

Minds, hearts, hands, and voices in Christ.



**Newsletter of the
Oak Tree-Iselin
Presbyterian Church**

Dec. 2023-Jan.2024

Rev. Chris Houtz, pastor

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the Spire is published for distribution electronically the first day of the month and sent by post the next business day. The deadline for submitted articles is the previous Wednesday.

We welcome any news you would like to share with the congregation. Please e-mail your WORD documents to:

Betsy Christensen, editor,
at Betson42@comcast.net or leave written articles in the mail box marked "*the Spire*".



✝ **A Message from our Pastor,
Rev. Chris Houtz**

Friends of Oak Tree-Iselin Church,

A couple weeks ago, on November 19th, I spoke about taking risks. In the sermon, the risks were focused on our Christian call in the world. However, those aren't the only ones we can take in, and for, our faith. For instance, if you are a nervous public speaker, you can take a risk and be a liturgist. It may not seem like much for some people, but for others, the idea of public speaking is terrifying. Even if it is in front of people you know well. I remember the first time I preached in church. It was the Sunday after Christmas. For seminary interns—that is one of the most common Sundays to preach—along with the Sunday after Easter morning! The crowds that had been growing during the holidays reach their pinnacle on Christmas Eve, and then quickly decline. It seemed more noticeable than normal that year because it was New Year's Eve! So, very few people were there. At least, that's how it felt until the moment I stepped into the pulpit! I absolutely understand that fear, and I know it can be a great risk to read in church! But I invite you all to take risks in faith. Like being a liturgist, it can be something in church. You can serve as an elder or deacon. You can join the choir. You can even start a new ministry if you want!

Now, I say all this because I am also going to take a risk this Advent! You see, it is currently November 14th as I write this, and I am attempting to plan our Advent services—and sermons—now. It may not seem risky, but I want to do a sermon series that I have been thinking about since last Christmas! And we will see how it works! But remember—as I said on November 19th, the worst thing that can happen is something doesn't work! Taking the risk is what counts in faith. With that in mind, I want to introduce our Advent sermon series.

My favorite Christmas movie is "A Christmas Carol." I'm sure you all have your personal favorite versions—for me it has been the musical with Albert Finney as that old miser—Ebenezer Scrooge! But this sermon series is not about that version; rather, it's about the story itself. I am going to use that famous Christmas story as a guide for each Sunday in Advent. In the past, we have had children's pageants and a Service of Lessons & Carols on Sundays during Advent. But if you look at our calendar, we will be having four regular services during Advent this year. You may be saying to yourselves right now, "There are—famously—only three ghosts of Christmas: Past, Present, and Yet to Come." Very true! But we have four Sundays for sermons. So, the plan is (as of now—November 14th), is to follow this beloved story along with the lectionary to ask ourselves how we keep Christmas—in our hearts, in our church, and in our world. The first Sunday, Dec. 3, will be the opening warning, as Marley comes to warn Scrooge. Then, the following weeks, we will be visited by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come.

Until then, I want to leave you with one of my favorite quotes from the book. At the end of the story, Scrooge, now a changed man, says:

"I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach!"

"God bless us, everyone!"

Rev. Chris

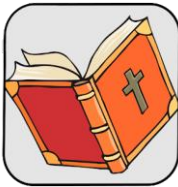
WELCOME



Join us
on Sunday morning
at 10:30 am
in the Sanctuary,
on our website,
or on Facebook.

**SUNDAY MORNING
BIBLE STUDY**

Led by
Elder Ron Stamboly



AT 9:00 AM
IN
FELLOWSHIP HALL

**The First Annual
meeting of the
Congregation
and Corporation
of
Oak Tree-Iselin
Presbyterian Church
has been scheduled for
Sunday,
February 4th, 2024,
following morning
worship**

Session Actions

There was no Session meeting in November.



