

DECEMBER 2021

# CONNECTIONS

# RETURNING HOME





# CLOSE to HOME

COMING TOGETHER AS ONE CHURCH DURING ADVENT

## COMBINED WORSHIP

Advent is a time of drawing close to what feels like home. After spending more than 18 long months separated from one another, we want to take time this Advent to prioritize being together as ONE church family. We want to spend time together cherishing our sacred rituals, singing our beloved carols, lighting the Advent wreath, and getting to know one another more deeply as we celebrate that we are truly coming home this Advent - coming home to one another! Each week we will worship together in one service that will combine the best we can offer of our modern and traditional experiences. We will meet weekly in the Sanctuary at 11:00am. This is a time to remember and greet old friends, to meet and welcome new friends, and to grow together as ONE family in this Holy season. We hope you will make plans to attend as we draw close to home together!

Click [HERE](#) to access to A Sanctified Art's "Close to Home" Advent devotional.

# ADVENT SERMON SERIES

When something hits close to home, it affects us deeply. During the Advent and Christmas season, we journey through scriptures and rituals that are tender, heavy with emotion, and vulnerable. We carry the memories and truths of this season close to our hearts. *Close to Home* acknowledges the “already but not yet” tension of our faith: Emmanuel is with us, and yet, God’s promised day—our everlasting home—is not fully realized. It names our deep longing for God to come close to us.

The Advent and Christmas lectionary scriptures are rich with home metaphors and imagery. John the Baptist prophesies about the One who is to come, but reminds us that we are still wandering far from God’s promised day; his message hits close to home, especially for those experiencing inequity and oppression. After receiving the angel’s news, Mary retreats to Elizabeth’s home, seeking refuge and safety. Christ is born in the midst of a journey home, in a crowded dwelling amidst livestock and shepherds alike. The Magi travel far from home to pay homage to Christ, and, having been warned in a dream, they avoid Herod by traveling home another way. Using the traditional lectionary texts, we reflect on the ways in which home is both physical and metaphorical, something we seek and something we are called to build. Ultimately, God is our home and resting place. God draws near and makes a home on earth—sacred ground is all around us. Join us this Advent season as we draw “Close to Home.”

## DECEMBER 5 | **LAYING THE FOUNDATION** (PEACE)

*Luke 1:57-80, Philippians 1:3-11*

## DECEMBER 12 | **A HOME FOR JOY** (JOY)

*Luke 3:1-18, Zephaniah 3:14-20*

## DECEMBER 19 | **SEEKING SANCTUARY** (LOVE)

*Luke 1:39-55, Luke 1:46b-55*

## DECEMBER 24 | **INVITED HOME**

*Luke 2:1-20*

## DECEMBER 26 | **CHOSEN HOME**

*Luke 2:41-52, Colossians 3:12-17*

## JANUARY 2 | **HOME BY ANOTHER WAY**

*Matthew 2:1-12, Ephesians 3:1-12*

# ADVENT CALENDAR

## DECEMBER 5

11:00am - **Combined Worship** (SANCTUARY)  
*REV. STEPHANIE YORK ARNOLD PREACHING*

4:00pm - **Beers & Carols** (GHOST TRAIN BREWING)

## DECEMBER 24

5:30pm - **Christmas Eve** (SANCTUARY)

**CANDLELIGHT SERVICE**

*REV. STEPHANIE YORK ARNOLD PREACHING*

## DECEMBER 12

11:00am - **Combined Worship** (SANCTUARY)  
*REV. JONATHAN GOSS PREACHING*

## DECEMBER 26

9:00am - **Virtual Worship Only** (YOUTUBE & FACEBOOK)

*REV. JONATHAN GOSS PREACHING*

## DECEMBER 19

11:00am - **Lessons and Carols** (SANCTUARY)

**CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS SERVICE**

*REV. STEPHANIE YORK ARNOLD PREACHING*

## JANUARY 2

11:00am - **Combined Worship** (SANCTUARY)

*REV. STEPHANIE YORK ARNOLD PREACHING*

## DECEMBER 21

6:00pm - **Longest Night Service** (SANCTUARY)

*REV. KATIE GILBERT PREACHING*

## Children's Christmas Service

# LESSONS AND CAROLS

DECEMBER 19TH, 11:00AM, IN THE SANCTUARY

ALL are invited to a special worship service where kids will play an active leadership role in helping to tell the story of Christ coming into the world. City Kids will process with the light, sing, and share lessons. Our choir and Loft band will lead us in Christmas carols and we will light the Advent wreath as a church family as we await the Christmas miracle to be born anew in our midst. Children can choose to wear special nativity costumes if they'd like as they lead us in worship. Parents, keep an eye on the City Kids weekly emails for updates on how to sign up your kid(s) for a speaking part AND for the songs we will lead.

