

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On November 29 in the magical land of big trees east of Fifth street, was it a redtail hawk who chanced by? Was she on her way somewhere, or stopping for a look at food sources below? No sooner had he arrived on that chilly morning at 7:20am, that a couple of black birds, not quite as big as he but at least as vocal as Heckle and Jeckle, joined him. Heckle and Jeckle wanted her gone. Were the upper branches theirs? Earths inhabitants, most of us, are given to turf wars. As blackbirds one and two continued to screech at the hawk I couldn't help but laugh out loud. After a time my laughter, surely not unnoticed by the hawk on the high branch, and the screeching blackbirds were too much. He flew to a different perch, dive-bombed by one of the blackbirds on his way. Without retaliation this powerful creature made her way to a different tree, barren of birds. Five smaller blackbirds came with haste to the tree. Their great gusto of chirping was not a welcome, but perhaps their version of "Be gone, large hawk!" By the time Bella and I came back, he was gone, and the other birds as well. I'm still smiling, yet wondering.

The holidays can bring visitors, strangers into our midst. Sometimes we are the strangers. Sometimes we are the ones who welcome, or screech. It seems an ongoing process for us humans. We venture into unfamiliar places, hoping and praying to find a welcome. Sometimes we are wary, yet something deeper tugs at our hearts. Like the blackbirds large and small, we can be like Herod, fearful of the stranger. Or perhaps we become as the shepherds, scared yet curious, wondering what the stranger's presence might mean.

What could the smaller birds have learned from the hawk, if they had taken

the time to lay aside their territoriality? How could they have better fed their young, or kept a hawk eye in their environment? Esther Bennett and the Kuhnerts could better advise as to whether birds indeed do learn from others different from themselves.

Jesus' arrival on the scene of history at first involved being born in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph. He brought foreign ideas: God as loving father, forgiving parent, the Holy One as a mother hen. He began the dismantling of a religious and financial system that oppressed the poor and legitimized dreadful notions of God. Like the blackbirds, many humans didn't want him around. When he continued to show up at the Temple, in Jerusalem, when he could no longer be shooed away, humans took steps to make sure he never returned. What were our ancestors afraid to learn? What about this baby scares us, gives us pause?

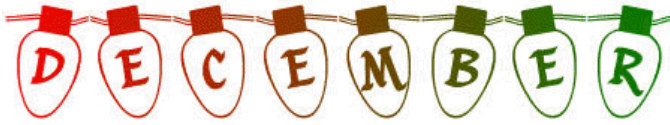
Stores open on Sunday and holiday commercialism can be easy scapegoats for preachers in this season. I can feel just a little self-righteous when I wear a "Jesus is the Reason for the Season" pin. A wise one recently posed this question? Are we more upset about stores being open or about Jesus' call to us to open our hearts to all of the gifts he came to share? In this season, gracious Jesus, open my heart wherever you see it closed. Show me a new way of humanity, that I may fly about and welcome you into my tree.

In our newsletter you will find Open Prairie's opportunities for worship, for joy together throughout the month of December. Check them out. You will find a perch, and welcome in our tree.

With joy in Jesus ~

Pastor Mary Gay

December CALENDAR OF EVENTS



2	12:30pm	Lunch Bunch at Kramer's
4	9:30am	Sunday School
	9:45am	Choir
	10:30am	Worship
5	5:00pm	Centering Prayer
	7:00pm	OP Reads
7	5:00pm	Interns Meet
	6:30pm	Choir
8	4:00pm	Personnel Committee
		Prairie Circle
9	12:30pm	Lunch Bunch at Java
10	7:30pm	Coffeehouse
11	9:30am	Sunday School
	9:45am	Choir
	10:30am	Worship
12	5:00pm	Centering Prayer
14	5:00pm	Interns/Potluck @ Pastor and Goldy's
15		Health Ministries Party
	6:30pm	Choir
16	12:30pm	Lunch Bunch at Kramer's
18	9:30am	Sunday School
	9:45am	Choir
	10:30am	Christmas Pageant
	3:00pm	Caroling followed by Fellowship/Food
21	5:00pm	Centering Prayer
	6:30pm	Choir
23	12:30pm	Lunch Bunch at Java
24	8:30pm	Christmas Eve Service
25	9:30am	Worship Service MERRY CHRISTMAS!
28	5:00pm	Centering Prayer
	6:30pm	Choir
30	12:30pm	Lunch Bunch at Kramer's
31		New Year's Eve