THE LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21ST AT 7:00 PM
(SERVICE WILL NOT BE PUBLISHED ON SOCIAL MEDIA)

I hope everyone will consider coming to the Longest Night Service on December 21, at 7:00 PM if you are able. For me, it is one of the most powerful services we have all year because it lets us be free with how the holidays make us feel. When so many people are excited for Christmas, out shopping, and generally celebrating, it can feel very isolating for anyone who is grieving. Whether you recently lost a loved one or lost someone years ago and the holidays haven't felt the same since, this is a chance to remember God's presence in even our darkest moments.

But it is not a "downer" of a worship service. It's very intentional and reflective, but not needlessly sad. We have some prayers, a brief message, a couple hymns, and we light candles. You don't need to be grieving a loss, no matter how long ago, to join. If you feel overwhelmed by the state of the world, you can find meaning in the service. I hope everyone will think about joining us for a wonderful service of deep meaning and eternal joy.

Rev. Chris

Liturgy for December



December 3rd

First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37

December 10th

Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 40:1-11
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13
2 Peter 3:8-15a
Mark 1:1-8

December 17th

Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Psalm 126
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

December 24th

Fourth Sunday of Advent

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38



December 31st

First Sunday of Christmas

Isaiah 61:10-62:3
Psalm 148
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:22-40

From the Deacons

Ministry of Compassion

A receptacle has been placed in the foyer for donations to the food pantry. Items needed are:

Canned:
vegetables, beans, fruit,
tuna fish, pasta sauce,
soup, gravy

Peanut Butter
Jelly
Rice
Pasta
Stuffing
Instant potatoes
Mac and cheese
Cranberry sauce

We will gratefully accept donations of frozen turkeys, chickens or hams for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Distribution date for Christmas is **December 11th**.

Thank you
for your
help!



Liturgy for January



January 7th

Sunday after Epiphany
First in Ordinary Time
(Baptism of Jesus)

Genesis 1:1-5
Psalm 29
Acts 19:1-7
Mark 1:4-11



January 14th

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18
1 Corinthians 6:12-20
John 1:43-51

January 21st

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jonah 3:1-5, 10
Psalm 62:5-12
1 Corinthians 7:29-31
Mark 1:14-20

January 28th

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deuteronomy 18:15-20
Psalm 111
1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Mark 1:21-28



Wednesday Bible Study

11:00 am in
Fellowship Hall
Led by Rev. Chris

Thursday
Congregational Call
at 11:00 AM



Phone 805/706- 4409
PIN: 3944



Date mm/dd/2024

Pay to the Oak Tree-Iselin Presbyterian Church Amount
Order of _____ \$ _____
Written amount _____ xx/00 Dollars

Memo Regular offering Signature _____

Please help the counters properly credit your offerings and contributions by using your offering envelopes and filling out the required information. Just as you do a deposit slip for a bank, write your name and the amount enclosed. The counting teams check each envelope as a bank teller would do. If you forgot your envelope and are using a yellow pew envelope, write also your church giving account number if you know it. We make every effort to make sure our regular offerings, donations and other contributions are documented appropriately.

“Thank you” from the Finance Committee



Aluminum tabs for Ronald McDonald House



A collection container
can be found in
Fellowship Hall

Your tab contribution was gratefully received by the Avenel Presbyterian Church VBS Program, which sponsors the Ronald McDonald effort. Please continue to save tabs for the next collection in July, 2024.



Shop-Rite gift cards are now available each week during Fellowship Hour in \$25, \$50, and \$100 denominations. Simply bring cash or check and receive your card(s).



Memory Verse For December

³ A voice cries out:
“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,

and the rough places a plain.

⁵ Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,

and all flesh shall see it together,

for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

Isaiah 40:3-5

2024

**Per capita
apportionment
will remain at
\$40.00**

Baby Shower for Mary

Sunday, December 10th
during Fellowship Hour

See list below of items
accepted by
Moms helping Moms

December Mission Focus

Please bring items unwrapped.

