

THE AGAPIAN

December 2013 — Agape Church of the Brethren

Persistent Hopefulness!

Advent and Christmas remind us each year of the hope of a better world. Heaven knows we need it! Our world is typically filled with enough discouraging news to sufficiently depress every breathing soul on the planet. But images from the Christmas Story annually raise in our minds the possibility of something different from the world's normal round of distresses. Maybe it's because the good news of the Christmas Story, itself, includes vast uncertainties and threats in its plot that were all transcended.

Joseph and Mary must travel to Bethlehem and take lodging in a stable at the most inconvenient moment imaginable. They must do this because of an absolute governmental decree, with no exceptions included for reasons of health or safety. It brings to mind the sense of powerlessness in the face of larger forces that we all fear sometimes. We know that there are steamrollers in our world that could flatten us all, should we be so unfortunate as to get in their way: exercises in eminent domain, terrorist attacks, frivolous lawsuits, muggers, economic downturns, foreclosures, corporate collapses, etc. The list of scary things could go on and on. It's probably best that we not think about it too much.

Mary and Joseph don't appear to have thought about it too much. They simply gathered up what they needed, saddled the donkey, and headed off for Bethlehem; and

then afterwards, for Egypt to avoid yet another insane threat. Matthew is so matter of fact in his report of the latter. Speaking of Joseph he wrote, "he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod," (Matthew 2:14, NIV).

The Holy Family travels through this story of governmental mandates and tyrannical cruelty with a resignation to their fate and a faith in the providential hand of God that is utterly remarkable. In spite of official tyranny, physical distress, and separation from family and home, Mary and Joseph press on faithfully through it all with their young son, Jesus; and eventually arrive home to resume their hopeful lives in the land the Lord had given to them.

Perhaps the thought occurs to us, if they could survive their uncertainties, maybe we can survive ours, too. Thus the hopefulness that returns in this season each year! Peace on earth, good will among men and women may seem far distant much of the time, but according to the Christmas Story, it is our hope for the future.



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Christmas Eve

Service



The service begins at 7 P.M. with a gathering and cookie time at 6:30. This year's Christmas Eve Service features the Agape children, as they help tell the story of the first Christmas. They will also bless us with a song on the melody bells, and add their art work to the Christmas tree. As the congregation has come to expect, there will be plenty of beautiful music by the choir and soloists, as well as a meditation by Pastor Copp. We will conclude the evening with our traditional candle lighting service, circumambulating our sanctuary with the warmth of candles' glow and strains of "Silent Night." Please "Come, All Ye Faithful," invite family and friends, and be blessed!

A Christmas Greeting

We wish you a fresh experience of Christmas this year; with a satisfying mix of the old and the new. Whatever your circumstances, we trust that your hopes remain alive within you, because of the One In Whom You Have Placed Your Hope. Blessings in Christ! Pastor Jeff & Connie

Caramel Apples & Buckeyes

A group of Agapians are making caramel-chocolate apples again this year, organized by the Women's Fellowship! On Saturday, **Dec. 7th**, those interested will be making the apples for personal gifts and to sell at the Cookie Walk. In addition, we are making extra buckeyes for the Cookie Walk because they are so popular! If you find yourself unable to make cookies this year, this is a perfect opportunity to make a donation for supplies. Sign up is in the narthex, more details to come. See Vicki Welch if you have any questions or want to make a donation.

Annual Cookie Walk

Our annual Cookie Walk & Craft Sale, sponsored by Women's Fellowship, is scheduled for **Dec. 14th**. There is a sign up available in the narthex. Not only do we need volunteers to make cookies to sell for **Women's Fellowship's biggest fundraiser**, but extra help at the event is always welcome. See Diana S. for details.

Caroling Party!

Spread joy to shut-ins and nursing home residents by adding your voice and joining fellow Agapians on **Sunday, Dec. 15** for the annual caroling party. We'll...