Please note that on this Sunday we will be offering a livestream of worship at 11:00am instead of our prerecorded service. Please click [HERE](#) to access the livestream on our YouTube page.

# BEEERS AND CAROLS

Joy to the world, the time has come! On **Sunday, December 5 at 4:00pm**, we will gather at Ghost Train Brewing for a night of beers and carols. We are kicking off the holiday season with a time of singing, visiting with church family, and MORE singing! Our Loft and Sanctuary musicians will be leading us in carols, so come with your best holiday sweater and be ready to sing your merry heart out. Aside from Ghost Train's awesome brews, we'll have hot chocolate, apple cider, and other non-alcoholic beverages available! No registration required and all ages are welcome.

## JUSTICE

## & JAVA



Our Justice and Mercy Team would like to invite you to join us on Sunday, December 5 immediately after worship for coffee and an opportunity to support Community On The Rise and Glen Iris Grace.

Community On The Rise will have a table set up in our Courtyard for everyone to browse and purchase the amazing products they create out of recycled #5 plastics.

If you are interested in a hands-on way to give back this season, join us in the Large Dining Room to help Glen Iris Grace pack weekend food bags that will be given to elementary school students to help ensure they have food for the weekend.

This is a great opportunity to support two wonderful groups who are working to address needs in our community and to build relationships with one another after worship. We hope to see you on Sunday, December 5. For more information, email Tiffany Dowdy at [Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com](mailto:Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com).



CITY KIDS PRESENTS:

# COCOA & COOKIES IN THE COURTYARD

On **Sunday, December 19**, First Church City Kids will sell homemade cookies and cocoa to raise funds for Urban Ministry WE Learn and Embrace Alabama Kids (formerly United Methodist Children's Home). Grab a quick snack and hang out with your friends before and after worship in the Courtyard as our kids learn about giving back and serving this Advent.

## LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 6:00PM

ONE OF OUR FIRST CHURCH TRADITIONS IN RECENT YEARS HAS BEEN TO HOST A LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE TO OFFER SPACE FOR THE GRIEF AND SADNESS THAT CAN OFTEN ACCOMPANY THE HOLIDAY SEASON. THIS YEAR WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO RETURNING TO AN IN-PERSON SERVICE IN OUR BEAUTIFUL SANCTUARY. WITH ALL THAT HAS COME TO US IN THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF, WE THINK IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO LEAN INTO OUR PRIORITY OF AUTHENTICITY BY PROVIDING SACRED SPACE TO NAME OUR GRIEF. WE RECOGNIZE THAT MANY TIMES THE JOY AND EXPECTATION OF CHRISTMAS OVERSHADOW THE PAIN, GRIEF, AND HURT THAT WE ARE EXPERIENCING IN OUR LIVES. YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN US AS WE COME TOGETHER TO MARK OUR PAIN AND SORROW ON THE LONGEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR.

# POINSETTIA SUNDAY

This year we will once again have the opportunity to place poinsettias in our beautiful Sanctuary. On Sunday, December 19, you are invited to place a poinsettia in memory or in honor of a loved one to adorn our worship space on that special Sunday. Each poinsettia is \$12.50 and must be ordered by Friday, December 10. Click [HERE](#) to order yours now.

## Christmas Eve

Candlelight Service

DECEMBER 24, 5:30PM IN THE SANCTUARY

It's been two years since we have been able to gather together to celebrate Christmas Eve in-person, so this year we are really excited to invite you to our Christmas Eve candlelight service in the Sanctuary. Beautiful music, sacred scripture, communion at the altar, "Silent Night" by candlelight, and friends you have missed seeing alongside friends you have just met will all be present to help you welcome Christ into your hearts on this special night. Masks will be required as we want to keep one another safe during our Christmas celebrations. We hope you will make plans to come back home this Christmas Eve for worship!