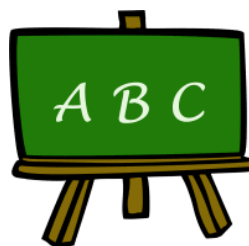
**HAPPY BIRTHDAY
To YOU!!!**

Dec 4	Rev Mary Gay McKinney
Dec 11	Al Forristall
Dec 13	Heather Heider
Dec 15	Sallee Beneke
Dec 18	Frank Bettasso
Dec 18	Beth Forristall
Dec 20	Adam Webber
Dec 21	Courtney Ludvigson
Dec 23	Daniel Kuhnert
Dec 27	Janis Land

Church Council News
The next Church Council Meeting will be
Monday, January 16th at 7:00 PM.



**During worship, childcare is available
for young children from infancy through
kindergarten. The
children will be able to
leave the sanctuary and
go to the preschool
room after the
"Children's Moment"
with Pastor Mary Gay**



CHRISTKINDL MARKT



On Saturday, November 19th, Open Prairie participated in the Princeton Chamber of Commerce annual Christmas Walk by offering its 3rd annual German Christmas market. The church was crowded with visitors who shopped and enjoyed delicious food. Some seemed to

enjoy just socializing with friends at the café tables.

As usual, the event offered gingerbread houses for the children to decorate. And Goldy Mortenson offered a new art project for the children involving tiles.

Open Prairie's Christmas tree for the event was decorated with Austrian straw ornaments which were a gift from Sabine Richcreek. The ornaments had been her mother's. Sabine also joined us in decorating the tree for the event.

Inasmuch as last year's Christkindl Markt canopy left the church parking lot in a wind gust, there was concern this year about putting up a canopy/tent from which to sell hot drinks and sweets. Friday, the 18th, when the canopy was scheduled to go up, Princeton was experiencing 40mph wind gusts.

The problem was solved, however, by the heroic efforts of the Jagers, Patricia Wilson, Jim Hughes, and Molly Blogg, who were willing to arrive at the church at 7:00 am—the morning of the event—to set up the canopy. By then the 40 mph wind gusts of Friday had died down, but Saturday morning began with sprinkles of rain. The canopy held and the protection it provided was much appreciated. The income from hot drinks and sweets under the canopy was our largest yet.

At the end of the day, our total income was just over \$3800. A final

report of our earnings after expenses will appear in the January newsletter.

Sarah Criner

Open Prairie's budget thanks all of you who contributed in any way to this event. And the Princeton Chamber of Commerce appreciates Open Prairie too, as the Chamber considers our event a draw to Princeton. Indeed, we had visitors from as far as Peoria, Bloomington, and Geneseo.



Christmas Morning Worship is at 9:30 AM.

We will return to 10:30 AM Worship on New Year's Day.



Don't forget about the box in the church office to collect printer inkjet cartridges for recycling. We earn up to \$4 per cartridge and keep them out of the landfills!

