

December 29, 2017



NCFA CONNE~~X~~ION!

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Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!

January 21st, 2017



There will be a **congregational meeting/town hall meeting on January 21st**, when Session will present their plan for moving forward, including the 2018 budget.



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Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!

“Do Not Be Afraid”

Luke 2:1-14

Rev. Rebecca Longino

New Covenant Fellowship of Austin

December 24th, 2017: 4th Sunday of Advent

Luke 2:1-14

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

That angel sure picks an unusual crowd to announce the birth of the savior to.

You'd think the angel would go to the Temple in Jerusalem, to share this news with the religious leaders.

Or maybe to Rome where all of the important political leaders are found. But instead, that angel appears to that group of shepherds living in a field.

And, let's be honest, it probably wasn't even their field.

Back in that time, shepherds were not generally respectable people.

Others saw them as shady people who would let their flocks graze on other people's land.

They were scorned and outcast by the rest of society.

A modern day equivalent might be the people who are experiencing homelessness or just going through a rough season,

And hold up cardboard signs on the medians around town, asking for a money to help them get by.

While there are some who treat them with compassion and generosity, others look on with disgust,

Viewing these so-called pan-handlers as low lifes or freeloaders.

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The world is not generally kind to these folks.

That’s how shepherds were viewed back in the first century.

They were not embraced by the rest of society.

They were outcasts.

And so, on a quiet night, they are just minding their own business.

Keeping an eye on their sheep.

Trying to dodge the owners of the land they’ve camped out on so as to not get kicked off.

Perhaps they take turns getting a little shut-eye.

When out of nowhere this angel appears before them.

And Luke tells us the glory of the Lord shone around this angel.

In the dark of the night, this angel and glory of Lord shine brightly.

Well, naturally the shepherds are terrified.

Of course they’ve never seen anything like this before.

Very few people have actually seen the glory of the Lord, so these shepherds have no idea what is going on.

And then to make the situation even more terrifying, the angel speaks,

So this isn’t just some optical illusion they are seeing.

This heavenly creature is actually talking to them.

I wonder if the shepherds thought this was some representative from the Roman Empire,

Telling them to stop bumming off of people’s land and go find more respectable jobs.

Instead the angel says “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people”.

Frankly, I’m impressed the shepherds were able to hear a word the angel says,

They are somehow able to listen despite their tremendous fear.

The angel goes on to tell them the good news that the Messiah has arrived, the savior has been born.

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And they are instructed to head on into Bethlehem where they will find that baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

When these instructions are delivered, the angel is joined by a heavenly host, perhaps dozens more angels who begin to sing in celebration of this event.

Praising God for the birth of this child.

And just like that, the angels are gone.

The shepherds are left in that wide open field.

And despite the fear they felt just minutes before, they make their way toward Bethlehem to see this very special baby.

The news of the birth of Christ was enough for them to set aside their fear and trust that this good news is indeed good news.

When I think about these shepherds setting aside their fear and trusting the angel, I cannot help but think about A Charlie Brown Christmas.

I would venture to guess that most of us have seen this classic Christmas movie.

Perhaps you're like me and you have a tradition of watching each year.

The movie starts out with Charlie Brown, lamenting about how no one likes him.

How he just doesn't understand the joy of Christmas.

He trudges through the snow, being mocked by other children as he goes.

And approaches Lucy for advice, dropping a nickel into her money can.

Lucy tells him they need to figure out the source of his fears in order to find a solution.

They decide he has pantophobia, the fear of everything.

She tells him the cure for his melancholy is to get involved in something Christmas-y.

So she recruits him to direct their Christmas play.

Good ol' Lucy always has an agenda.

Charlie Brown hesitantly agrees and when he shows up to the auditorium,

The other children scoff at the idea of him directing their play.

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Good ol' Lucy always has an agenda.

Charlie Brown hesitantly agrees and when he shows up to the auditorium,

The other children scoff at the idea of him directing their play.

After all, he's been known to mess things up in the past.

They figured this would be no different.

Lucy helps get everyone in line and hands out the scripts, assigning parts.

Snoopy shows off his skills of making various animal noises as he's assigned to play all of the animals in the nativity scene.

Charlie Brown notices that there's a lack of spirit on stage,

so he sets out to find a Christmas tree to help liven the mood.

He returns with a sad little tree, which looks like nothing more than a twig with a few needles on it.

The other children make fun of him for it.

They mock him, saying he doesn't understand what Christmas is about.

Charlie Brown feels even more down than before.

But then, Linus steps up and says he knows what Christmas is really about.

Cuing the lights to dim, he recites his lines for the play, which come from Luke chapter 2.

He speaks about the shepherds in the field, and the angel telling them of the child that has been born.

When Linus gets to the line "Fear not! For behold, I bring tidings of great joy which will be to all people."

