



The Storm of December 2020 (Taken by Maurie Hill)

“SpiritSpark”



**The First Baptist Church of
Manchester Center, VT**

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Pastor: Rev. Rebecca Sommons

January 2021

A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR REBECCA

Dear Church Family,

I thought I might tell you what Christmas was like this year and where I saw God in it. Once I let go of my sadness about having the first Christmas Day without anyone else around, at least for the first half of the day, I was able to look forward to this chance to be alone with God. In the morning, I sat on a cozy couch by the Christmas tree and worked on my sermon for Sunday. It's always a time of closeness and awareness of God's Spirit for me, but I was especially encouraged by the way our cat, Paris kept me company by contentedly resting on my legs as I typed.

Matthew had predicted he would be home by 3 pm, but instead, he was able to finish his work by lunch time, which was a nice surprise. What wasn't such a welcome surprise is that he was firm about waiting to celebrate Christmas when Natalie gets home. He wouldn't even open one present. I've

never waited to celebrate Christmas on a different day before, but it seemed like the invitation to wait and grow in patience I received from God as I entered Lent was still in effect.

I felt God's presence as we connected with family members in Minnesota, New York, and Pennsylvania in the same day. We saw their faces and heard their voices, and we weren't the least bit distracted, because there wasn't any flurry of activity at our house. It was good to be present with them all, even though we were far apart geographically.

When we got all that snow several days ago, I was weary of shoveling and consoled myself with the thought that at least we will have a white Christmas. As you know, that wasn't the case because of all the rain. And yet, Matthew and I were captivated by the power of the rushing water in Baker Brook that runs through our backyard. We'd never seen it so high and strong. Its power and majesty reminded me of God's justice *rolling on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream* (Amos 5:24).

As we gazed out at the stream, we suddenly saw more wild turkeys than we had ever seen in our yard before. They flew over the stream and came up to our bird feeder in a grand parade. We recognized the one with the limp, and were delighted to see him among so many friends. It evoked the feeling of the shepherds coming to the manger, finding what they longed for in response to God's announcement through the angels.

Christmas was a day of surprises. It did not go according to traditional expectations. I tried to hold only one expectation ~ that God would show up, and He did. I really don't know what 2021 will hold, but I look forward to it with peace and hope, because I believe God will continue to show up in surprising ways for all of us. May we have our eyes open to notice them and give thanks.

Love in Christ,
Pastor Rebecca



NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The members of The First Baptist Church of Manchester Center , VT are hereby notified to meet in their house of worship at Manchester Center or by Zoom or phone on January 24, 2021 following worship for the following purposes:

- 1.) To hear the reports of officers and committees for the past year and act thereon.
- 2.) To elect officers and committee members for the coming year(s).
- 3.) To discuss and act upon any other business to come before the Annual Meeting.

Church Clerk, Martha Thompson

THE MISSIONS COMMITTEE

Many hands contributed to the Operation Christmas Child Boxes which were assembled and mailed out as part of our outreach. We are excited to let you know that they found their destinations in Honduras and Madagascar. Thank you to all who helped!

On Jan 10th, we will begin receiving the offering for the RMMO (Retired Ministers and Missions Offering). Remembering those who have served has always been a vital part of our ministry and it is even more critical at this time. As always, thank you for your amazing generosity!

Linell Pike, Secretary

PRUDENTIAL COMMITTEE

A check for the sale of the parsonage has been sent to the Bank of NH and \$14,400 has been deposited in Bank of Bennington.

GSK installed the new energy efficient water heater which is expected to lower electric costs. A new electric panel has been installed in the Joy Hall stairway. In the future, if we need to add electrical devices for which we would need a new box. We were hoping to have the ability to dim sanctuary lights but an old relay that we were unable to replace prevents this feature. Electricians are checking to see there is no live knob and tube under the organ and once that is done, we will be able to shop around for insurance.

We voted to purchase a lower-end programmable Nest thermostat and apply for a VT Energy Efficiency rebate. This product will allow remote activation.

We voted to accept a quote of \$2251 from GSK for: 10 emergency lights and exit sign units, 2 additional lights for staircases and 5 hours to install them- additionally 6 smoke/carbon monoxide detectors.

Total Restoration needs to replace a few more slates on the roof before payment is sent.

The vestry replacement tile work is still on hold due to high work demand in the building industry.

We are all set with an attic insulation contract with the same company that installed the foundation.

Internet connection/WiFi is being switched to Comcast as a cost saving measure.