## Magic City Acceptance Center

This year we will be helping to provide 75 care bags for LGBTQ+ youth and young adult participants at Magic City Acceptance Center (MCAC). The purpose of these bags is to aid in self-care, resilience, and building participants up as they return home for the holidays. Some will be returning to homes that are not necessarily supportive and affirming of their sexual and gender identities. If you are interested in purchasing the items for a care bag please reach out to Tiffany at [Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com](mailto:Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com).

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## Glen Iris Grace

In 2017 a group of volunteers within First Church joined together to address food insecurity for children by providing 40 bags of nonperishable food for students at Glen Iris Elementary to take home on the weekend. Five years later, Glen Iris Grace has expanded their reach and impact as they currently provide 150 bags (50 at Glen Iris Elementary and 100 at Midfield Elementary) each week. Eliminating food insecurity is a huge undertaking but we can take small steps along the way.

We invite you to consider supporting a student by donating to Glen Iris Grace at one of the following levels:

**\$260** – Provide food for one student for an entire school year

**\$130** – Provide food for one student for one semester

**\$30** – Provide food for one student for one month

Click [HERE](#) to make your gift now.

For more information about Project 12/25, please email [Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com](mailto:Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com)



# CHURCH-WIDE RETREAT

**FEBRUARY 11-13TH, 2022 AT LAKE GUNTERSVILLE STATE PARK**

You don't want to miss First Church's retreat! Our annual retreat is one of the most significant times to build community and make connections – not to mention grow spiritually.

Throughout the weekend we will journey through the whole Bible – from Genesis to Revelation – using Daniel Erlander's book *Manna and Mercy* as our guide. Over the years *Manna and Mercy's* contextual understanding of Scripture has become the theological foundation of our mission statement and six priorities at First Church.

In addition to meaningful content, the retreat will also offer plenty of free time to get to know our church family better while enjoying all that the park has to offer. This retreat is for the entire family. Childcare and children's recreational options will be available for kids from preschool through elementary. Youth, though included in the learning sessions, will have opportunities to gather together as well during the weekend.

The cost for the weekend is \$175 for a single registration, \$300 for a couple registration, and \$350 for a family of four (\$25 for each additional family member beyond that). A \$50 deposit is due upon registration. Chalets are available to families or groups of 4 or more people at an additional 20% cost. Scholarships are also available. Registration includes breakfast both days as well as lunch and dinner on Saturday. Register now by clicking [HERE](#). To request a scholarship or find out more information, please contact Katherine Mullen at [Katherine@firstchurchbhm.com](mailto:Katherine@firstchurchbhm.com).



# STUDENT MINISTRY

## AT FIRST CHURCH

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### SUNDAY SMALL GROUP

TIME: **9:30AM - 10:45AM**

LOCATION: **LARGE DINING ROOM**

We will be kicking off a new series about friendship, specifically learning how to be a good friend during difficult times. Through the stories of Job, Ruth, Naomi, Elijah, and Eli, we'll see how God invites us to "be with" people when they're grieving, lonely, in need, or feeling hopeless, and how God is already with them.

### SUNDAY NIGHT GATHERING

TIME: **4:00PM - 6:00PM**

LOCATION: **LARGE DINING ROOM**

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### SPECIAL UPCOMING EVENTS

MONDAY, DECEMBER 6

**ESCAPE ROOM**

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10:

**HELPING WITH CITY KIDS PARENTS NIGHT OUT**

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12

**YOUTH ROOM PAINTING PARTY**

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19

**CHRISTMAS OPEN: STUDENT MINISTRY CHRISTMAS PARTY**

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### STAY IN TOUCH:

Keep up to date with all that we have going on and never miss out on all the fun things happening.

**NEWSLETTER** - Email [Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com](mailto:Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com) to join

**REMIND** - (text reminders) Text: [@fcbhmadult](https://www.facebook.com/fcbhmadult) To: 81010

**INSTAGRAM** - [@firstchurchbhm.youth](https://www.instagram.com/firstchurchbhm.youth)

**FACEBOOK** - First Church Birmingham - Student Ministry

CITY KIDS

# HAPPENINGS

## COURTYARD GAMES WITH CITY KIDS

Join us on Sunday mornings at 9:45am from November 28 through December 19 as we meet in the Courtyard for an Advent Adventure! Kids ages 5 years through 5th grade will share a quick discussion about Advent, play games, make crafts, sing songs, and eat a snack.