- * gather for a quick lunch planned by Women's Fellowship right after worship service. Hot turkey sandwiches and hot chocolate will be provided; please bring a side dish to share.
- * organize and carpool as groups to a number of homes and nursing homes designated by the deacons to sing for those who will appreciate our visit and Christmas music.
- * deliver goodie bags packed by the nurture commission elves full of cookies from the cookie walk, candy, fruit, individually packaged snacks, or whatever other little items you contribute.

This is a joint effort of the three groups mentioned above; any questions or suggestions for people to visit should go to Becky M., Lynn S., or Kara M.

HELP THE FOOD BANK

Food Bank is in need of the following items:

Cereal, saltine crackers, hamburger helpers, dish soap, bar soap, evaporated milk, toilet paper, shampoo, chicken and dumplings, beef stew, dried beans, rice, canned fruit, tuna, and mac and cheese.

When you shop for Christmas presents, remember to purchase some of these needed items for the food bank. It would be greatly appreciated!

Agape Volunteer Secretary's Meeting

Agape's wonderful volunteer secretaries (and their families) are invited to a carry-in meal and meeting in the church fellowship hall after worship service on December 8. We will discuss duties, any suggested changes, and just check in to see how everyone's doing. **Please RSVP to Kendra M. by Dec. 1st with what you will bring and how many people are coming.**

Offering Envelopes

Bette S. will deliver the offering envelopes on Dec. 29th. Let her know if you would like some!

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

December begins the winter quarter for the children and youth curriculum, and the study "Meet Jesus the Messiah: Stories from John" will usher in the Advent season leading us to Christmas. Lynn Shipe will teach the children's class, and helpers will be needed. **Sign up to help on the announcement board.** Following Christmas and through January and February, a teacher and helper will be needed, so consider your gifts and volunteer.

Becky Morris and Peg Robison will share the youth Sunday School class teaching through the winter quarter. Beth Green will lead the Sonshine Room class continuing the study of "Having a Mary Spirit," Chuck Morris is leading the left-side class in a study of the book, "Amish Peace," and the Sophomore class meets in the overflow room studying the book "Vertical Church."

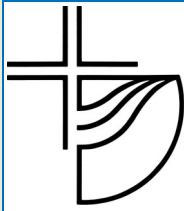
What are you missing by not being part of a Sunday School class?
That which you gain will be far greater than an hour of sleep lost.

Think about it and join us at 9:00 am every Sunday morning!



Nurture Group News

- * The Crafty Group will be meeting at Mary Ebert's home on the second Tuesday of every month.
- * The Daytime Group will meet at the church at 10:00 on Dec. 18 this month, and resume its normal schedule of meeting the fourth Wednesday of every month in January. Marilu Brunson is the contact person.
- * Since the Friday Night Nurture Groups aren't currently in session, we would encourage Agapians to share the spirit of the season by inviting others over during December to visit, eat, and enjoy being together. Many families would enjoy getting to know you, so if you find an open date, spread the word and see what happens.



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Continuing the Word of Jesus—Peacefully. Simply. Together.

Senior Moments

The Agape Senior Moments group meets on the **1st Wednesday** of the month at noon. Join the Agape Senior Moments and bring a dish to share!



Witness Commission Notes:

Our food bank, North Christian, is in need of donations to help purchase turkeys for Thanksgiving and hams for Christmas. There has been such a need this year that the fund the food bank usually pulls from is unable to support the buying of Turkeys now and Hams later. If you could donate it would be appreciated. Please make your check to Agape with notation to go to the food bank. If you prefer they will take the actual turkey, however you will need to delivery the turkey to them. Please contact Ron or Becky if you wish to do this.

An Advent/mission offering for the Church of the Brethren will be held Dec. 8. This is a wonderful way for you to give to the outreach programs of the Greater Church. There will be a flyer for you to read more about the wonderful projects that this offering will support.