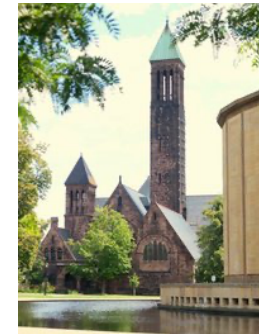


FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OFFICERS

<u>SESSION BY CLASS AND TERM</u>	<u>OFFICERS OF THE CORPORATION</u>	<u>BOARD OF DEACONS BY CLASS AND TERM</u>
Class of 2023 Janet Hill (2) Quinton Meyer (1) Tim Hess (1) Kailee Van Brunt (1)	James Gardner, President Don Houck Vice President Mark Armesto, Treasurer Janet Hill, Secretary	Class of 2023 Ilsa Cooper (1) Mark Armesto (1) Eli Van Brunt (1)
Class of 2024 James Gardner (2) Jean Hess (2) Maria Patrick-Roberts (1)	Transition Team Mark Armesto David Bond Ilsa Cooper Jean Hess John Long Eli Van Brunt	Class of 2024 Christina Banas (1) Gail McKeel (1) Jim McKeel (2) Madeline Mason-Brandon (1)
Class of 2025 Pat Frey (1) Pat Harmon (1) Suzanne Pilon (1)		Class of 2025 Olga Rico-Armesto (2) Nikia Jenkins (1) LouAnn Riegle (1)

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH STAFF

The Reverend Leslie Latham <i>Pastor, Head of Staff</i> Revleslie@firstchurchbuffalo.org	Cory Connell, Maintenance Coordinator Connelljamescory@gmail.com Voicemail extension 201
The Reverend John Long, D.D., <i>Parish Associate for Community Outreach</i> johnrlong17@verizon.net	Kurt Froese, Director of Family Ministries KFroese@firstchurchbuffalo.org Voicemail extension 200
Dr. David Bond, <i>Organist/Choirmaster, Bookkeeper, Facilities Manager</i> DBond@firstchurchbuffalo.org Voicemail extension 204	Contact Information First Presbyterian Church www.firstchurchbuffalo.org www.facebook.com/1stChurchBuffalo
	Presbytery of Western New York www.pbywny.org www.facebook.com/pbywny



First Presbyterian Church of Buffalo

Newsletter

Christmas Season 2023-2024

Epiphany 2024



The Advent season ended with our Christmas Eve service.

We are now in the joyous season of Christmas!

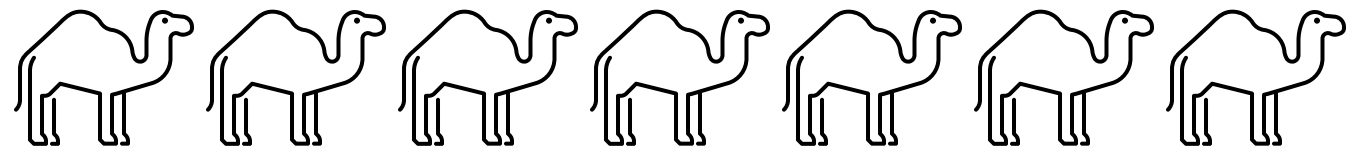
The original twelve days of Christmas were a series of religious feast days celebrated as part of Western Christian traditions. Starting on Christmas Day, the twelve days included religious celebrations, feasting and entertainments that lasted all the way to January 5th.

Worship

Join us as we celebrate the arrival of Emmanuel.

December 31: Celebrate the Messiah with Anna and Simeon
 January 7: Hopefully, a portion of *Amahl and the Night Vistors* with Buffalo Opera Unlimited

Year B	First reading	Psalm	Second reading	Gospel
First Sunday after Christmas December 31, 2023	1 Samuel 2: 18-20, 26	Psalm 148	Galatians 4:4-7	Luke 2:22-40
Epiphany of the Lord January 7, 2024	Isaiah 60:1-6	Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14	Ephesians 3:1-12	Matthew 2:1-12 Luke 3: 21-22



Study

While the Protestant Church does not canonize individuals or practice the intercession of saints, you will recognize many of the individuals and events honored during the 12 days of Christmas.