A sink sprayer faucet and plexiglass backsplash have been installed at the clean-up sink. We still need trim to hold it in place. The odor in the kitchen appears to have been rectified. We need to clean out the drain every so often to make sure there is no food in it and run water so the pipe is not dry.

AA requested temporary use of the vestry at 6 pm on Tuesday evenings until the Wilson House reopens in March 2021.

Lorraine Wilkins is working on a Church cleaning checklist for the entire church.

Dottie Sundquist, Secretary

INTERFAITH COUNCIL OF THE NORTHSHIRE

Every year at the Council's Annual Meeting an auction is held with donated items to raise money for the Emergency Needs Fund.

This year because of the pandemic it was not possible to do the auction in the usual way. The Council knew the need was going to be greater than ever with Covid-19 changing people's lives. A committee was formed who explored methods of doing an online auction. The auction was a huge success. Many items were donated and it was conducted as a silent auction online. Over \$7000 was raised; The best ever!

~submitted by Martha Thompson

MARY MARTHA FELLOWSHIP

Members of the Mary Martha Fellowship met on Sunday, December 13, 2020 at 9:00 A.M., in person and by Zoom. At this meeting we put the finishing touches on gifts for some of our members.

The slate of officers was presented for the new year and voted in.

President for 2020 will be Lisa Towslee

Vice-President - Lisa Hess

Treasurer -Judy Koch

Secretary & Flowers- Martha Thompson

Kitchen - Lindy Mylott

White Cross - Cathy Comar

Sunshine Chairman - Linda Hulett

As many of you have probably read, our nativity scene baby Jesus was missing again. The fellowship had planned on replacing him. But a little miracle happened and as reported in the Journal, some second graders found Him, much to our delight. We do now have an extra doll that could be used if Jesus goes missing again.

Our next meeting is scheduled for Jan. 10, 2021 at 9:00 A.M. in person and by Zoom

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Martha Thompson, secretary

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

December was a busy month of activities hosted by the Christian Education Committee. We hope the Advent candles and devotional book added to the experience of the season for our church members. Our Christmas Coffee House was an enjoyable evening, despite being virtual this year. Members of our congregation shared stories, songs, and memories, and a good time was had by all. Some folks joined us for caroling outside Equinox Terrace and some homes, bringing Christmas cheer on a chilly day. We also hosted another movie night, with a Zoom viewing of *The Nativity Story*. Coming up in January, we would like to host another virtual social hour. This will be an evening event where we can gather and socialize via Zoom. Watch the announcements for a date to be announced. Finally, we are still hosting the adult Sunday School class at 9:30 on the first and third Sundays of the month. You can join us live in the vestry or via the Zoom link that is emailed out before the class meets.

In Christ,

Annie Crumb



Carolers: Lisa Catapano-Friedman, Judy McGraw, Alan McGraw, Annie Crumb, Jae Vickery, Rev. Rebecca Sommons (behind the camera)

Getting to Know Our New Member

by Barbara West

During the fall, Jim Holden was baptized and joined our church. He has been worshipping with us for a while. However, many of you may not have had the chance to get to know him especially because we are meeting via Zoom. Consequently we would like to share a short biography about Jim so you can all get to know him a little better.

Jim is very much a local person. He was born in Bennington Hospital and grew up in North Bennington going to schools in North Bennington until he got to middle school and high school. For those years he attended Mount Anthony in Bennington.

Jim is definitely not new to attending church. When he was growing up he attended St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Bennington. He was involved in the junior choir. Music has always been an important part of Jim's life.

He attended college locally at Southern Vermont College and the Community College of Vermont. During this time he got involved with singing professionally in a rock band. This was a main focus for a number of years. It was something he really enjoyed doing.

Jim and his wife, Lisa, lived in Bennington for a while but they had a desire to move to Manchester. They both liked the community a great deal and for Jim it was almost like moving back to his roots. His grandmother grew up in a house on Bonnet Street and both his grandfather and grandmother graduated from Burr and Burton. Some of the things that drew Jim and Lisa to Manchester were the theaters in the area, Northshire Bookstore, nice restaurants, and friendly people. It seemed to have so many of the things they were looking for.

After Jim and his wife moved to Manchester he started to search for a church that he would like to attend. He knew he wanted to be baptized as an adult, but he knew he could arrange that at most churches. As they visited various churches, they attended First Baptist and from the beginning felt that the people were very friendly. They felt very comfortable at our church and decided to continue to attend.

