

Dear Members and Friends of Union Presbyterian Church,

During Christmas break my family had the opportunity to go camping for a week in St. Mary's, Georgia (just north of Florida on the coast). One day on the trip we visited Cumberland Island National Park. Cumberland Island is Georgia's southernmost and largest barrier island. It is accessible only by boat and boasts historic ruins, forests, beaches, marshes, and wild horses. As my family walked through the forests draped with Spanish moss and next to marshes, along the ocean, and beside the ruins of the Dungeness Mansion, my wife and I couldn't stop smiling while repeatedly exclaiming, "Is this real? It's like we are walking in a dream! Isn't this amazing?" My family really wanted to see a wild horse while we were there. And not only did we see several (there are over 100 on the island), one literally walked right next to us (we actually had to leave the trail to let it get by)! Vicky and I were filled with awe!



Since the Enlightenment, the Christian faith in general has tried to shy away from awe. In Seminary I didn't just take theology classes, I took "systematic" theology classes. Classes that tried to organize thoughts about God into understandable and related compartments. Usually in Sunday school we try to "understand" God better, not ever just sit in mystery of the vastness of God. In her book, "Surprised by Paradox: The Promise of AND in an Either-Or World," Jen Pollock Michel reflects on whether this abandonment of awe is a good thing. Michel writes that as she looked at her own faith and Scripture she began to wonder if "the tangles- and tangled faith- were less exception and more rule." Just think about some of the core things we believe:

- What does it mean that God is Triune... three in one?
- How did God create the universe by just speaking it into existence?
- How could the fullness of God fit into and fullness of humanity with Jesus? How can Jesus be both 100% man and 100% God?
- How exactly does Jesus' death erase the sin of the world?
- When we participate in the Lord's Supper, are we "just" eating bread and drinking juice or is there something more to it than that? What is the more?
- Through Christ we say that we are freed of sin and become "new people" and yet we still sin, how does that work?

All of this stuff isn't easy to understand. There aren't easy answers. They are tangles in our faith, mysteries, things to wrestle with. And maybe that's okay... particularly if they help us be in awe of how big, awesome, mighty and mysterious our God is.

*(Continued on page 2)*

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**January Elders**

**Inside**

Kim Lee  
Faye Harrell  
Frank Suggs

**Opening & Closing**

Billy Jordan  
Tim Grigg

**Stated Session**

January 17  
2:30 PM

(continued from first page)

Michel writes how *The Atlantic* recently published a group of studies trying to measure the effects of awe. In their studies, the psychologists described awe as “the experience of encountering something so vast- in size, skill, beauty, intensity, etc.-that we struggle to comprehend it and may even adjust our world to accommodate it.” While it is good for us to try and get a better grasp of the things of faith like the Trinity, Creation, the Incarnation, atonement, and God’s grace, maybe it’s also okay to throw up our hands a little more often and just sit in the awe of God. We can turn to one another (sort of like Vicky and I did at Cumberland Island) and say things like, “Walking with God is like a dream sometimes isn’t it? Isn’t this amazing?”



Knowing more about God is great! But when you really think about it, isn’t coming to a place of awe when reflecting about God even better? Is our number one goal as followers of Christ to understand Christ better or is it to trust him more? Coming to know more about God is a good thing, but I think that it might be through finding ourselves awed by God that our lives have a better chance of truly changing!

Sincerely in Christ,  
Pastor James

## Worship in January

Between now and Ash Wednesday, the church calendar works through the season of Epiphany. Join us each Sunday as we use Gospel passages (largely from Mark) from the church lectionary to explore some of Jesus’ early ministry. In the same way the heavens opened and Jesus was revealed to be much more than a simple carpenter during his baptism and transfiguration, as we wrestle with each week’s Scriptures may we each come to see Christ in a new light this season!