At the moment he says "Fear not!" Linus drops his security blanket.

This isn't just some slip up, an error on the part of the animators.

It's a rather profound moment where Linus lets go of that beloved security blanket,

the one he never goes anywhere without.

As he says those words the angel spoke, he lets go of his fear.

He releases the anxiety that usually has him bound.

Then he turns to Charlie Brown and says "that is what Christmas is all about."

Of course, Linus picks up his blanket as soon as his monologue is over.

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But, at the end of the cartoon, the children all gather around the beautifully refurbished Charlie Brown tree.

They sing a hymn and share a moment of recognizing the true meaning of Christmas.

And in that moment, Linus once again parts with his security blanket, when he tenderly wraps it around the base of the tree.

He symbolically lays his fears before God, allowing God to keep them.

And we don't see Linus pick up his blanket again in the movie.

This is such a remarkable illustration of how powerful those words from the angel are.

Do not be afraid.

These words are comforting enough for Linus to drop his security blanket,

and to trust in the good news of the message that Jesus has been born.

Do not be afraid.

These words are comforting enough for the shepherds to leave their flocks,

And to see this baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

Do not be afraid.

These words are comforting enough for us 2000 years later,

And we desperately need to hear these words, over and over.

Not just at Christmas when we read this story from Luke.

We need to hear these words in our broken and fearful world.

Our world which is filled with so much uncertainty, so much anxiety.

2017 seemed to be a year of heightened fear.

We experienced devastating natural disasters – more hurricanes and fires and other storms than are typical.

The results of the 2016 election has caused the divide in our nation to grow even more, making us fearful of our neighbors.

Fearful of what the future holds.

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When we hear this Christmas story from Luke chapter 2,
we can be assured that the birth of Jesus is an event bigger than any fear
we have.

Whether we fear that no one likes us, as Charlie Brown fears.

Whether we fear what tomorrow may bring.

Whether we fear what’s happening in the world today.

All of these fears are taken on by Christ our Lord.

The one who comes to offer the gift of releasing fear.

Of taking away our anxieties and reassuring us that we are in his care.

Reassuring us that God is with us always.

As Linus says at the end of his monologue, this is what Christmas is all
about.

It’s all about this radical story of a baby born into unusual circumstances,

And having his birth announced to an unusual crowd,

Bringing all of the comfort the world can know in those words “Do not be
afraid.”

The birth of Jesus invites us to drop those security blankets, and instead
cling to him.

In Christ, we find a deep peace that,

no matter what is happening in the world,

we can be confident that love is stronger than hate,

that hope is more resilient than fear and despair,

and that light can and will and does break through the darkness.

Take heart. Have courage. Do not be afraid.

Alleluia, Amen!

Jason Soroski’s article at <http://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/christmas-and-advent/just-drop-the-blanket-the-moment-you-never-noticed-in-a-charlie-brown-christmas.html> was helpful in crafting this sermon.

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2017 Matching Grant




**I CAN'T
KEEP CALM**
We Are
**SO CLOSE TO
OUR GOAL!!**

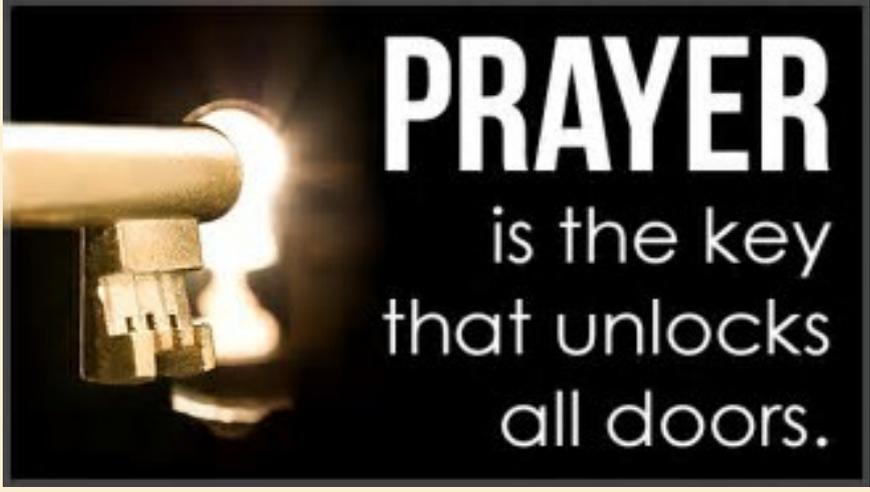


Matching Grant to Date:	\$ 12,123.00
Leadership Pledges	\$ 200.00
Balance Due to Meet \$15,000 Match	\$ 2,677.00



Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!