There had been a span of time in his adult life when he was not as involved in church, but he felt a strong desire to go back to worshipping in a church community. Jim feels that it is never too late to get involved in church. He had not lost his faith, but he was missing a faith community. He feels that his faith has grown a great deal since attending First Baptist.

For those of you who were able to attend his baptism in the fall, you heard his testimony at that time. He shared with us about the time in his life when he was very ill for a long time. After being sick he had to relearn how to walk, talk, eat, and everything we are required to do every day. He was pretty much an invalid. It was during this time that he was particularly drawn to fall back on his faith. At this time he decided he wanted to take the time to learn to play the guitar and to sing again. He wanted to share his songs of faith. It felt as if God had given him these talents and that He wanted Jim to use them. Jim played two of the songs he has written during the church service on Father's Day. These were the first spiritual songs he wrote. He wants to share more of his music with us on Facebook and during church services. He played with the Worship Band on Sunday, December 20th and he will be playing during the Christmas Eve service. We look forward to many more opportunities for Jim to share his talent. It is truly a blessing to us.

Since Jim became involved with the church he has participated in prayer group and the book discussion group. He is a welcome addition to these meetings. When he was asked about his most memorable part of his baptism, he said all of it was memorable. It was very meaningful for him especially because people were so friendly and affirming that it made the day very special. Welcome to our faith community Jim! We are thrilled to have you worshipping, playing and singing with us.

God Sightings

God is definitely at work here in the " little red church on the corner". I am still in amazement at the amount of people who contributed to our special collection for our church family this Christmas. Because of everyone's generosity we were able to get just about everything on the list. The items we did not get were because of the amount time shipping would require. Thank you to all who gave so generously. I am sure you all made a difference in the life of that family!

Earlier in December our Baby Jesus was stolen from the Nativity in front of the church much to the dismay of many. Thank you, Judy Koch, who thought to put it on the Northshire Community Forum and in the Bennington Blotter. What a great idea! Fortunately, second graders from MEMS found the Baby Jesus in a river behind the school. (see following article) What comes next is what amazes me. It sparked much discussion at school about Baby Jesus in a place that cannot discuss it unless asked. The kids were very concerned about taking care of him and returning him to the church. From what I understand, the discussions then continued at home that night. I am willing to bet some of those households had never had those discussions before! So, maybe having Baby Jesus stolen was meant to be! We all know that God does work in mysterious ways sometimes. It warms my heart.

Lorraine Wilkins (Mary & Martha Fellowship)

The following article is from the Manchester Journal dated December 16, 2020.

MANCHESTER — Baby Jesus has returned to its spot in the manger on the lawn of the First Baptist Church in Manchester.

The small doll-like figure that serves as the focus of the church's Nativity scene was reported missing Dec. 14.

Two days later, Baby Jesus is back in its spot thanks to a keen eye and a little detective work by second-graders in Amanda Penge's class at Manchester Elementary Middle School.

It's not clear how Baby Jesus went missing, but Mary Beth Monahan, a reading specialist at MEMS, said one of her students, Omario Bromfield, spotted Baby Jesus in the water in a gully near the edge of the soccer field.

Second-graders were outside when Bromfield saw the figure.

"It had been thrown down into a ravine in the water," Monahan said.

But at first, nobody connected the figure with the missing Baby Jesus.

But Olivia "Livi" Gaiotti had heard about the missing baby and started putting the pieces together.

"Livi, at the very end of the day, she said, 'you know, I wonder if that baby doll we saw in the water is the Baby Jesus?'" Monahan said.

That night, Gaiotti told her mom, who emailed Monahan.

The next day, Monahan gathered the students — Olivia Gaiotti, Omario Bromfield, Sakye Carmouche, Genevieve Monforte, Chase McNeil, Susie Monahan, Callaghan Speid, Mila Lanzillotta, and Oliver Wilder.

"So, I said, 'OK, guys, we're on a mission,'" Monahan told her students the next day. "I said, 'Livi is doing some detective work. Now we need to follow up.'"

Monahan, went down into the ravine and pulled the baby from the icy crust of the water's surface.

"Lo and behold, it was the missing Baby Jesus," Monahan said. "It was kind of frozen into the water. I lifted it up and everybody cheered."

Penge and Monahan said the rescue sent a jolt of pride and excitement through the class and the entire school as word spread.

Penge said the students were “so proud.”

“They felt they saved the holiday spirit!,” Penge said. “All afternoon they were incredibly kind to one another, asking for turns with baby Jesus and inquiring how they could help care for him or get him home safely.”