### *New Lectionary Series: Epiphany is Here*

- January 3; Matthew 2:1-12, “Epiphany- Seeing the Light”  
-Epiphany Sunday
- January 10; Mark 1:4-11, “Epiphany - Torn Heaven”  
-Baptism of the Lord Sunday
- January 17; John 1:43-51, “Epiphany - God Descending”
- January 24; Mark 1:14-20, “Epiphany - Good News”
- January 31; Mark 1:21-28, “Epiphany - Impure Spirits”
- February 7; Mark 1:29-39, “Epiphany - Hide & Go Seek”  
-Celebration of the Lord’s Supper
- February 14; Mark 9: 2-9, “Epiphany - Not See but Listen”



## SEEING THE LIGHT DURING EPIPHANY



2020 has been a tough year for a lot of us. In challenging times it is easy to sometimes feel like darkness is closing in all around. However, the season of Epiphany is a season for the church to remember that Christ is a light that can penetrate any darkness. The word “Epiphany” means “manifestation” or “the revealing of the divine.” During the season of Epiphany we often explore Bible stories like the wisemen looking into sky and seeing the revelation of a child king or Jesus’s baptism and transfiguration where God revealed who Jesus was in a special way. In all of these stories, God’s revelations pierce the darkness.

During the season of Epiphany, God’s hope, love, peace, and joy can pierce all the darkness in our world as well. Here at Union, we will be doing 2 ministry programs to help each of us experience some of God’s light this year.

### God Sightings

During the Season of Epiphany we invite you to keep a careful look out for what God is doing in your life and in your midst. A God Sighting is anywhere you see God or Christ. Perhaps this month you will see the majesty of God or experience God’s peace or joy in a specific place. Maybe you will see the love of God through interactions with another or God might reveal something profound to you in Scripture or prayer. We invite you to write down your God Sightings and leave them in the offering plate the following week, contact the church office with them, or send us a message through our webpage ([www.unionpresbyterianchurch.com/godsightings](http://www.unionpresbyterianchurch.com/godsightings)).

These God sightings will be posted on Facebook, listed on our webpage and in worship. Reading of others experiences with God can often help us see more clearly where and how God is at work in our own lives! We hope this Epiphany project might open all of our eyes to God at work this year and fill us with joy!



### Blessing of the Home

During the season of Epiphany, Union’s Session also wants to come and pray for and bless your home. Please contact the church if you would like Pastor James and an Elder come and pray that God’s presence will be felt powerfully in your home during 2021. Maybe you even have some specific ways you would like to see God at work in your home or life this year. Pastor James and the Elder will also leave you a cross to hang up in your home with the initials CMB on it (standing for the Latin phrase “Christus Mansionem Benedicat” which translates “May Christ bless this home”). This follows the tradition of the early church (and continued in some Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches) of leaders blessing homes and marking the outside door frame in chalk with a CMB. We hope

that this cross might be a way to remember throughout the year that God is with you as you enter your home and whenever you leave it!

December 18, 2020

Union Presbyterian Church  
5811 Union Road  
Gastonia, NC 28056

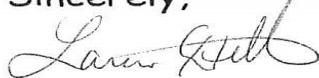
Response from  
New Hope Elementary  
Concerning the Angel Tree

Dear Mrs. Jordan,

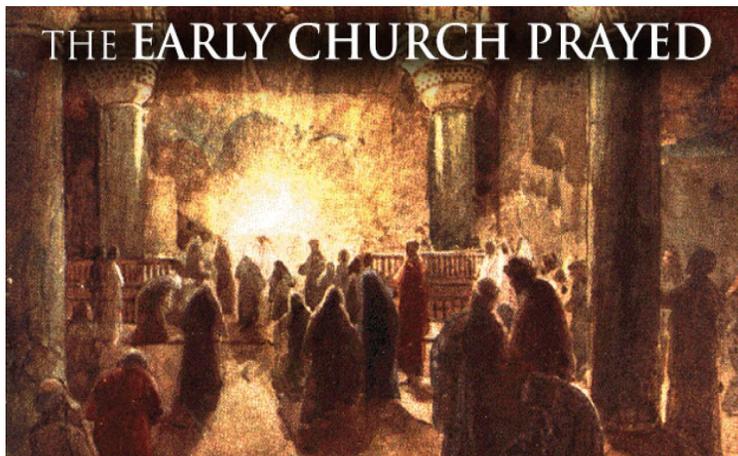
With my deepest sincerity, thank you so much for taking care of our students at Christmas. Thank you for reaching out to us to help our children in need. Your kindness and generosity was truly heartwarming. As our parents have come to pick up their gifts, I was blessed to witness the gratitude and relief they felt. Please know your acts of giving have made a huge impact on so many different levels.