## SUNDAY SCHOOL IN THE NURSERY

Join us on Sunday mornings at 9:45am from November 28 through December 19 as we meet in the Courtyard for an Advent Adventure! Kids ages 5 years through 5th grade will share a quick discussion about Advent, play games, make crafts, sing songs, and eat a snack.

## PARENTS NIGHT OUT FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 5:30PM – 8:30PM

All City Kids are invited to a FUN night! Babies from 3 months old to our toddlers who are 3 years old will play in the Nursery with our Nursery Team. They will play, watch a movie, and eat a dinner (please pack a dinner if your child has special things they love to eat - no nut products, please!) Our friends who are 4 years old all the way to our 5th graders will eat dinner, have a Christmas Party, dance, craft, play games, sing, and end our night with a Christmas movie. Our Student Ministry will help with crowd control but we will have adults who have volunteered to hang out for the night as well. Parents are invited to connect with our Parent Sunday School Class and leaders from our Children's Council who will meet up at a fun spot— or enjoy a date night— or a night of quiet at home! Registration is required but the whole event is FREE! Make plans to join us and register [HERE](#) now.

## BABY RAVE MONDAY, DECEMBER 20, 10:00AM IN THE LOFT

Babies and toddlers are invited to bring an adult to join the fun of singing and dancing to our favorite Christmas songs. Adults, bring a cup of coffee - juice and snacks will be provided for our youngest friends along with jingle bells and glow sticks! No reservation required, bring a friend!

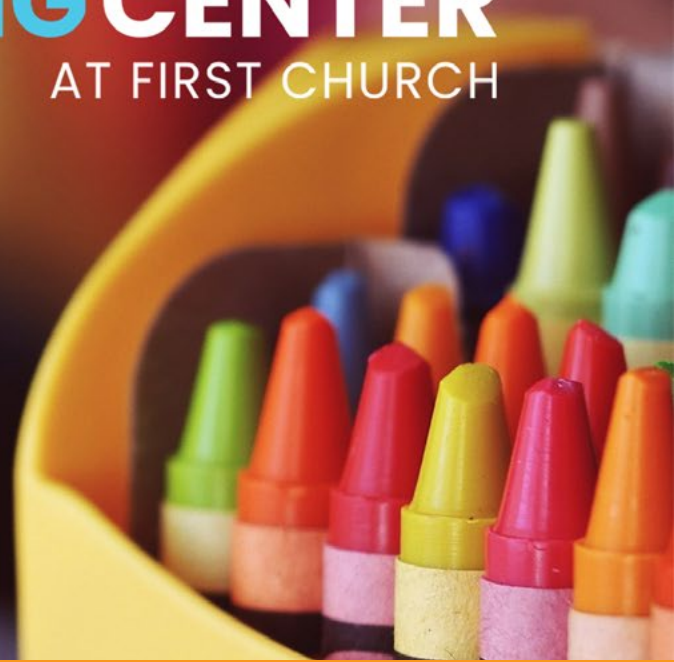




# EARLY LEARNING CENTER

## AT FIRST CHURCH

Our First Church ELC has been preparing tomorrow's children for the past 30 years. If you are seeking a loving environment that will help support the individual development of your child or a child you know, please consider our ELC. Our teachers hold ECE degrees and the staff is fully vaccinated. The ELC is open Monday through Friday from 7:00am – 6:00pm. You can schedule a virtual tour today by calling 205-251-6059(x2) or emailing [elc@firstchurchbhm.com](mailto:elc@firstchurchbhm.com). Applications are open for children 6 weeks through 5 years old with current vacancies in the 2,3, and 4 year old classes. In addition, the ELC currently has employment opportunities available for substitute and afternoon part time teachers with a competitive hourly rate.



# amazon smile

As we approach a season in which many of us will do our shopping online, we want to make sure you are aware that First Church has an Amazon Smile account. When you make a purchase through Amazon Smile 0.5% of that purchase is donated back to the charity of your choice. All you need to do is make sure you are shopping at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) (all of the regular Amazon products and prices can be found there) and select Birmingham First United Methodist Church as your charity of choice. We hope you will consider using Amazon Smile as an easy way to make a contribution to First Church!

