

DECEMBER 2023

CONNECTIONS



EMMANUEL
GOD WITH US



How does a weary world rejoice?

During this Advent season we will use A Sanctified Art's theme of "How Does a Weary World Rejoice?" as we follow the Gospel of Luke who begins the story of Jesus by interweaving the parallel stories of Elizabeth, Zechariah, and John the Baptist. In considering these birth narratives alongside one another we see the full scope of human emotions: isolation, fear, disbelief, connection, trust, and joy. The Christmas season is often an emotionally-charged time when we feel many things deeply - sometimes all at once.

This series is designed to remind us that it all counts - we need to acknowledge the weariness of the world while also seeking real and daily moments of joy. Each week we will respond to the question "How does a weary world rejoice?" with a statement inspired by our scriptures which demonstrate rhythms for rejoicing, even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Click [HERE](#) to read more.

12.3 | WE ACKNOWLEDGE OUR WEARINESS
Luke 1:1-23, Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

12.10 | WE FIND JOY IN CONNECTION
Luke 1:24-45, Isaiah 40:1-11

12.17 | WE ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE AMAZED
Luke 1:57-66, Psalm 126

12.24 | WE SING STORIES OF HOPE
Luke 1:46-55, Luke 1:67-80

PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE WILL BE NO SUNDAY SCHOOL
AND WE WILL HOLD ONE SERVICE AT 11:00AM IN THE SANCTUARY.

12.31 | WE ROOT OURSELVES IN RITUAL
Luke 2:21-38

PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE WILL BE NO SUNDAY SCHOOL
AND WE WILL HOLD ONE SERVICE AT 11:00AM IN THE LOFT.

2023 ADVENT CALENDAR

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3

11:00AM – FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT IN THE SANCTUARY & LOFT

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6

5:00PM – WEDNESDAY NIGHT DINNER (LARGE DINING ROOM)

6:00PM – THE BIG ADVENT EVENT (LARGE DINING ROOM)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10

11:00AM – SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT IN THE SANCTUARY & LOFT

12:00PM – COOKIES & COCOA (LARGE DINING ROOM)

4:00PM – BEERS & CAROLS (HI WIRE BREWING)

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13

12:00PM – SENIOR ADVENT LUNCH (THE LARGE DINING ROOM)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17

11:00AM – THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT IN THE SANCTUARY & LOFT

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21

6:00PM – LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE (SANCTUARY)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24

11:00AM – FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT IN THE SANCTUARY (ONE SERVICE ONLY)

4:00PM – CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE (THE LOFT)

6:00PM – CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE (SANCTUARY)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31

11:00AM – WORSHIP IN THE LOFT (ONE SERVICE ONLY)

THE

BIG

ADVENT EVENT

DECEMBER 6 AT 6:00PM IN THE LARGE DINING ROOM

All ages are invited to a church-wide Advent wreath-making and crafty Christmas party! What's better than a night of Christmas crafts with friends? We'll be guided in creating an Advent wreath which can be taken home to use for the season. We'll also learn to make a few special crafts which we can use yearly in our decorations. Adults are invited to register [HERE](#) for the event - there is a fee that covers the wreath and craft supplies. We hope you make plans to attend!



COCOA & COOKIES

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10 AFTER WORSHIP IN THE LARGE DINING ROOM

Our CityKids are baking and buying delicious treats so that you can grab a cookie or create a to-go box after worship on Sunday, December 10. We'll accept donations for the yummy goodies with all proceeds going to Church of the Reconciler. Community on the Rise will also sell their ornaments, gifts, and jewelry. We'll see you in the Large Dining Room for the fun!



BEERS AND CAROLS

We hope you are making plans to join us at Hi-Wire Brewing (2901 4th Ave S Suite 1A) on **SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10** at **4:00PM** for our annual evening of beers and carols! We'll be led in song by our church musicians in everyone's favorite Christmas carols. In addition to Hi-Wire's variety of brews and sodas, there will be food trucks present as well. An ugly Christmas sweater or festive outfit is encouraged but not required. All ages are welcome and we can't wait to see you there!



PROJECT 12.25

As the holiday season approaches, our hearts are filled with the spirit of giving and there is no better way to embrace this spirit than by supporting Project 12/25. This year we will partner with Greater Birmingham Ministries as they seek to provide a memorable Christmas for 200 families. One of the ways that GBM seeks to empower those they serve is by offering gifts and clothing in a store where parents are able to shop for their own children rather than receive a hand out from someone else. In the spirit of community and compassion, First Church Birmingham will help ensure that GBM is able to meet their goal of 200 families as well as offer dignity and honor to those in need during this season.

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**WITH YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT,
WE CAN MAKE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT IN THESE FAMILIES' LIVES.
WE ARE CALLING UPON OUR CONGREGATION TO MAKE PROJECT 12/25 A SUCCESS.**

HERE IS HOW YOU CAN HELP:

Pull a tag off the Christmas tree in the Welcome Center.

