

Church News

December 2024

First Baptist Church

Pastor - Steve Larson

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Pastor's Ponderings -

Every year as we enter the holiday season, we are filled with a whole array of emotions. There's joy and happiness in being together with family and friends. There are feelings of gratitude and thankful hearts for all of our many blessings. There are also feelings of sadness and loneliness for some. It can be a time of real difficulty.

I am always amazed at the amount of loneliness and difficulty that surrounded the first Christmas. We see it with such joy and gladness; we celebrate the season with such anticipation. But how difficult must it have been for Joseph and Mary? It's no fun to have to explain getting pregnant before you're married. How do you explain it when you know you've never been with a man? Can you imagine how lonely that must have been when you knew no one would believe you? Your Mom, your Dad, your family, how about your fiancé? How embarrassing would it be, especially when your explanation as to what happened is completely unbelievable? You've now brought such incredible shame and embarrassment on your entire family. They really can't stand up for you because your explanation doesn't make sense. What you're saying happened, is not even possible, it's so far-fetched; everybody's going to think you're crazy. It's blasphemous! Your marriage is now out the window, there's no way Joseph is going to want to marry you. You could be killed for this. Stoned to death by your fiancé, your family, friends and neighbors. Just try and think that through a little bit, look at it through their eyes and tell me it would not have been lonely and incredibly hard. Following Jesus, walking in obedience to Him can be lonely at times, because what Jesus is calling us to do for Him does not make sense to those around us. Sometimes people are not going to understand.

How hard would it have been to be Joseph, knowing that you are a very honorable man, you had done nothing wrong. But who's going to believe you now? You know people are always going to look at you and wonder. What would it be like to get your instructions from an angel, in a dream, while you are sleeping? How believable are your dreams, and how much of your dreams are based on your dietary disciplines over the last twelve hours? It's very easy for us to "enjoy" the Christmas story because we didn't have to "live" the Christmas story. We've read the Christmas story, and we know how it turns out. When it's unfolding right before your eyes, it's not so easy. It's a good lesson to us, -

“Life is hard, follow God anyway”. Follow God always, regardless if it makes sense, because sometimes it doesn’t. Follow God always, regardless if it’s fun, because sometimes it’s not. Follow God always, regardless if it’s easy, because sometimes it’s hard. Follow God always, regardless if you understand, because sometimes it’s uncertain. Follow God always, regardless if it’s lonely, because you are never alone. God always knows the way. We can trust Him. And sure, it’s easy and fun when we know how the story turns out. But Joseph and Mary were just living one day at a time, not knowing what lay ahead. Just looking to God, listening for His voice, and following His leading. Sometimes life is hard, but if we don’t keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, it’s impossible! The Christmas story reminds us that obedience is always best *“And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith”*. Hebrews 12:1-2

The Christmas season is hard for some. I would like to say that we are mindful of those in our midst who have lost loved ones this year, and this will be your first Christmas without that special person in your life and in your home. There is a new kind of loneliness for you. I am so sorry, we are praying for you. Only God knows the way through that journey. Please keep looking to Jesus, you are not alone. It’s different this year, but Jesus is with you. He promises He will never leave us or forsake us. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 28:20, *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”*. God is faithful still.

On behalf of Kristi and myself and our family, we wish you all a very merry Christmas and a very blessed New Year. It is so good, and we feel so very blessed to be with you at First Baptist Church. We are so thankful for each and every one of you. May the birth of the baby Jesus, born in a manger, be your greatest blessing *“because He will save His people from their sins”*. Surely Jesus Christ has come to seek and to save the lost. Praise God, Jesus still saves! May God give us the will and the determination to follow Him unconditionally, regardless of those who may not understand, regardless of what it looks like to the world around us.

Blessings to you,

Pastor Steve & Kristi



Merry Christmas!

