

THE TOWER

DECEMBER 2013

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A NOTE FROM THE MINISTER

“Christmas Firsts”



As we have entered the season of Advent in preparation for Christmas, the celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, it is interesting to note when many of our Christian traditions first appeared.

Christmas caroling came into popularity during the 1500s in England. It's still called “wassailing” in some circles, which comes from the old Norse *ves heill* or “good health.” The earliest English collection of these songs wishing good health for the holidays was published in 1521.

Christmas as a holiday has been celebrated for centuries, but in the United States it wasn't an official holiday with workers allowed a day off until 1836 when Alabama became the first state to recognize Christmas. The last state to declare Christmas a holiday was Oklahoma in 1907. Amazingly this was 37 years after President Ulysses S. Grant declared Christmas to be a federal holiday on June 26, 1870! Massachusetts declared Christmas a state holiday in 1856.

The first Christmas card for mass distribution was created on December 9, 1842, in England. Its creator was William Egley, Jr., a 16-year-old youth! His 3.5-inch by 5.5-inch card, preserved in the British Museum, depicts four holiday scenes and a “Merry Christmas and Happy New Year” greeting with blanks after the word “To” on the top and “From” at the bottom.

The first White House Christmas tree, now an annual media event, was decorated by President Franklin Pierce in 1853.

Santa Claus didn't always ride on a sleigh pulled by reindeer. This depiction is only 150 years old. In the January 3, 1863, edition of *Harper's Weekly*, a cartoon by Thomas Nast first represented Kris Kringle riding on the reindeer-driven sleigh. Titled “Santa Claus in Camp,” it shows Santa delivering presents to soldiers during the Civil War.

For years people decorated the Christmas tree with candles. This of course was a major fire hazard, and so, the tree would need to be carefully watched at all times to

make sure it did not burst into flames. This changed in 1895, thanks to American Ralph E. Morris. Following Thomas Edison's invention of the light bulb, Morris concocted the idea of placing these newfangled light bulbs, instead of candles, on Christmas trees.

Every year the U. S. Post Office issues a wide variety of postage stamps designed to celebrate Christmas. This was not always the case. The first postage stamp to commemorate Christmas was not minted in this country, but rather, in Austria in 1937. This country did not feature a Christmas stamp until 1962. It was a 4-cent stamp that featured a Christmas wreath and two candles.

The first television broadcast of a nation's leader wishing their subjects a Merry Christmas was on December 25, 1957. It was delivered by Queen Elizabeth, the British monarch. The British Broadcasting Corporation has continued to televise the greeting every year since. The Communist Eastern European nations were not allowed freely to celebrate Christmas until 1989, the year the Berlin Wall was toppled. On Christmas Day that year, church masses were broadcast on television in those countries for the first time.

The first Christmas candy cane originated in Germany about 250 years ago. They were initially only white sugar sticks. One tradition says that a church choir master wanted to give children something to eat during the long Christmas service to keep them quiet, and so, he invented the candy cane. The "J" shape would remind the children of Jesus, its white color representing Jesus's purity. Turned upside down, the candy cane resembled a shepherd's crook to remind the children of the shepherds that visited the baby Jesus at the first Christmas. Around 1900 red stripes were added to the candy cane. These would represent the blood shed by Jesus on the cross. Also about that time peppermint or wintergreen flavor was added. These came to represent the hyssop plant mentioned in the Bible for purifying, possessing a faint minty smell.

Most of us share these Christmas traditions, some of which are centuries old. Let us hold on to them in our celebration of the birth of Jesus. And let us commit to attending the various services offered this month (listed elsewhere in this edition of the *Tower*) that will enrich our experience and wonder of Christmas.

Blessings in Christ,

Pastor Gary



TO REVEREND DR. GARY SHAHINIAN AND PARK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

We greatly appreciate the food store gift cards. They helped our family through the holiday. We have been disabled and out of work this year and it has been hard to feed the family and pay bills. We are sincerely grateful. Thank you and the church for your help. We wish you well and happy holidays.

With sincere gratitude and warmest thanks,
A Recipient Family of Thanksgiving Gift Cards

Thank you church members and friends for your continuous support to the Park Church Thanksgiving Project. Gift Cards from Shaw's Supermarket were purchased for three families consisting of eight adults. Once again your generosity has helped lessen the burden of these families at this time of year.

Thank you all!!
Ann Lavalley and Chris Wilson
(and thank you Ann and Chris for once again coordinating this valuable ministry of our church!)