Day 1: Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

Day 2: Stephen, the first martyr of Christianity. The book of Acts tells us he was one of seven deacons appointed by the Apostles to distribute food and charitable aid. He was accused of blasphemy for preaching the Good News. He was tried by the Sanhedrin and then stoned to death. (Acts 6 through 7)

Day 3: John. By tradition he is believed to be the Apostle mentioned in John 19: 26-27, When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Day 4: Innocents’ Day, in remembrance of the massacre of young children in Bethlehem by King Herod in his quest to kill the infant Jesus.



Day 5: Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. He had disputes with Henry II, King of England, over the privileges and rights of the Church and was murdered by the king’s men.

Day 6: Egwin of Evesham, third Bishop of Church of England, Diocese of Worcester. It is said he struggled with the local population over the acceptance of Christian morality, especially Christian marriage and clerical celibacy.

Day 7: Pope Sylvester I who was the Bishop of Rome in the 4th century. He was pope during the formulation of the Nicene Creed. In some eastern and central European countries, the day is called Silvester.



Day 8: Honors Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Day 9: Basil and Gregory Nazianzen They were childhood friends who grew up to defend the Trinity and Jesus’ divinity at a crucial time in the development of the Church.

Day 10: The Holy Name of Jesus commemorate the day when Jesus was brought to the Temple in Jerusalem. From Luke 2, we know he was circumcised and named. It was also the day Anna and Simeon greeted the Holy Family in the Temple and recognized Jesus as the Messiah.



Day 11: Elizabeth Ann Seton established the first Catholic girls’ school in the United States. She also founded the first American congregation of religious sisters, the Sisters of Charity.

Day 12: John Nepomucene Neumann the fourth Bishop of Philadelphia. He is known for organizing the diocesan school system in the United States.



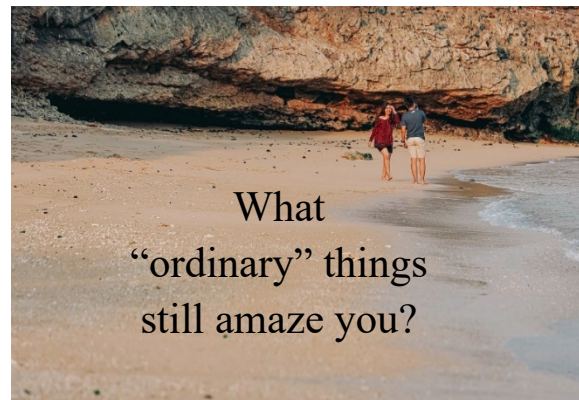
Reflect

The calendar sent in the Advent Newsletter continues through December 31. The Advent devotional, *How Does a Weary World Rejoice*, includes artwork and reflections through Epiphany and the baptism of Jesus. The displays in the narthex reflect these resources as well. We encourage you to ponder them in the days ahead.

The congregation was welcome to answer the reflection questions posted in the Narthex. Our first two questions were thoughtfully answered as you can read below.



Jesus, family, music, creating art, the Lord God, visiting an old friend, sunny days, snow, children, campfires, knowing God loves me and has a purpose for me, having a new lady friend, money, my nieces and nephews, being at church, time to spend with family and friends, the seasons, flowers, sports, community, cats and love.



Sunsets, nature, bumble bees, rainbows, bubbles, lightning, the moon, trees, the ocean, the sun, flowers and the perfection of babies.

Our current question is, "*What are you grateful for?*" We will welcome the new year with "*What do you hope for?*" Please share your thoughts on the narthex board.

Celebrate

Many of our Christmas traditions come from the early British settlers in the United States. Up until Victorian times, no one worked over the twelve days of Christmas. Now there's one we should bring back! Also, people left their Christmas decorations up until Candlemas, on February 2nd, to cheer them through the darkest and coldest days of winter. Candlemas is another name for the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Forty days after His birth, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple for the rites of Mary's purification and Jesus' dedication to the Lord.

The twelfth day of Christmas was known as Twelfth Night. It marked the night before Epiphany. Twelfth Night might have signaled the end of Christmas, but people celebrated it with great feasts, games and plays.

Included in the feast was a Twelfth Night cake. It was a huge fruit cake, tasting a bit like a giant brioche, and was baked with a coin or dried bean hidden in the mixture on each half of the cake. Men and women took slices from opposite sides of the cake, and whoever found the bean or coin in their piece became the king or queen of the bean. It was their job to host the evening's entertainment, of singing, dancing and games.



