



# First Mennonite Church

## Midweek E-Newsletter

December 15, 2021

### From Pastor Tom

#### Grieving during the Holidays

Eighty-three years ago, on December 10, my grandfather H. B. Fast passed away unexpectedly. My mother Bertha Fast (Harder) was twenty-four at the time. Although she was well on her way into independent adulthood and had established a career as an elementary school teacher, her dad's death hit her hard. He was only fifty-one. I remember her telling me how difficult it was to celebrate Christmas that year. And while my mom always went to great lengths to make the Advent-Christmas season special every year- decorating our house, playing Christmas music, and creating a mood of anticipation and excitement as December 25 approached- she never failed to grieve her beloved papa's death each year on December 10.

Grieving amidst the Christmas holiday is a recurring reality for many of us, particularly if a loved one died in the weeks just prior to December 25. It's as if the expected joy of the Christmas season only makes the loss that much more painful and palpable, and as the years go on, impossible to forget. The grief may ease and lose its sharpness, but it is nevertheless forever encased by this season that is supposed to be so happy.

Amidst all the decorations and sappy songs and television commercials feverishly promoting gift giving (make that gift purchasing), there is something very honest about grieving during the holiday season, and indeed true to the Scriptural story on which Christmas is based. It is a story having a background of suffering and oppression. The "enrollment" or "registration" mentioned repeatedly in Luke 2:1-7 was nothing other than an oppressive taxation of the Palestinian people by the Roman Empire. The angelic announcement and shepherd pilgrimage to see the baby didn't change the fact that Mary had had to place the new-born baby in a manger intended for animals, and that as soon as the angels' songs faded, the hard work of raising that child in those times began. Even the magi's celebrated appearance a few years later (but almost always recounted as part of the Christmas story) has in its immediate backstory the horrific slaughter by King Herod of all baby boys two and under, forcing Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus to flee to Egypt as refugees.

Let's face it. The "joy" of Christmas, and of the ultimately good news of Jesus' birth, only becomes good news in retrospect, and even then, only amidst the painful realities of our lives in the present. Those of us who grieve during the holidays may very well have a better understanding of the Christmas story than those who don't. The world was not yet as God intended it, and thirty-some difficult years and a painful crucifixion later, and now some two thousand years after that, still isn't. Because of that birth and that crucifixion, a joyous outcome is guaranteed. But it is not yet here. So this Christmas season, as with every other, let us again tell the stories, share the grief, and celebrate the ultimate goodness of God.

## Among Our Friends and In Our Prayers

- ☞ **Let us remember all those who are grieving at this time**, especially those for whom this will be the first Christmas without a loved one.
- ☞ **Let us continue to pray for the families of Janice Goertz and Lee Albrecht**, as they face the recent loss and absence of their loved ones. May reminders of joy break through their sadness.

## Upcoming Events

- ☞ **Susan Mayo (cellist for the Wichita Symphony Orchestra), and Hillsboro locals, Bob Delk (guitar) and Steve Hanneman (keyboard and trumpet) will be playing a variety of seasonal, big band and country swing tunes** at the Shari Flaming Center for the Arts on the Tabor College campus: tomorrow, Thursday, December 16, 6:30-8:30.
- ☞ **Have yourself a honkin' good holiday, December 17 from 4-6 p.m.!** MCC is thrilled to host this drive-thru event again this year. Order your charcuterie box(es) today to enjoy in the comfort of your home, spread Christmas joy and order extra to give as gifts! Suggested donation per box is \$25. We're also collecting items for [MCC hygiene kits](#) at this event. **Place your order by 5 p.m. Thursday, December 9.** [Details and order form are on mcc.org.](#) Questions? Please call 316.283.2720.
- ☞ **Camp Mennoscah Christmas Gathering** is Dec. 18 at 2:30 p.m.! Join us in the Dining Hall at Camp Mennoscah for afternoon fun—bring games to play indoors or out. Camp will provide popcorn and generic pop. (Masks recommended and encouraged for inside activities.)
- ☞ **Visit Ebenfeld's Live Nativity**, December 18 & 19, 6-8 p.m. Drive through and listen to the story of Jesus on your radio, 1498 Kanza Rd.
- ☞ **Immerse yourself into the Christmas message with music and song Sunday December 19 at 4 p.m. Hopeful Blues is honored to host Doxology Ensemble**, a 12-voice male ensemble from the Anabaptist community near Hutchinson. Jointly, they will present a concert of sacred music, joining two unique ensembles for an afternoon of Christmas music. Hopeful Blues, an eclectic instrumental group based in Hope Mennonite Church in Wichita performs a variety of sacred instrumental music from old world to contemporary. Doxology Ensemble sings Acapella choral arrangements, both classic and modern. The Christmas repertoire includes arrangements of traditional carols, rousing spirituals, and soaring choral settings of scripture. After a two-year hiatus, we are excited to be rehearsing again and are looking forward to sharing the joy of the Incarnation through song. The concert will be held at Hope Mennonite church, 868 N Maize Road, Wichita KS. Admission is free, and donations are welcomed.

## Other Announcements

- ☞ **Poinsettias:** You are invited to share poinsettias for Advent! Please place plants in the Fellowship Hall south window area. Plants can be taken home after the December 24 Christmas Eve Service. Thank you!

- ☞ **'TIS THE SEASON FOR ANNUAL REPORTS! TODAY** is the deadline for your annual reports to be submitted to the church office. Thank you for your hard work throughout the year, committee and council members!
- ☞ **The advent wreath that we are using at FMC this advent season was made by Roger Ryder.** In honor of his wonderful craftsmanship, let us all remember his contributions to the Hillsboro community. Please remember his family in your prayers this Christmas season.
- ☞ **Please take a moment to read a note from the family of Jan Goertz,** posted on the hall bulletin board.
- ☞ **Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) is monitoring the damage from the string of deadly tornadoes which moved through areas of the Midwest and parts of the South over the weekend.** We extend our condolences to those who have lost loved ones and we offer prayers of support for the survivors. We have several MDS Early Response Teams investigating several of the tornado sites to help determine how and where MDS will respond. Many of our partners via the National Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) which specialize in search and rescue, damage assessment and cleanup are already responding. Together with our NVOAD partners and local officials we will determine when and where volunteers will be needed most. If you are interested in being added to a volunteer waitlist, please include your name, address and email address and send to: [volunteer@mds.org](mailto:volunteer@mds.org). If you wish to donate to the MDS response, you may do so on our website. [Please click here.](#)
- ☞ **The MCC Comforter Blitz Committee is looking for additional committee members!** Would you be interested in assisting the making of comforters for Mennonite Central Committee, and helping to plan the annual three-day comforter making event in Yoder, Kansas? If so, we would love your skills and your voice! If interested, please reach out to Committee Chair, Kara Klingenberg at [k.klingenberg@hotmail.com](mailto:k.klingenberg@hotmail.com) or call her at 620-983-9003 for more information. We are currently looking for a treasurer, advertising help, and anyone else who is interested in helping.

## Verse of the Week

“The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’”–Luke 1:30-33 (NRSV)