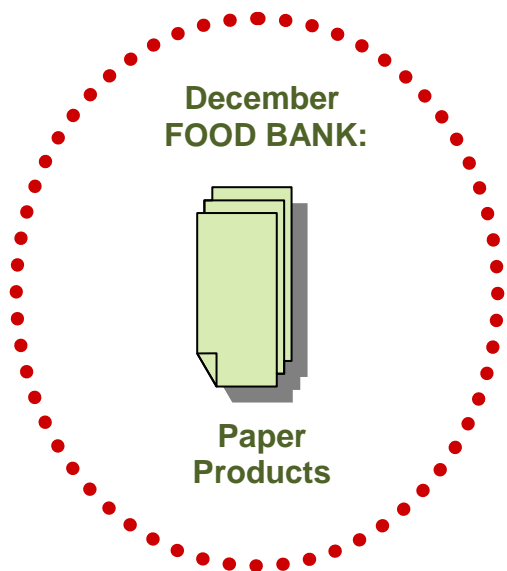
~~Seasons Greetings~*~*

CHRISTMAS CAROLING!
Sunday, December 18th at 3:00pm



OPUCC will be Christmas caroling on Sunday Dec 18. We will meet at the church at 3pm. We will go to nursing homes as well as some other destinations, then return to church for hot dogs, chips & hot chocolate. We will also be showing a Christmas movie. For those folks who cannot make it to caroling, you can still join in fellowship we should be back to church around 5:30.

groups, after having lost several of their own buildings in the storm. They continue to need help rebuilding homes of victims of Katrina. You do not need to be a skilled carpenter to go on this trip. The volunteer coordinators determine jobs to fit the skill level of the group. We have done everything from putting up siding and hanging drywall to painting and cleaning. If you are interested in going on this trip in January, think you might be interested, or if you have more questions about it, please call Molly Blogg, at 815-878-4664, or email her at mjblogg@gmail.com. This has been an amazing experience for those who have gone in previous years, and we hope to be able to send a group again this winter.



Biloxi Work Trip

Open Prairie is booked to go to Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, MS the week of January 22-28, 2012. We need to determine if there are enough people interested in going on this trip again. Open Prairie started sending a group down there each year after Hurricane Katrina to help renovate and rebuild devastated homes. Back Bay Mission has built a very nice, new facility to house their volunteer



Christmas Eve Worship
8:30 pm



DECEMBER OFFICE HOURS:

M, T, W, TH 19-22: 8-9:00 AM & 1-4:00 PM
M, T, W, TH 26-29: Vacation



No Sunday School on Christmas Day or
New Year's Day

PRAIRIE CIRCLE

It is time for Prairie Circle to meet again,
and let's start with a Christmas meeting.
Please come to June Harmon's home on
Thursday, December 8th for some good
food and great conversation!



Community Coffee



When:

Saturday, December 3rd, 2011

Where: Sheffield UCC

Time: 7:00am-10:00am

Featuring their Famous Fresh Baked
Cinnamon Rolls



LADIES LUNCH BUNCH

*Fridays at 12:30, All
Ladies Welcome!*

*****Please be on the lookout for an email
determining lunch on
December 23 and 30.*****



UPCOMING MISSION TEAM MOVIE DATES:

January 22nd
"Spitfire Grill"

****All movies begin at 6:00 PM at the church.
Members of the mission team will provide
popcorn!**

Calling All Cooks!

Sunday School interns, teachers, and guest presenters meet on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month from 5:00-6:30 p.m. for a learning/planning session and supper. We are looking for folks who are willing to provide a simple supper for our group of 6-8 people. Suppers can be homemade or purchased. We are not a fussy group! If you would like to provide supper for us one evening, please contact Dani in the church office to reserve a date



Christmas Party

SAVE THE DATE:

HEALTH MINISTRIES HOLIDAY PARTY

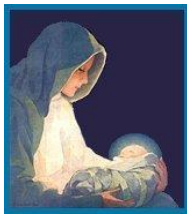
DECEMBER 15TH, 2011

AT MIMI'S

"Our Table"

Located at The First United Methodist Church of Princeton, every Monday night.

"Our hope is to offer help to families and individuals who are struggling to make ends meet, and to offer fellowship around the table for those who find themselves alone at meal time."



Christmas Cookie Walk



December 3, 2011

8am-Noon

United Church of Christ, Spring Valley

The December 19th Princeton Coffeehouse show will feature performer Kris Delmhorst.



Originally from Brooklyn and a long-time fixture on the Boston folk scene, she's now lives in western Massachusetts with her husband (folk singer Jeffrey Foucault) and daughter. She's played with the likes of Mary Gauthier, Peter Mulvey, Catie Curtis, and Eliza Gilkyson. Kris is a self-taught guitarist and fiddler, and a classically trained cellist. She's a perennial nominee for the Boston area music awards.