PRAYER AND PRAISE



- ⇒ Continued praise to God for Becca's wonderful, comforting sermons through this Advent Season.
- ⇒ Traveling mercies for all of our families, relatives, and friends during this season, including:
- ⇒ Trish's family on way to/from Homer, LA where they will reconnect with family (Trish is the eldest sibling) and enjoy son Kirk's plans to see George's resting place together;
- ⇒ Nikkie's and Vi's travels to Houston with thanksgiving for family celebrations.
- ⇒ Danita's family coming together.
- ⇒ George's relatives gathering in Huntsville, AL and prayers for the "Hatfield-McCoy" tendencies of the families. Thanksgiving for the life of George's uncle, and prayers of comfort for his mother as she grieves his death.
- ⇒ Praise the Lord that Fortune and Placid are able to be home for the holidays and can worship with us, their church family, before returning to their studies.
- ⇒ Praise that Mary Ann has been able to join in worship with us during Advent and that she has been accepted into the Master's program at the University of Houston, a three-year course of study. Thanksgiving for the message of today's sermon, "Do Not Be Afraid," reminding us that God will come through for us so that we need not walk in fear. Prayers for Mary Ann's family.
- ⇒ Prayers for those affected by recent AT&T layoffs.
- ⇒ Prayers for Doris's coworker who teaches physical education and is recovering from knee surgery, and now faces removal of a throat polyp. Lift up Doris as she was invited to sit in on interviews for a new resource teacher. Praise for a grandson's signing a letter of intent to go to TCU on a 5-year football scholarship and for granddaughter T'Ahna's upcoming graduation and plans to attend A&M.
- ⇒ Thanksgiving for Ashley's grandfather's birthday and for the life of her Oma who would have celebrated her 97th birthday.

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NCFA CONNEXION!

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N
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F
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SUNDAY MORNINGS

NCFA SUNDAY WORSHIP

Sunday, December 31st

Rev. Rebecca Weaver-Longino

Interim Session Moderator-Preaching



NCFA SUNDAY WORSHIP AT 10:15am

We would love to have you and your family come share in the **CELEBRATION OF THE GOOD NEWS!**

We are worshipping in the Fellowship Hall of Genesis Presbyterian Church on the Wilshire Campus starting at 10:15 a.m.

New Covenant Fellowship of Austin PC(U.S.A.) is a racially diverse community informed by the Bible, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and motivated to share God's love with all. In response to God's love, we are called to equip disciples to faithfully serve, to encourage seekers to joyfully commit, and to implore all to worship our Lord, as we love our neighbors, grow in grace, and live by faith.

JOIN US IN THE CELEBRATION OF THE GOOD NEWS

Real Church...
Real People...
Real Simple...

Real Church...
Real People...
Real Simple...

Being Real, Relevant, and Racially Diverse!



DECEMBER

- 12-1 Favour Unegbu
- 12-2 Connie Jones
Sam Okyere-Mireku
- 12-3 Cathy Angell
- 12-9 William Moreno
- 12-12 Destiny Edwards
- 12-15 Pat Nemir
- 12-16 Elizabeth Smith
- 12-22 Chuck Coffman
- 12-22 Christian Mojica
- 12-24 Sherrena Lee
- 12-28 Randy Mojica

Session Members

- *Rev. Rebecca Longino
Interim Session Moderator
- *Elder Nikkie Shubitz
Clerk of Session
- * Elder Cathy Angell
Administration & Personnel
- * Elder Zaira Amado
Buildings & Grounds
- *Elder Randy Mojica
Children and Youth
- *Elder George Washington IV
Discipleship & Men's/Women's Ministry
- *Elder Mary Jo Mojica
Finance & Stewardship
- *
Congregational Life/
Lay Ministry
- *Elder Kimberly Hall
Missions/Evangelism
- *Elder Viola Lee
Worship & Membership

Deacons

- Ulysses Cox
- Rey Mojica
- Ashley Phillips
- Scott Phillips
- Roxann Vallejo

DECEMBER 2017-

JANUARY 2018

- 31st 1st Sunday after Christmas
9:30am Praise Team Rehearsal
10:15am Worship at Wilshire Blvd.
Rev. Rebecca Longino, Preaching
Sunday School—Nursery & Ages 3-5
(Room. 1A & 1B);
10:45am Children & Junior/Senior High
(Room 8-Narnia)
- 1st
Happy New Year-Office will be closed.
- 3rd 5:30pm Worship Ministry Meeting
6:30pm Fellowship Dinner
7:00pm Bible Study
- 7th 2nd Sunday after Christmas
9:30am Praise Team Rehearsal
10:15am Worship at Wilshire Blvd.
Rev. Al Krummenacher, preaching
Sunday School—Nursery & Ages
3-5 (Room. 1);
10:45am Elementary – Grades 1-5
(Room 8)
10:45am Junior/Senior High (Room 5)