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRAYER AND BIBLE STUDY



Ladies Prayer Group
Wednesdays at 10:00am



Men's Group
Tuesday evenings at 7:00 pm
We are studying the series "Unoffendable"
by Brant Hansen
All men are invited to join us!
Questions?? - contact Stan Motter at 815-545-7441



Ladies Afternoon Bible Study
Wednesdays at 1:00 pm
We will be studying through the **Book of 1 Corinthians** beginning Dec. 4th.
As we have studied all Paul's writing, we look forward to him outlining a foundation to encourage believers to pursue godly behavior in the world we live in
Would love to have you join us as we apply the Bible to our lives!
Kim Enlow at 815-931-2533



Ladies Evening Bible Study
Wednesdays at 6:30 pm
We are studying a series called "When You Pray",
which is a look at Six Prayers in the Bible.
We hope you will join us!
Colette Kirby at 815-942-9527



Single Moms Support Group
Meet the 1st and 3rd Thursday Evenings at 6:00 pm
If you are a single mom or know of one who would
enjoy meeting with others, please invite them to come with you!
Please contact Kristi Larson at 815-942-0812

*"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message
is heard through the word of Christ."
Romans 10:17*



Boards to Meet on Tuesday, Dec. 10

5:30pm - Board of Christian Ed.

5:30pm - Board of Deacons

5:30pm - Board of Trustees

On that memorable night in the Judean hills of Bethlehem two thousand years ago, this was the song of the angels. Though the centuries have rolled by, still the world longs for and looks for the peace that the angels announced. Where is this peace?

Clearly it is not evident in the world, with its constant fighting and conflicts. This peace abides instead in the hearts of all those who have trusted in God's grace. In the same proportion that the world has trusted Christ, it has peace. There can be no lasting peace until Christ has come to the hearts of all people and brought them His peace.

*"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace
to men on whom His favor rests."*

Luke 2:14

UNIFIED GIVING

<u>Month</u>	<u>Monthly Amt. Needed</u>	<u>Monthly Amt Received</u>
Received for October	\$25,720.00	\$25,924.00
Received for November (so far)	\$25,720.00	\$14,464.00

** All giving for 2024 needs to be in by December 27th for statements.*

Thank you for your generous and faithful giving!!!





Awana Club

"Because Kids Matter to God"

First Baptist Church
Ages 4 yrs.thru 7th grade

Awana Club is held the 1st and 3rd Sunday
of each month at **4:00 - 5:15pm**
You may register by calling the
church office @ 815-942-0812

December 1 - Awana meets at church
(Make Christmas Cards for Shut-ins)

December 15 - Awana meets at church
(Prize Store & Christmas Caroling to Shut-ins)



Questions -

call Cheryl Johnson or Kristi Larson
We are looking forward to seeing you!

One of your goals as a parent is to work yourself out of a job. Someday your children will leave home - and a major part of your responsibility is to prepare them for that day. From learning to brush their teeth and tie their shoes to helping with their homework and teaching them to make wise decisions, your goal is to prepare them for the day when you won't be there.

But, what about their spiritual foundations? Have they learned from you what it means to walk with Christ every day? Have you taught them to pray, and to love the Bible and live by its truths? Have you encouraged them to give their lives to Jesus Christ?

*"Impress them [the commandments] on your children.
Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road,
when you lie down and when you get up."*

Deuteronomy 6:7

*"GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE
TO MEN ON WHOM HIS FAVOR RESTS."*

LUKE 2:14



December Birthdays

9 Russ Battersby
13 Katie Maylum
18 Abel Valdivia
28 Jim Swiggett
29 Bob Krug
30 Alicia Steffes
31 Christy Johnson

December Anniversary

5 Rick and Heather Shouse
11 Dave and Cheryl Johnson
16 Ray and Marlene Burnside
23 Russ and Jane Battersby
27 Ken and Colleen Miller
31 Wendell and Theresa Baggett

December

ARE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IN NEED OF PRAYER?

First Baptist Church has a wonderful team of prayer warriors who are willing to lift your requests to our heavenly Father.

Colette Kirby leads this ministry,
and you can email your prayer needs to her at –

colette.kirby@comcast.net

or text 815-954-9527



“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
2 Corinthians 12:10

Our Deepest Sympathy and Love to the family of Mary Beldon. Mary went home to be with the Lord on Saturday, November 2. Prayers for comfort for her family are much needed at this time.