<http://www.krisdelmhorst.com/>

Saturday November 19th,
at 7:30 PM

\$10.00 at the door

www.theprincetoncoffeehouse.com

"It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas when its mighty Founder was a child Himself." ~Charles Dickens



BLUE CHRISTMAS ~ we invite you who have lost a loved one this year, long ago or in between, to join us for a special time of quiet, prayer and music on Wednesday, December 21 at 5:00pm. Perhaps you are not grieving, but someone in your family or circle of friends has been hard hit this year. We welcome all to this time together. Hot chocolate and d-caf will follow for those who wish to remain and visit.

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT - During Sunday worship on December 18, our children and youth will present the Christmas story. We've invited our children not yet old enough for Sunday school to join us. Our interns will narrate. Our children and youth will experience your support and encouragement.

Parents, please make sure your children are here for rehearsal on Saturday morning, December 17, at 10:30am.

CHRISTMAS EVE ~ On Christmas eve we invite you to bring a candle to light. Along with the assortment of candles that will come in from all, our worship area will be bright with the light of Christ. Carols, scripture readings and special music highlight this service @ 8:30pm on Christmas eve.

CHRISTMAS MORNING ~ on that rare occasion Christmas falls on a Sunday. We will **worship at 9:30am** instead of 10:30am. We wanted to make it possible for you to arrive at noon events. Bring your joy and celebrate with us the birth of Jesus on this Christmas Sunday morning.

INTERNS meet for training on Wednesday, December 7 at 5:00pm. Intern and Sunday school teachers share in a potluck supper @ Pastor and Goldy's on Wednesday, December 14 at 5:00pm.

Get in or continue the Christmas spirit with the PRINCETON HIGH SCHOOL Christmas concert on Monday, December 12 at 7:00pm. DANIELLE HUGHES & FERN WEBBER are singing.



Stay tuned for more information about our New Open Prairie Website!

**UPCOMING COFFEEHOUSE EVENTS,
18 Years and counting:**

Jan. 28th – Peter Mulvey www.petermulvey.com

Feb. 23rd – Stacey Earle & Mark Stuart
www.staceyandmark.com

Mar. 24th – Dana & Susan Robinson
www.robinsongs.com

Apr. 28th – Rita Hosking ritahosking.com

May 26th – Nels Andrews nelsandrews.com

All shows begin at 7:30 PM. There are no advance ticket sales. All seating is general admission, and the recession-proof ticket price remains a modest \$10.00. Door open at 7:00 PM. The Princeton Coffeehouse is located at Open Prairie UCC Church, 25 E. Marion Street in Downtown Princeton. We still serve Open Prairie's fair trade coffee, as well as assorted teas and homemade desserts. For further information, check our website at

www.theprincetoncoffeehouse.com

Songs of the Season...

The Bureau County Chorus will present "Songs of the Season, a Concert of Sacred and Popular Holiday Music" on Sunday, December 11, 2011 at 2:30 PM in the Sanctuary of the Evangelical Covenant Church, 24, North Main St., Princeton, IL.

Sacred selections on the program include "The Animals' Christmas," "En Natus Est Emanuel," "Gesù Bambino, (the Infant Jesus)," "Now is the Time for Christmas," "And the Glory of the Lord" (from Messiah).

Popular selections include "Bugler's Holiday," "Grinch!- A Christmas Medley," "Jingle Bells," "Joy on Christmas Morning," "Carol" from *Wind in the Willows*, and "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year."

The Bureau County Chorus is under the direction of Joy E. Schertz with Jennifer Allen as accompanist.

The public is invited to attend this concert of holiday seasonal choral music free of charge. A free-will donation opportunity will be provided.

For further information, contact Ms. Schertz (815) 646-4218 or Kevin Glover, (815) 915-7478.

**EVERYONE HAVE A WONDERFUL AND
BLESSED HOLIDAY SEASON!**



MERRY CHRISTMAS! LOVE, ARIA

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch of their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."



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