Each tag will share a child's age and category to purchase a gift to be included in GBM's distribution.

Return your gifts to the church by December 10.

Make a financial contribution to Project 12/25.


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For more information please contact Ashley Hess @ashley@firstchurchbhm.com

SENIOR ADVENT LUNCH

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13 AT 12:00PM IN THE LARGE DINING ROOM

We are inviting our senior members to an Advent Lunch in the middle of the day on Wednesday, December 13 at 12:00pm in hopes of getting to spend some quality time with them during the holidays. If you are interested in attending our Senior Advent Lunch, either because you are a senior congregant or because you have missed seeing these friends too, then please click [HERE](#) to make a reservation or contact Peg Thompson in our Church Office at 205-254-3186. Deana Solfronk will prepare our meal and the cost is \$10 per person. In addition to good food, Patrick Evans will join us to lead a few rounds of singing carols as we celebrate the season.



FAREWELL RECEPTION FOR CRISTIN DEDMON

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17
AFTER WORSHIP IN THE LARGE DINING ROOM

As we prepare to say goodbye to our beloved Children's Minister Cristin Dedmon and her family at the end of December, you are invited to join us for a reception in her honor following worship on Sunday, December 17 in the Large Dining Room. Children are invited to draw a picture for Cristin and anyone from the congregation is invited to write a letter of love. There will also be a children's book for the congregation to sign with words of appreciation. If you would like to contribute to a love gift for Cristin, you are invited to mail a check to First Church with "Love Gift – Cristin Dedmon" marked in the memo line or click [HERE](#) and select the fund by the same name to give online.

LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 6:00PM

ONE OF OUR FIRST CHURCH TRADITIONS IS TO HOST A LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE ON THE WINTER SOLSTICE, THE LONGEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR. DURING THIS SERVICE WE LEAN INTO OUR PRIORITY OF PRACTICING AUTHENTICITY BY PROVIDING SACRED SPACE TO NAME OUR GRIEF AND SADNESS. 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 IN THE SANCTUARY ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21 AT 6:00PM AS WE COME TOGETHER TO MARK OUR PAIN AND SORROW ON THE LONGEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR.

CHRISTMAS EVE AMARYLLIS FLOWERS

This Advent season you have the opportunity to remember or honor a loved one by purchasing a beautiful amaryllis to decorate our altar on Christmas Eve. You are invited to take your amaryllis home with you at the conclusion of worship on Christmas Eve. Flowers are available for \$20 each. We will be taking orders until we run out or until the end of the day **Sunday, December 10.**

Click [HERE](#) to place your order now.

Christmas Eve

Candlelight Service

4:00PM IN THE LOFT

6:00PM IN THE SANCTUARY

This year we are once again offering two candlelight Christmas Eve services to provide ample opportunities to join together in worship as we celebrate Jesus' birth. At 4:00pm you are invited to attend a beautiful worship service in the Loft. There will be coffee, cookies, and snacks before the service begins. During the service there will be Christmas hymns and songs led by our band, holy communion, and candles to illuminate the space as we hold the mystery of Christ's birth. At 6:00pm you are invited to attend our traditional Sanctuary worship service led by our choir where we will sing Christmas carols and hymns, receive holy communion at the altar, and light candles as we sing Silent Night. Come to either service or, better yet, stay for both!

2024 CHURCHWIDE RETREAT

PARADOX

WHEN LOSS IS GAIN

FEBRUARY 9 – 11 AT CAMP MCDOWELL

Our Christian faith teaches us that even in our suffering there is something being born anew. In his book *Falling Upward*, Richard Rohr explores our human journey from the first-half of our life to the second-half. This weekend we will explore the ways life invites us to release our need for rules, being "good enough," and climbing the ladder. We will look at the archetypal "Hero/Heroine's Journey" to see that inevitable losses in life have the ability to lead us to a more liberating second-half where we release our grip on control and lean into acceptance. In addition to our time of studying and learning together there will be plenty of time for rest and play as well.

Click [HERE](#) to learn more and sign up now.

Wednesday Night **DINNER & PROGRAMMING**

IN THE NEW YEAR

We are excited for a new round of dinner and programming on Wednesday nights in the new year. Dinner will start back on Wednesday, January 10 and run through Wednesday, April 24. Wednesday nights invite us to build connection with others, engage spiritually, enjoy a delicious meal (that we don't have to prepare), and grow our church family. Click [HERE](#) to learn more about Wednesday Nights at First Church.

YOUTH UPDATES

YOUTH SUNDAY SCHOOL

9:45AM ON SUNDAYS IN THE YOUTH ROOM

IN THE FOUR-WEEK SERIES "GREATFUL," WE'LL LOOK AT FOUR CLASSIC CHRISTMAS STORIES TO SEE WHAT THEY CAN TEACH US ABOUT GRATITUDE AS WE CELEBRATE JESUS' BIRTH.