I wish you all a wonderful and blessed holiday season. Praying for good health, safety, and love for all this coming year.

Sincerely,



Laura Axtell  
School Counselor



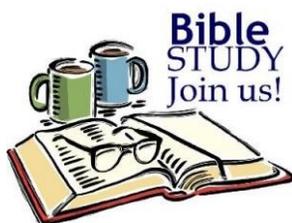
Prayers for us in 2021 from the Early  
Christian Church

O Almighty God, we are confident of this very thing, that he which has begun a good work in us, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: we pray that our love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that we may approve things that are excellent; that we may be sincere and without offense, till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. Amen. —*Adapted*: Philippians 1:6-11.

O God Almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Your only begotten Son, give me a body unstained, a pure heart, a watchful mind, an upright understanding, and the presence of Your Holy Spirit, that I may obtain and ever hold fast to an unshaken faith in Your Truth, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord; through whom be glory to You in the Holy Ghost, forever and ever. Amen. —Clement of Rome

Give perfection to beginners, O Father; give intelligence to the little ones; give aid to those who are running their course. Give sorrow to the negligent; give fervor of spirit to the lukewarm. Give to the those trying to live exemplary lives a good consummation; for the sake of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen. —Irenaeus

-O Lord God Almighty, who has built Your Church upon the foundation of the Apostles, under Christ the head corner-stone, and gave us the gift of the Holy Ghost; leave us not destitute of Your gifts and talents, nor the grace to make a right use of them always without any sordid self-ends. But instead may all the gifts You have graciously entrusted with us be used for your honor and glory; so that, we may be able to give a good account of our stewardship when the great Judge shall appear, the Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns with You and the Eternal Spirit, one God, blessed forever. Amen. —*Adapted*: Barnabas.



**Bible  
STUDY**  
Join us!

### **Bible Study- Isaiah**

Starting on January 5, the 10:00 AM Morning Bible Study will begin walking through a new book of the Bible... Isaiah. This prophetic book is a challenging one partly because it spans so many years of Judah's history and also because it is not always chronological. This is a great time to jump in and join our church's Bible Study group!

### **Celebrating the Lord's Supper**

We invite you to join us in celebrating the Lord's Supper on February 7. We will once again be providing special sealed bread and juice for Communion to keep the sacrament as safe as possible. The Lord's Supper will be made available at the Outdoor 9:00 AM Service, the Indoor 11:00 AM Service (if we are able to resume that service by then), and there will be a special video leading Communion as part of our online worship service as well.



### **Worship During the Pandemic**

At the beginning of January, we find ourselves worshiping 2 ways at Union: outside at 9:00 AM and online. We hope that hospitalization numbers due to Covid-19 will begin dropping in our area soon and we can once again have an indoor service. We will communicate to the congregation by the Remind App, phone tree, webpage, and Facebook when Session feels it is safe for us to be inside at 11:00 AM again. Until then, you can join us online using our interactive bulletin or worship with us outside at 9:00 AM (a shortened service due to weather in the upper church parking lot).

Please note that because of cold weather, our educational Westminster Catechism class also remains on hold for the month of January.