# NEW MEMBER PRAYERS FOR FIRST CHURCH

## AS WE SEEK TO BE AN **OPEN PLACE** FOR ALL

### MY PRAYER FOR FIRST CHURCH IS:

*I pray that First Church continues to be an open place where all members of our community can experience fellowship and the love of Christ.*

- Elishua Markham

*My prayer for First Church is that we lead our community through our example of servanthood, extension of grace, and authentic relationship with all.*

- Alison Watson

*I pray that First Church always leads with a growth mindset and a spirit of compassion. I pray for the church leadership. I pray for the new friend who walks in the front door. I pray that visitors and long-time member feel held in love that is so much bigger than we can fathom.*

- Alie B. Gorrie

*That we as a whole continue to share the true love of Jesus. That we continue striving to be better than the day before and continue living in unity to love each and every person right where they are and as they are.*

- BreAnna & Cecilia Partain

*We will continue to grow into the justice and love God has for us all and become a closer family.*

- Sandy Lawrence & Marsha Coleman

*That First Church would continue to grow and that those who enter will find hope in the darkest seasons, will ask questions when things don't make sense, and be reminded that they belong and have found a place to call home.*

- Hanna Grace Johnson

*For First Church to continue to the work and ministry for inclusion of all people.*

- Karen Tudisco & Joey Morris



# GIFTS RECEIVED BY THE CHURCH

## To the Memorial Fund

### **In Memory of Buddy Ramsey**

From Scott & Judee Evans

### **In Memory of Terilane Ramsey**

From Scott & Judee Evans

From Misty Williams



## **UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION**

We know a lot has changed – many of you have moved, changed jobs, phone numbers, email addresses, etc. If you or your family have made any changes to your contact information in the past year, please take a moment to let us know. You may do so by contacting our Office Administrator Peg Thompson at [Peg@firstchurchbhm.com](mailto:Peg@firstchurchbhm.com).

# DECEMBER CALENDAR

## December 5

12:00pm - Justice & Java  
4:00pm - Beers & Carols

## December 21

6:00pm - Longest Night Service

## December 19

11:00am - Lessons & Carols  
12:00pm - Cookies & Cocoa

## December 13

6:00pm - Executive Council

## December 24

5:30pm - Christmas Eve Service

## December 20

10:00am - Baby Rave

## December 17

5:30pm - Parents Night Out

## December 26

9:00am - Virtual Service Only

# WEEKLY CALENDAR

## SUNDAY

9:00am: Virtual Live Stream Service

9:45am: Sunday School

11:00am: Loft & Sanctuary In Person Worship

4:00pm: Student Ministry

## TUESDAY

7:00pm: Converge Young Adults

## WEDNESDAY

6:30pm: Chancel Choir

# FIRST CHURCH BIRMINGHAM STAFF

YOU MAY REACH OUR STAFF AT 205-254-3186 OR BY EMAIL

Senior Pastor: Stephanie York Arnold .....	Stephanie@firstchurchbhm.com
Pastor: Jonathan Goss .....	Jonathan@firstchurchbhm.com
Executive Pastor: Katie Gilbert .....	Katie@firstchurchbhm.com
Minister of Youth & Social Justice Engagement: Tiffany Dowdy.....	Tiffany@firstchurchbhm.com
Minister of Children: Cristin Dedmon .....	Cristin@firstchurchbhm.com
Minister of Community Engagement: Katherine Mullen .....	Katherine@firstchurchbhm.com
Organist: Richard Byrd .....	Richard@firstchurchbhm.com
Design: Blake Hobbs .....	Blake@firstchurchbhm.com
Choir Director: Patrick Evans .....	Patrick@firstchurchbhm.com
Office Administrator: Peg Thompson .....	Peg@firstchurchbhm.com
Business Administrator: Steve Pitts.....	Steve@firstchurchbhm.com
Maintenance Supervisor: Ron Dates .....	Ron@firstchurchbhm.com
Nursery Director: Ginger Gambill .....	Ginger@firstchurchbhm.com
Wedding Director: Betsy Pate .....	Betsy@firstchurchbhm.com
Executive Director of Early Learning Center: Cassandra Copeland .....	ELC@firstchurchbhm.com



an OPEN place for ALL to **WORSHIP, GROW,** and **SERVE**

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