The only negative he can think of was driving in the big bus on winding, narrow roads as they crossed the Continental Divide -- it was scary when they met another bus or a truck coming the other way. He still doesn't know how they made it.

**Liz Spencer** has accepted a call to be the pastor at Trinity United Church of Christ in Lexington, Missouri (about 45 miles east of Kansas City.) She has enjoyed a long ministry here as a hospice chaplain and looks forward to sharing her experience, strength, and hope as a pastor. The church has a membership of 110 and the people there have been really wonderful and welcoming to Bill and Liz. You can read more about the town of Lexington at <http://www.historiclexington.com/> <http://www.historiclexington.com>. Liz wants us to know that she will miss each of us a great deal. She says, " Please know that your friendship is one of the things that has given me the strength to seek this new calling. As one of my favorite authors, Henri Nouwen, said: "When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand.' Thank you for doing (and continuing to do) so." WE will really miss you, Liz!

**Lisa Kirch** has finished her first semester of teaching art history at the University of Northern Alabama in Florence. She and Sarah were spending Christmas at the coast with her dad. They have been attending a Methodist church 8 miles from her home where members of her family have attended since 1903. A long-lost cousin has taken her to the family graveyard and she found the markers for her great-great-great-grandmother's grave--and her (4 greats) grandmother's stone was nearby. Lisa sends good wishes to one and all for a Happy New Year.

**Eric Deisler** is closing in on his 15 minutes of fame as his picture was in the Austin paper in mid-December. He was part of the lighting crew for the Bryker Woods School 5th grade production of their original opera based on the story, "The Velveteen Rabbit." This is the 8th year that the school's fifth graders have created an original opera complete with sets, songs, lighting and acting.

Congratulations to **John Steele** from Simsbury, CT. He has been accepted at Annapolis. He is the grandson of Lois and John Drachenberg.

Congratulations are also in order for **Jake Burlinson** who turned twenty-one in mid-December!

### JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

- 1 Bob Breihan
- 3 Suzanne VanderPoel
- 18 Brad Ferguson  
Betsy Ferguson  
Paul Deisler  
Kaitlyn Newell
- 22 Mary Masters
- 23 Danny Masters
- 28 Yoshikuni Kaneda
- 30 Robin Chapman
- 31 Joe Nordstrom

### **COFFEE HOUR**

Please sign up in the Fellowship Room to be coffee hour hosts on an upcoming Sunday. The coffee hour time is such a good opportunity to visit old friends and meet visitors. We keep coffee and ginger ale and some punch fixings in the pantry in the kitchen. There are usually paper napkins, and we use coffee mugs and punch cups to avoid wasting natural resources. Your menu can be as simple or complicated as you want. Cookies and/or chips and salsa are just fine! If you have questions, talk to Pat Oakes, Tommie Pinkard, or Lynne Lemley.

### **FROM CHRISTIAN ED**

Congratulations to all of our church youth for your performances in the Christmas Pageant on December 18 – you were great! Congratulations also to the congregation and visitors who performed their roles so beautifully. You donated **four** baskets of food and clothing for our homeless ministries! And thank you to all the adults who helped behind the scenes in so many ways – we appreciate your time, effort and talents!

There will be a congregational forum in the near future regarding the Sunday School curriculum for both the elementary and middle/high school classes. More information to follow.

We still need Sunday School assistants for the elementary Sunday School class. Please sign up and join the fun!!!

### **Thanks! Thanks! Thanks!**

The stewardship committee would like to thank everyone for the unprecedented prompt and generous response to this year's pledge drive. Early indications are that no adjustments will need to be made to the proposed budget and that the boards' visions for the coming year can go forward as they have planned. For those of you who have not yet pledged... It is never too late, pledge forms and time and talent surveys are still available in the fellowship room.

Thank you all again,

Sara Ross

Dennis Murphy

Lynne Lemley

### **“WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”**

A biblical, theological, historical, cultural, and personal exploration of Jesus' identity, and our relationship to him.

This spring, Whit Bodman and Tom VandeStadt will be offering an adult education series that explores the identity of Jesus from biblical, theological, historical, cultural, and personal perspectives. The goal is to help folks in our church understand Christianity's interpretations and understandings of Jesus in different times and places, and to help us clarify and articulate our own relationship to Jesus. Whit and Tom will participate together in a preaching series, and then host a bi-weekly discussion group from February to April.

The series will be divided into six main topics: Jesus as *King of Kings*, Jesus as *prophet*, Jesus as *savior*, Jesus as *suffering servant*, Jesus as *God*, and Jesus question: “who do *you* say that I am?” After exploring the themes that coalesce around Jesus' various titles, folks will be encouraged to write a statement that articulates their own faith in Jesus.

Whit and Tom will take turns on alternate Sundays preaching on these themes. The dates for the after worship discussions are as follows:

Feb 5	Jesus as <i>King of Kings</i>
Feb 19	Jesus as <i>prophet</i>
March 5	Jesus as <i>savior</i>
March 19	Jesus as <i>suffering servant</i>
April 2	Jesus as <i>God</i>
April 23	“Who do <i>you</i> say that I am?”

We hope you can participate in these discussions. Please bring your questions, your doubts, your faith, your experiences, your hopes.....and lend them to our common exploration.

**DEADLINE FOR FEBRUARY VISITOR – JANUARY 19**