That spirit went home with the kids and was shared with their families.

“I’ve heard from numerous parents this evening about how their student came home and was so excited to share what they found and how baby Jesus would make it home safe,” Penge said.

On Wednesday, Penge and a few students returned Baby Jesus to the church.

And, Baby Jesus has worked its way into the classroom work.

“We have been studying holidays around the world,” Penge said. “[We] were able to tie it in to the unit we’ve been studying.”

First Baptist Church is glad to have its Baby Jesus back where it belongs.

“We are very grateful to have our baby back,” said church member Judy Morrison Koch, who originally posted about the missing figure on Facebook. “The students will all be getting a small treat (candy canes) for finding the baby. We are thankful for their good eyes and spotting Jesus in the bushes.”

Monahan and Penge said the emotional lift and good news is a needed break from a year that has been challenging in a lot of ways.

“It’s just a big lift,” Monahan said. “It’s scary for kids right now. They’re doing an amazing job with the masks and being safe, but there are a lot of rules to follow. It’s a serious thing we’re all in. This was just a completely joyful moment we all shared.”

She said there was a lot of joy and laughing at the end of the day.

“That’s always a good thing,” Monahan said. “We need that.”

Darren Marcy at dmarcy@manchesterjournal.com



Oliver Wilder, Genevieve Monforte and Callaghan Speid pose with Baby Jesus as they return him to his rightful place at First Baptist Church in Manchester

A THANK YOU

Dear First Baptist Church Family,

Thank you so much for your generous gift given to me on Christmas Eve and the card that was with it. Your expression of appreciation for playing music is extremely kind. I really enjoy doing it and feel that I get more out of doing it than you do from my playing. The card that was given to me was especially meaningful. It was a beautiful angel card that opens up into an angel that I can place on a table. For those of you who don’t know, I am especially fond of angels. You are all angels to me. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I pray that all of you have a wonderful 2021. May the year bring good things to all everyone. Thanks for letting me a part of your worship service each Sunday.

Much love,

Barb

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Pastor Rebecca's e-mail address: rebeccasommons@gmail.com

Pastor Rebecca's cell phone: (802) 688-3024

Church office Phone: (802) 362-1555

Pastor Rebecca continues to remain open and eager to meet with church family. These get-togethers have taken a different look over the last few months as they have moved away from set office hours. She has, instead, met on an as needed basis. She is happy to meet with you in person, over the phone, or through zoom. When the weather is good, she has often met people outside and talked while taking a walk and she is happy to continue that during the winter. She is open to any ideas you may have.

Pastor Rebecca's phone number and email are included here. Feel free to reach out to her anytime throughout the week.

(802) 688-3024 rebeccasommons@gmail.com

CALENDAR OF CHURCH EVENTS

Sunday, Jan. 3 John Brigham preaching / communion

Monday, Jan. 4 Emmaus Group at 7 pm (zoom)

Tuesday, Jan. 5 Prayer Group at 7 pm (zoom)

Wednesday, Jan. 6 Seeking God Together at 11 am (zoom)

Thursday, Jan. 7 Interfaith Council Meeting at noon (zoom)

Sunday, Jan. 10 M&M meeting 9 am (in person and zoom)

Sunday, Jan. 10 Retired Ministers and Missionaries Offering

Monday, Jan. 11 Emmaus Group at 7 pm (zoom)

Tuesday, Jan. 12 Prudential Meeting at 5 pm (zoom)

Tuesday, Jan. 12 Prayer Group at 7 pm (zoom)

Thursday, Jan. 14 Christian Ed. Meeting at 7:30 pm (zoom)

Monday, Jan. 18 Emmaus Group at 7 pm (zoom)

Tuesday, Jan. 19 Prayer Group at 7 pm (zoom)

Wednesday, Jan. 20 Seeking God Together 11 am (zoom)

Friday, Jan. 22 Deacon Meeting at 10 am (zoom)

Sunday, Jan. 24 Annual Church Business Meeting (in person and zoom)

Monday, Jan. 25 Emmaus Group at 7 pm (zoom)

Tuesday, Jan. 26 Prayer Group at 7 pm (zoom)

Wednesday, Jan. 27 Missions Meeting at 1pm (in person)

FLOWERS

January 3: poinsettias

January 10: poinsettias

January 17: Martha Thompson in memory of Charles Waugaman

January 24: Russ & Glenna Taxer in memory of Everett & Grace R. Hazelton

January 31: Martha & Bill Bowen in memory of Earle & Lois Hill