



# First Reformed Church of Nyack

Nyack's Hometown Church  
Celebrating 177 years of  
service

January/February 2016

## Pastoral Reflections

The birth of Christmas Day is an interesting thing. There's little to no evidence that the early church celebrated Christmas. Easter, yes but, Christmas, not really. It wasn't until about 200 ACE that the great African Christian theologian, Clement of Alexandria, mentions a date for the birth of Jesus. And, it wasn't until the 4<sup>th</sup> century that Pope Julius I declared December 25<sup>th</sup> Christmas Day.

Christmas is a type of Little Easter. And Easter is a type of Larger Christmas. Because in the Christian faith, both days celebrate a journey to new life.

What I want to emphasize here is that from "in the beginning" the homo species – even before modern humans – have been journeying, looking to the stars, seeking meaning in mystery and the unknown. From the birth of modern humans who journeyed and walked out of Africa across continents some 50,000 to 100,000 years ago to Syrian refugees who are journeying across countries and continents to immigrants who have historically come into the US, this journey for new life is primal.

The journey of people seeking new life trying to leave behind death, and pain and suffering in an existence that seems to be filled with death, pain and suffering is as old as the story of Adam and Eve trying to find meaning in their lives, trying to work through their relationship, trying to do the right thing, as best they can with the information they had - and sometimes - like all of us, they messed up.

Tonight we read 9 lessons from the Hebrew Scriptures to the Christian Scriptures, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from the Torah to the Gospels. And so from the 1<sup>st</sup> lesson to the 9<sup>th</sup> lesson what we hear are the stories, the images, and the religious language that paints a picture of the journey of life.

And in light of this great human narrative, perhaps the greatest change for us to consider tonight, perhaps the greatest evolution, perhaps the greatest and most important death and new life story from last year to this year is simply the one within ourselves.

*Continued on page 2*





## Pastoral Reflections continued...

What is my story saying today? What chapter is being written? Is this a difficult section? Is it happy, sad, maddening, confusing, glorious? How might this unfolding narrative be edited toward the good?

My friends, all of us have struggles. But ours is a religion of good news. The good news of Christmas is that Jesus provides us a light – a way of peace and hope in a life and world that is often filled with pain and misery.

And it's not a light of judgment, but a simple candle of hope and love that helps us in those painful dark nights of the soul. And while we may keep the details quietly in our hearts, it is one thing with which we can all identify. Life is hard. We're doing the best we can.

Today we are invited to reflect on our own journeys. And to weave the stories of our individual journeys within this Great overarching Human Story which we read today through the 9 lessons. Tonight we read the Great Narrative of the journey of Mary and Joseph trying to find a safe place to birth new life. The life of Jesus reflects this hope, this possibility, this new life. From beginning to end, from the 1st lesson to the last lesson, from birth to death, Christmas reminds us that there is hope and possibility for new life in this human journey.

Christmas is not an event as much as it is an ideal and evolving reality which invites us, challenges us, encourages us on our journey to birth love and hope and communion and possibilities. The stars have al-

ways guided humans on their journeys. The Christmas message celebrates this star that is beyond our reach but guides us on our journey in this darkness and pain and enlightens our path to show us the way forward to that which is Christlike.

We are the wise men and women on a pilgrimage in search of a truth and love and new life. And the way of Jesus enlightens our path. And while Christmas day will come and go, the heart of Christmas is not an event but an evolving spiritual and ethical ideal toward more openness to others, more light into our darkness, greater love in our relationships, and deeper meaning in this mystery of life.

Christmas is the ideal of birthing the love of God. An ideal that doesn't have a date, but rather is a life-long evolving reality to what is good.

Sometimes we're on the right path; sometimes we're not. Sometimes the chapters in our lives are fun to read. And sometimes we weep as we turn the pages. But like the star that guided the wise men, the way of Jesus is one of forgiveness, of healing, of encouragement, of hope, of possibilities, an invitation to a more enlightened path.

Let us pray and hope for more enlightened paths.  
Merry Christmas.

*This pastoral reflection was taken and edited from the Christmas Eve sermon based on the traditional Nine Lessons read and delivered by Fernando Arzola Jr. on December 24, 2015.*

### GIVING



Support First Reformed Church through service, prayer, and/or giving. The church website is set up for members and friends to make online donations through PayPal: [www.nyackreformed.org/giving](http://www.nyackreformed.org/giving)



## Sharing Our Blessings

By Carol Russell

The Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays are times when we reflect on our rich blessings. They also provide an opportunity to let God's love for each one of us prompt us to reach out to others. On the day before Thanksgiving, volunteers from our church, Soup Angels, and other friends served a lovely turkey dinner to the clients of the Nyack Consultation Center. The feast, supplied by Soup Angels, was served by loving volunteers, while our own Jim Rensink provided wonderful live music. Guests were offered extra servings to take home, and all, guests and servers alike, left feeling full of God's love. During Christmas week, our congregation provided home baked cookies and hot chocolate for the clients. These friends of our church also took home gift bags containing full size toiletries, a warm hat and gloves and some candy, of course. Thanks to all who contributed items and funds to make this project possible.



## Operation Christmas Child

Thanks to all who contributed items and filled boxes for our annual Operation Christmas Child collection! With your donations, about 48 shoeboxes were collected. We express our thanks to the Ambassador Girl Scout Troop 40608 who came on November 8 and assembled all the boxes, getting them ready to be sent to children all over the world.





## SUNDAY SCHOOL

By Bonnie Williams

The 91st Christmas Pageant, dedicated to beloved Kay Ogden (one of the first cherubs) was a wonderful blessing to the church.



### BACKSTAGE AT THE PAGEANT





## ASH WEDNESDAY EVENING SERVICE

Wednesday, March 10 ~ 7:00pm



## ST. PATRICK'S DAY BREAKFAST

Sunday, March 13 ~ 9:30am



Green pancakes and kielbasa await you for this festive annual gathering.

## MAUNDY/HOLY THURSDAY EVENING SERVICE

Thursday, March 24 – 7:00pm



## EASTER SUNDAY

Sunday, March 27 – 7:00am (Sunrise Service, Nyack Beach)

Sunday, March 27 – 10:30am (Sanctuary)





## Nyack's Hometown Church

### First Reformed Church of Nyack

**Church Location**

18 South Broadway  
Nyack, NY 10960

**Mailing Address**

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**Office Manager/Newsletter Editor**

Sarah Kotecha

**Music Director**

James Rensink

**Children's Sunday School Coordinator**

Bonnie Williams

**CONSISTORY****Elders**

Skip Russell

Charles Travers (VP)

**Deacons**

Arlene Keiser

Katherine Rife (Clerk)

Paul Wanamaker

*Affiliated with  
The Reformed Church in America*



### Calendar of Upcoming Events: Don't Miss Out!

**Sunday, January 17, 10:30am:** Guest speaker, Peter James.

**Sunday, March 13, 9:30am:** Annual St. Patrick's Day breakfast.

**Sunday, March 20, 10:30am:** Palm Sunday worship service. Journey to Jerusalem in Children's Sunday School hour.

**Thursday, March 24, 7pm:** Maundy Thursday service.

**Sunday, March 27, 7am:** Easter Sunrise service at the Nyack Beach State Park.

**Sunday, March 27, 10:30am:** Easter Sunday worship service with annual Easter egg hunt following the worship service.

### January & February Birthdays

**January 17:** Skip Russell

**February 12:** Joseph Alessi Jr.

**February 19:** Francesca Jennings