Our Deepest Sympathy and Love to the family of Esther Ritke. Esther went home to be with the Lord on Sunday, October 20. Prayers for comfort for her family are much needed at this time.

SENIOR LUNCHEON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10 12:00 PM

We will be serving

- Soup
- Sandwiches
- Christmas cookies

We will also play “Christmas Bingo”
As well as sing a few Christmas Hymns

There is a sign-up sheet on the foyer table

We would love to have you join us!





Advent Season is here.....

December 1 – December 22
December 24 (Christmas Eve)

There are still openings for Advent Readers

Salvation Army Bell Ringing

Friday, December 6

4 – 8 pm

North and South Door at Wal-Mart



**We will be ringing bells for “We Care” again this year!
This is such a great ministry annnnnnnnd a chance to give
weary shoppers a smile! There is a sign-up sheet.
Any questions, you may contact the church office.**

Moody Bible Institute

CANDLELIGHT CAROLS

“Hope is Born”

Saturday, December 7 at 1:00 pm

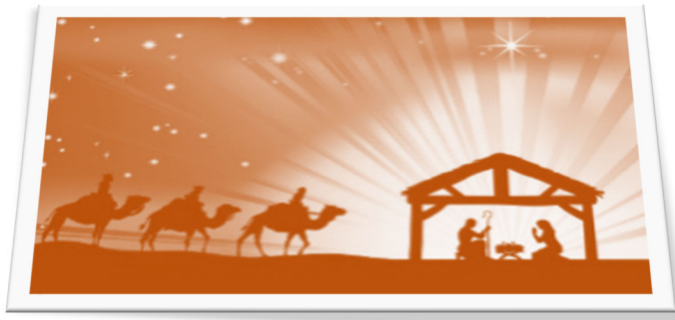
Tickets are \$25/per adult

\$13/per child (13-17 & college age)

Torrey-Gray Auditorium

820 N. LaSalle Blvd., Chicago, IL 60610

Sign-up sheet is in the foyer



First Baptist Church
Drive-thru “*Live Nativity*” Event
Friday, December 13
Saturday December 14
5:30 -8:30 pm

You are invited on Dec. 13 & 14, from 5:30 – 8:30 pm to come and drive thru our “Live Nativity” Event! We will be performing a still reenactment of the night Jesus was born! There will be a crèche featuring Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, angels, an innkeeper, shepherds, and the 3 kings! There will also be a live camel, donkey, and sheep. As you are driving thru you may tune your radio to station 103.9FM where you can listen to the simulcast of -

“THE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS”

We will also be having a canned food drop-off that we will be donating to We Care of Grundy County.

We hope you are able to come and share with us the biblical story of Jesus’ birth!

Ladies’ Christmas Breakfast & Gift Exchange



Saturday, December 14
10:00 am - 12:00 pm

All ladies are invited to a
Christmas Breakfast & Gift Exchange to be held at the church!
There will be a delicious breakfast, singing of Christmas songs, games,
all followed by a Christmas Devotion.
This will be a wonderful time of fellowship and laughter with each other!
You’re welcome to bring a dish to share, if you wish,
and a small gift to exchange (under \$15).
Come join us!

Christmas is such a busy time, and our spending easily gets out of control. Instead of a season of peace and goodwill, it becomes a season of exhaustion and resentment.

Of course Christmas shouldn't be this way - nor does it need to be.

There is a deeper solution to having a good Christmas - and that is to rediscover its true meaning. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, who came down from Heaven to save us from our sins.

May you see His glory this Christmas season!

"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped".

Matthew 2:10-11

The Christmas Story

Luke 2:1-20



In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. And they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace to men on whom
His favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Youth Christmas Program
Sunday, December 8
10:30 am



"Make Room for Jesus"



Practice Dates -
November 24 - 10:30 am
December 1 - 10:30 am

All youth may participate
We need angels and shepherds (will be non-speaking parts)

Youth in Mrs. Motter's and Mrs. Planeta's classes
will have speaking parts



Make Room (feat. Matt Maher, Casting Crowns)

*You can come as you are
But it may set you apart
When you make room in your heart
And trade your dreams for His glory
Make room in your heart
Make room in your heart*



Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Tuesday, December 24

7:00 pm



Please join us for a beautiful night of music, candlelight, scripture, the Birth of Jesus as written in the Bible, and a message from Pastor Steve Larson.