First Church is having our own Twelfth Night Celebration, and all are invited!

Please join us on Friday, January 5 at 6 pm

for an evening of food and fun in the

First Church Blue Room

Come and enjoy a light meal and toast the evening with wassail. We will cut the Twelfth Night cake (it will be a simple pound cake) and discover who will be King or Queen of Misrule for the evening. Of course, there will be a crowning followed by more merriment!

Feel free to invite your extended family and a friend or two. This is a great celebration to end a season of gatherings and parties.

Mission

Thank you all for the generous donations of socks, gloves, hats and scarves. We have filled nearly 16 bags with your contributions. We will be distributing them to our food bag recipients and to Friends of the Night People. We have learned there is a need for men's winter coats.

We will be collecting gently used or new men's winter jackets through January 14.



Epiphany Three Kings Day

The Story

Tied to biblical accounts of Jesus Christ's birth and baptism, the holiday of Epiphany is a chance for Christians to reflect on the nature of God's physical manifestation on Earth and pay homage to three important visitors in the biblical account of Jesus' birth. Epiphany is celebrated differently by various Christian denominations. Here's what to know about Epiphany—also called Theophany or simply Three Kings' Day.

In the Orthodox Church, the holiday is known as Theophany and commemorates Christ's baptism. After fasting, Orthodox Christians attend a church ceremony where a priest blesses water, then uses it to bless the congregation. The congregation takes holy water home and uses it to bless themselves and their homes all year long.

Among Catholics and Protestants, Epiphany focuses on the arrival of the Magi, three wise men from the East sometimes called kings. Matthew 2 recounts how King Herod attempted to use them as scouts who could lead him to his rival. When the Magi arrived in Bethlehem, they worshiped the infant Jesus and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. That the Magi saw Jesus as worthy of worship is considered proof that the baby was God's manifestation on Earth. After finding and worshiping Jesus, the Magi left by another road rather than disclose his location and endanger the child.

What about those gifts? Gold is a precious metal used for jewelry and currency. Frankincense is an expensive fragrance made from the sap of trees in India and Arabia. It was burned in the Temple in Jerusalem and is still used in churches today. Myrrh is a costly perfume made from rare thorn bushes in Arabia and Ethiopia. It was used as an antiseptic and wound treatment. It was also used in anointing oil and embalming fluid.

The gifts symbolize three key aspects of Christ's identity. Gold suggests Christ's royalty as King of the Jews and Lord of lords. Frankincense reflects His divinity. Myrrh represents Jesus' humanity and foretold his death and burial. In fact, you could argue that through their gift-giving, the Magi "preached" the gospel in a tangible way. Whether they fully knew it or not, their gifts told the story of how God himself came down from Heaven as our King (gold) to fulfill his priestly duties (frankincense) and eventually died for our sins (myrrh).

Celebrations around the World

In Latin America, Spain and Puerto Rico, people bake *rosca de reyes* (bread of kings), a sweet bread baked into a crown-like circle. Though traditions vary a bit in each country, many children put out grass and water the night before Epiphany for the animals who accompanied the Magi. They may put out food and drink for the kings. Children receive gifts from the kings for their good behavior. Many families save their gift giving for this day.

In Italy, Epiphany is also known as Befana, a folk festival that celebrates the legend of an old woman or witch who went by that name. *La Befana* sheltered the Magi on their way to Bethlehem. After the wise men left, she decided to follow them in search of the baby Jesus. As she searches, the kindly old woman brings gifts to well-behaved children.

Germans eat a golden pastry ring filled with orange and spice representing gold, frankincense and myrrh for a Three Kings cake. It is a tradition to decorate Christmas trees with cookies and other sweets. On Epiphany, the Christmas trees are plundered of their cookies and sweets by children (and hungry adults).

Another travel-themed tradition practiced throughout Europe and becoming more common in some parts of North America is known as "chalking the door." The custom involves writing the initials of the Magi, who are traditionally known as Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, on or above the door of one's home. Those initials—C.M.B.—also stand for the phrase *Christus mansionem benediciat*, Latin for "may Christ bless this dwelling." Believers also add numbers for the current year and plus signs that represent Christianity's cross. You may recall we did this in church last year.

The ACE team wishes you health and happiness during this joyous season and into 2024.