- Diapers – All Sizes (open packs okay)
- Adult Incontinence Products (open packs okay)
- Clothing Sizes 0-5T
- (FALL/WINTER ONLY AT THIS TIME)
- Books for Ages 0-5
- Swaddle Blankets
- Diaper Bags
- Pack N Plays (less than 5 years old)
- High Chairs (less than 5 years old)
- Strollers
- (less than 5 years old – no jogging strollers)

- Wipes (unopened)
- Baby Hygiene Items (unopened)
- Period Products
- Formula (unexpired and unopened)
- Breast Pumps
- Breast Pump Bottles & Storage Bags (unopened)

- Breast Pads
- Nursing Pillows
- (ie: Boppy pillows)
- Bottles
- Pacifiers
- Sippy Cups



For more information, visit,
<http://momshelpingmomsfoundation.org>



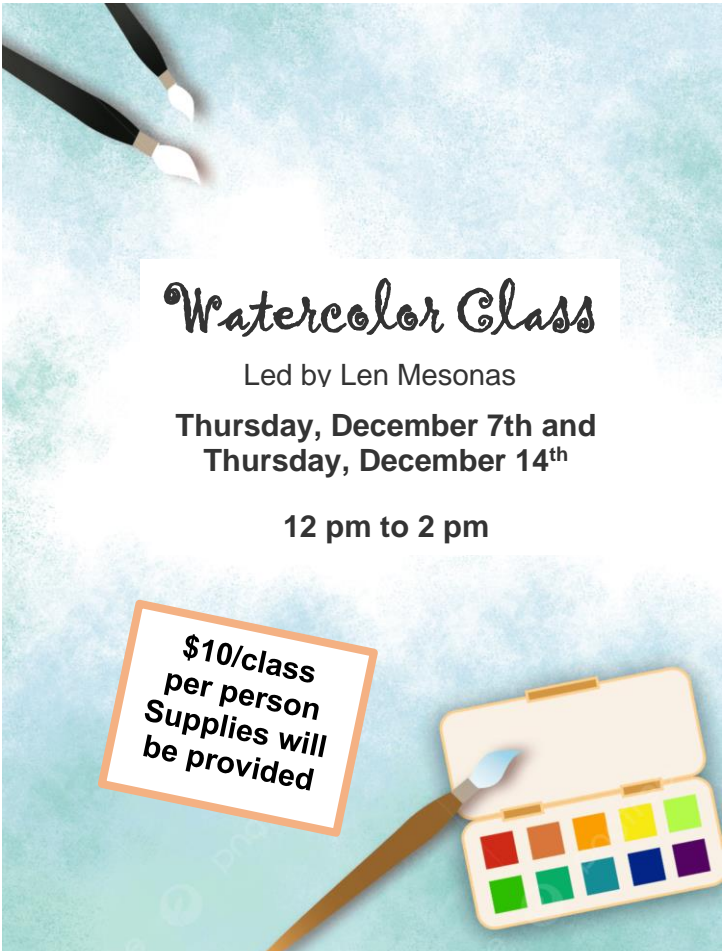
Advent Fellowships

Hosted by the Worship and Music Committee

We will begin at 6:00 pm
On Wednesday, December 6th
And continue on
December 13th and 20th

A sign-up sheet will be available in
Fellowship Hall for those who wish
to provide desserts.

If you need transportation,
call Betsy at 732/407-2965.



Watercolor Class
 Led by Len Mesonas
**Thursday, December 7th and
 Thursday, December 14th**
 12 pm to 2 pm

**\$10/class
 per person
 Supplies will
 be provided**



Remember the Date!
**Saturday,
 January 6, 2024
 9:00 am
 In Fellowship Hall**


Come join us for breakfast
 with the ladies of CLEF
 and
 the men of the Men's Breakfast Club

Followed by the
 "UN-greening
 of the Church"





**Brown Bag
 Lunch**
\$354
 was donated to
 the Salvation Army
 in Perth Amboy

"Thank You"
 From the
 Mission Committee



IT'S NOT WHAT'S
 UNDER THE
 CHRISTMAS
 TREE
 THAT MATTERS
 IT'S WHO'S
 AROUND IT.
 -CHARLIE BROWN



May you have a
 Blessed
 Christmas Season
 and a
 New Year
 filled with
 Joy, Good Health, and Peace