It is a wonderful evening for your family and friends to come together to experience and celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, it is a gift to give yourself.

“When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped”

Matthew 2:10-11





PLEASE JOIN US.....

Sunday Morning Worship Service - 8:00am

We offer a staffed Nursery

Sunday Morning Worship Service - 10:30 am

Sunday Morning Kid's Church (Pre-K and up)

during this Worship Service

We offer a staffed Nursery



Kid's Church

Every Sunday morning during the 10:30 am Worship Service

Meets in our Library ... Sue Cheng (ages 4 yrs to 1st grade), Kristi Larson (ages 2nd to 5th grade) and Lisa Vaksdal (sub). This class offers a Bible lesson, craft and snack for the kids during the worship service. It gives the parents a chance to listen to the message and also the kids to receive a message as well. If your kids are too young for this class, we have a staffed Nursery that you may take them to at the same time. Kids are brought back to their parents before the main worship service is concluded. Come check us out!

Adult Bible Study

Sunday 9:15 am

Meets in the Sanctuary.....Jeff & Claudette Swiggett

Looking forward to seeing you!



"Look to the LORD and His strength, seek His face always." 1 Chronicles 16:11

YOUTH SUNDAY SCHOOL

9:15 - 10:15 am

Pre-K thru 1st Grade ... Lisa Vaksdal

2nd thru 5th Grade ... Jen Goebel

Jr. High ... Mary Motter

High School ... Cathy Planeta



"Pray continually" 1 Thessalonians 5:17



OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD
Gift-filled Shoeboxes
October 6 – November 17

Praise the Lord for the opportunity to bring great joy and the Good News of Jesus Christ to children through gift-filled shoeboxes. Ask God to prepare their young hearts to respond to His love through these simple treasures.

We, as a church family, once again participated in filling shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse/Operation Christmas Child. This year we delivered **175** shoeboxes to the distribution center!

"The Lord is near to all who call upon Him." Psalm 145:18

For those
who celebrate
the wondrous
works of Christ,
in worship,
in service,
in mission.
Together, we remember.



Remember
the wondrous works
that God has done.

--1 Chronicles 16:12

*Retired Ministers & Missionaries Offering 2024
December 15, 22 and 29*



GOOD NEWS CLUB

Ages 5 – 12 years old

Every Thursday at Saratoga School

January 23, 2025 – April 17, 2025

2:45 – 4:00 pm

The Good News Club team is looking for helpers. We will be meeting at Saratoga School every Thursday from 2:45 – 4:00 pm, January 23, 2025 – April 17, 2025.

We have a....

- Bible Story
- Verse memory game
- Singing
- Missionary story

at each meeting and pray many children come to know Jesus.

If you have any questions, you may contact Kristi Larson at 815-370-2395.

Jesus welcomed the children who flocked around Him:

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14).

Their openness, their enthusiasm, their trust – all these delighted Jesus. A young child may not understand everything about God – but he or she can understand something. A young child understands love, and also understands what it means to obey someone. Don't ignore the children God brings across your path, but by your words and by your example tell them about Jesus.

“He called a little child and had him stand among them... and He said... “whoever humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:2-4



Prairie Singers



“The Works of Christmas”

This year marks Prairie Singers 36th Christmas concert series. We invite you to hear us at various locations. The Prairie Singers have selected carols that evoke memories of childhood and family gatherings, Mary and the Christ Child, and the angels, shepherds, and the wise men. Come and enjoy “The Works of Christmas” with the Singers.

Epworth Methodist Church, Ottawa
Sunday, December 1 at 2:00 pm

Prairie Creek Public Library, Dwight
Thursday, December 5 at 6:30 pm

Immaculate Conception Church, Morris
Saturday, December 7 at 7:00 pm

St. Patrick Catholic Church, Seneca
Sunday, December 8 at 2:00 pm

The Dwight Public Library concert is open to the public and free of charge, but reservations are required. Contact the library at 815-584-3061.

The Church concerts will have a free will offering.