Thank you, Billy Jordan, Eddie Moton, Charlie Nelson & Billy Wilson for repairing the fascia board at my home.  
Jim Dotson

My Union Church Family, how I love working with you to advance the Kingdom of God! Thank you for being my church family (though I am a sheep of another pasture). Thank you for the wonderful Christmas gift; it was such a blessing! Father God gave me a great gift in YOU!  
Love, Nancy

Thank you all for my Christmas present. I am very thankful & blessed to be at Union Presbyterian and look forward to 2021.  
Love, Sherry

Dear Union, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you all for the ability to clean the House of our Lord. This March will be ten years that I have been cleaning and have been truly blessed with this opportunity to do something I enjoy doing while make some supplemental income to help support my family. I look forward to another year of keeping our church clean and sanitary for the hopefully increased usage in 2021. Wishing you all a blessed and healthy New Year. Keep shining your light allowing people to see Christ through you.  
Sincerely, Your Brother in Christ, Jason Morrison

Dear Union Church, My family and I wish to thank you for all the love, support, and prayers this last year! Thank you for the amazing Christmas gift and all the ways you continue to be a blessing for my entire family!  
In Christ, Pastor James

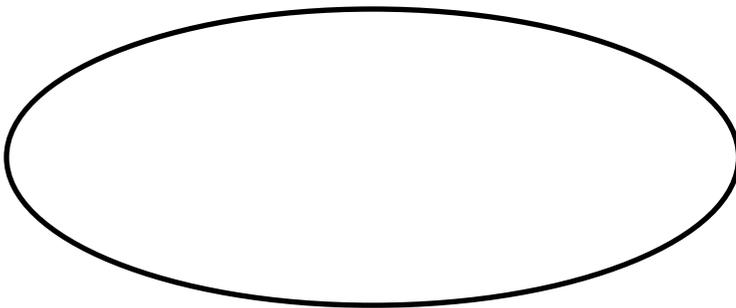


**FINANCIAL REPORT AS OF  
NOVEMBER 30, 2020**

	<u>November</u>	<u>Year to Date</u>
Revenue	\$28,163	\$201,763
Expenses	<u>14,895</u>	<u>186,326</u>
	13,268	15,437

**Monthly Budget Requirements     \$19,124**

If you have any questions regarding the financial information of the Church, please feel free to contact Martha Simmons, Disbursing Treasurer, or any member of the Finance Committee. Martha is responsible for disbursements only. Questions regarding your financial giving to the Church should be directed to Billy Wilson, Treasurer.



**PRESBYTERIAN PRAYER CALENDAR**

**January 3**

Tryon  
430 Harmon Field Road  
Tryon, NC 28782  
[tpreschurch@windstream.net](mailto:tpreschurch@windstream.net)

**January 10**

Union  
5615 Union Road  
Gastonia, NC 28056  
[Unionpc5615@gmail.com](mailto:Unionpc5615@gmail.com)



**January 17**  
Union Mills  
2378 Centennial Road  
Union Mills, NC 28167  
[ksward@blueridge.net](mailto:ksward@blueridge.net)

**January 24**

United  
P.O. Box 1495  
Lenior, NC 28645  
[office@unitedpclenior.net](mailto:office@unitedpclenior.net)

**January 31**

Unity  
8210 Unity Church Road  
Denver, NC 28037  
[unity@unitypres.org](mailto:unity@unitypres.org)



SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					<b>1</b> Happy New Year	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b> 2:30 PM SOC	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b> 10 AM Bible Study  6 PM B & G	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>10</b> After 9 AM service W & C 2:30 PM W & S	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b> 10 AM Bible Study  6 PM C & T	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>17</b>  2:30 PM Session	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>31</b>						

**Union Presbyterian Church**

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Gastonia, NC 28056  
Phone: 704-864-7681  
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unionpc5615@gmail.com  
www.unionpresbyterianchurch.com

**Non-Profit Organization**  
**U.S. Postage Paid**  
**Permit No. 8**  
**Return Service Requested**

Reverend James Holeman  
Pastor

Sherry Maples  
Music Director/Accompanist

Nancy Newman  
Administrative Assistant

Church Hours  
9:00 AM—1:00 PM  
Tuesday—Friday  
Office Closed Monday and Saturday

**SAVE THE DATES**

February 7	Communion
February 17	Ash Wednesday
March 28	Palm Sunday
April 4	Easter Sunday