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YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTY

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16 AT DAVENPORTS PIZZA IN VESTAVIA HILLS

GRADES 6TH - 12TH ARE INVITED TO THE YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTY! WE WILL KICK OFF WITH DINNER AT DAVENPORT'S PIZZA IN VESTAVIA WHERE STUDENTS WILL PARTICIPATE IN A LIVELY GIFT EXCHANGE WITH A MAXIMUM LIMIT OF \$10 PER GIFT. WE WILL CONTINUE THE MERRIMENT WITH A TRIP TO THE VESTAVIA AMC THEATER TO VIEW "WONKA." STUDENTS SHOULD FEEL FREE TO SHOWCASE THEIR HOLIDAY SPIRIT BY DONNING THEIR TACKIEST CHRISTMAS CLOTHING! A TIME FOR DROP OFF WILL BE DETERMINED WHEN MOVIE TIMES ARE RELEASED. THE COST FOR THE EVENING IS \$15. CLICK [HERE](#) TO RSVP BY DECEMBER 10. PLEASE LET ASHLEY KNOW IF YOUR FAMILY WILL NEED HELP WITH THE COST OF THE YOUTH CHRISTMAS PARTY.

AYLWIN FELLOWSHIP GATHERING

A long-standing women's group of First Church, The Aylwin Study Club, is now the Aylwin Fellowship and we would love to welcome more friends into our group since the name "Aylwin" means "noble friend." Our focus is on hospitality, multi-generational fellowship over lunch, and inspiring programs. We meet on the first Wednesday of the month, February - May and September - December in the First Church Parlor. Gathering time is from 11 - 11:30 and lunch is served at 11:30. We are generally finished by 1:00pm.

If you are interested in attending, please contact Anne Cain at 205-504-9344 or acain1011@gmail.com for more details. Reservations for lunch are due by the 20th of the month preceding the meeting. Membership at FUMC is not required. We would love for you to visit and enjoy a whole new group of friends.

AN INVITATION FROM AWAKENINGS SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS

For over two decades psychologist and trainer, Dr. Deborah Threadgill Egerton, MA, Ph.D., has been teaching the Enneagram as a valuable mechanism for social justice and anti-racism and using it as a blueprint to reconnect people across all dimensions of diversity. Her new book, *Know Justice Know Peace*, is bringing those efforts down to grass-roots movements in local communities all over the world. This guide will help us understand why each of us must examine how we came to ingest life experiences that led us to negatively see members of the human family as "different from me." Journeying through the Enneagram, we see how "othering" has created near permanent mindsets and recognize how the darkness hides within our type structures. The good news is that if we are willing to take this journey together, there is deep personal healing and increased wholeness that will help God mend the entire universe.

The journey begins Sunday, January 7 in the Awakenings classroom located in the Fireside Room on the bottom floor of the Education Building. For more information contact Art Wimberly at art@thrivebham.org.

AS WE SEEK TO BE
AN OPEN PLACE FOR ALL

MY PRAYER FOR FIRST CHURCH IS:

My prayer is that First Church will continue to grow in its mission to provide an open place for ALL and that other churches will be led to follow the example set by First Church of being a place where everyone can belong.

- David Pou

I pray that our love for the community continues to be good news for those who have been denied a dignified life. Give us the strength to bring light to those who weep at night today.

- Isaac Guazo



GIFTS RECEIVED BY THE CHURCH

TO THE MEMORIAL FUND

IN LOVING MEMORY OF MIA CATHER

FROM TRUDY AND MIKE LOOP

IN LOVING MEMORY OF LARRY VINES

FROM SUSAN VINES

IN LOVING MEMORY OF RANDY HANCOCK

FROM JOE AND JENNY WALKER

IN LOVING MEMORY OF GRAY NORTON

FROM MOLLY THOMAS

IN LOVING MEMORY OF ROSE RAPACH

FROM STEPHAN BISAHA

TO THE BUILDING FUND

IN LOVING MEMORY OF RANDY HANCOCK

FROM LYN GRANT

FROM MILLER GORRIE

FROM JAMES GORRIE



UPDATE YOUR **CONTACT** **INFORMATION**

We know a lot can change over time. 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.

OUR **CALENDAR**

WEDNESDAYS

- 5:00pm: Dinner
- 5:30pm: Nursery Open
- 6:00pm: Small Group Programming
- 6:30pm: Choir

SUNDAYS

- 9:00am: Virtual Live Stream Service
- 9:45am: Sunday School
- 11:00am: Loft & Sanctuary In Person Worship

Click [HERE](#) to view our monthly calendar.

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 Children: Cristin Dedmon	Cristin@firstchurchbhm.com
Minister of Community Engagement: Katherine Mullen	Katherine@firstchurchbhm.com
Minister of Youth & Justice: Ashley Hess	Ashley@firstchurchbhm.com
Organist: Richard Byrd	Richard@firstchurchbhm.com
Design: Blake Hobbs	Blake@firstchurchbhm.com
Minister of Music: 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
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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