THANK YOU PARK CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

From the Cape to the Berkshires, from Lawrence to New Bedford, and so many places in-between, the Massachusetts Council of Churches builds bridges across the divided church. We believe that the bridges that connect us are stronger than the gaps in-between. . . . We build bridges across, and within, denominations. Ecumenical delegations from the Massachusetts Council of Churches were present at the Boston Marathon Bombing prayer service with President Obama and Governor Patrick, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem's visit, a Greek Orthodox theological conference, and each of the denominational annual meetings. Massachusetts Council of Churches President Bishop Gayle Harris journeyed from Boston to bring greetings to the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, reminding us that in Christ there is no East or West. . . . We thank you for your prayers, your connections, and your financial support.

Advent Blessings from the Massachusetts Council of Churches,
The Reverend Laura Everett, Executive Director



Our annual Christmas Cantata will take place on Sunday, December 15, during our 10:00am worship service in Davis Chapel. Our Choir Director David Rose and devoted choir members are busy preparing a beautiful morning of music for all.



The Sunday School will have a visit from Santa following the morning worship service of Sunday, December 22. The whole church family is invited to the Lee Room for "Lunch With Santa," a gift to our Church Family from your children! One is never too old to enjoy a visit from Santa! *You better watch out . . . you better not pout . . .*



**BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE WILL BE ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19,
AT 7:00 PM IN DAVIS CHAPEL**

Take an hour out of your busy schedule for a time of peace and reflection, especially for those who are facing sadness, but for everyone who is frazzled during the hectic pace of this holiday season. You will have an opportunity to light a candle and offer a prayer, to meditate on and experience the message of Christmas, and to partake of Holy Communion.



Christmas Eve
SERVICE

Our Christmas Eve Service this year will be at 11:00pm in Davis Chapel. It will be our traditional Candlelight Service with the singing of “Silent Night” at midnight.



*Sunday
School
Program*

Our Sunday School will present their Christmas gift to the congregation on Sunday, December 22, during our worship service at 10:00am in Davis Chapel.

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**MOVIE MATINEE ON DECEMBER 15
WILL FEATURE A CHRISTMAS EPISODE
OF *TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL***

“It Came upon a Midnight Clear” presents Wayne (Randy Travis) venturing out on a snowy Christmas Eve and getting caught in a dangerous blizzard. His younger brother Joey is waiting anxiously at home when he receives a welcome visit from Monica (Roma Downey). The tale of Mark Twain and an unexpected surprise reveal the true gift of Christmas. Don’t forget to bring your brown bag lunch. We meet in the Roy Room following the worship service. The program begins at 11:30am. The episode is 47 minutes.

THE CHILDREN'S TOWER

December 2013

"The holy one to be born
will be called the
Son of God."

Luke 1:35, NIV



Dear Children,

One of the songs we will be singing in the Christmas Pageant that we will be gifting to our Park Church Family on December 22 during morning worship is truly a favorite of mine.

There are so many beautiful Christmas carols! "Joy To The World," "Silent Night, Holy Night," "O Come, All Ye Faithful," "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," "The First Noel," "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," "We Three Kings of Orient Are," "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Oh, so many beautiful songs which fill our minds and hearts as we prepare to celebrate Christmas! Oh, the joy of Christmas and all it brings with its arrival!

First the season of Advent . . . a time of preparation of our hearts. We hover over the Advent calendar daily opening the little numbers of each of the 25 little "boxes" to read the scripture that prepares us for the last little flap to be opened on December 25. And then we will have arrived! Christmas will be here! Joy to the World! Hark, the Herald Angels Sing . . . glory to the newborn king! Oh, wait! I almost forgot to tell you what is my FAVORITE song. It is the song that describes the glorious setting for the birth of a KING! My favorite song, you ask? Of course you must have guessed by now! What other song could tell the story so well? What other song could hold all the joy of all the other Christmas carols all rolled up into one? Of course you know it! "*Away in a Manger*," the song that tells the Christmas story in only a few short verses.

A baby who has no crib for a bed. A baby whose only covering is the sky above his head. A little baby asleep on the hay. Stiff and scratchy hay. Hay in a manger . . . a box for animal feed! Animals breathing over him providing his only warmth. How fitting for a KING!! Yes, fitting for "the King" who would save the world. Lowly himself so He loves the lowliest. Cold so He could warm the hearts of all peoples who believe. Born in a manger so that He promises to stay by our cradles of life till morning is nigh.

The little LORD Jesus, asleep on the hay. The holy one. The Son of God!

Wishing you the love and joyful promise of Christmas . . . Miss Linda



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