

# Parish Happenings

December 2020

## FROM PASTOR CHAD

The season of Advent is upon us. Our virtual Giving Fair is live (<http://givingfair.lowervalley.org>), our sanctuary has been greened, and our tree sale is in full swing. Yet, we are all very aware that this year will be different. The season of Advent will most certainly feel darker, colder, and more bleak. Still, even with out being able to gather for worship, hope remains.



Yes, there is hopeful news on the vaccine front, and there is hope for a more coordinated and competent government response to this pandemic, but there is a much deeper hope that abides. This deeper hope is the hope of every Advent. It is the hope proclaimed by prophets from long past and those of the recent past alike. The hope that binds us together even when we are required to remain masked and distanced from family, friends, and siblings in faith.

Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem

*Isaiah 40:1*

The hope I speak of is that rooted in the words of the prophet Isaiah who spoke words of comfort in the midst of deep darkness and confusion for God's people. Yes, the people have suffered, but God's promises are not in doubt and words of comfort are in order.

This hope is also the hope John the Baptist who came out of the wilderness preaching "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." John's words are also rooted in Isaiah and at first glance seem less comforting — John's words require something of us (namely repentance). But, John trusted that God was breaking into the world in a new and dramatic way if the people would just ready themselves.

Finally, this hope is the proclamation that God is alive and active in the world even when the physical evidence suggests otherwise. Jesus constantly taught that the Kingdom of God was present. He demonstrated the presence of the Kingdom in his teaching and in his miracles, but just as importantly he called his disciples to live the very presence of God's Kingdom.

Advent is a season of hope. A time to reflect on God's promises and God's presence and it is a time to heighten our awareness to God's activity in the world around us. Advent is less about what God has done and more about what God is doing even in the darkness of a pandemic.

May we all find in this slower version of the American holiday season a deeper hope. May we put behind us the rushing frenzied Advent's of the past and take comfort in a living God who longs to gather us in like a shepherd gathering in his lambs.

*Cleal*

## **MISSION NEWS**

### **Annual Giving Fair**

This marks the 18th year of our annual Giving Fair. This year we are going virtual due to COVID-19 restrictions. The Virtual Giving Fair began on "Giving Tuesday", December 1 and will close on Saturday, December 21. We'd like to thank Mike Reaves for working so hard on developing our Virtual Giving Fair website that allows people to purchase symbolic gifts through donations to charities. You can access the virtual giving fair through the church website under the mission tab or at this link [givingfair.lowervalley.org](http://givingfair.lowervalley.org). Remember the reason for the season. This is gift giving that changes lives.

### **Christmas Tree Sale Underway**

On Saturday, November 28 a caravan of cars drove to BJ's Tree Farm to pick up trees. Thanks to all who donated your time and muscles to pick up the trees and set them up at church. The church began selling Christmas Trees on Sunday, November 29. We will be selling trees the next couple of weekends until Christmas. If you are able to volunteer your time, please sign up on the Sign Up Genius link. <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60b0c45a8aa28a0f94-lvpc1>



"The Crew"



A happy customer!



Flooded tree yard

## **NOMINATING COMMITTEE NEWS**

We have a few openings on our Nominating Committee and Session. If you are interested in serving on the Nominating Committee or Session, please contact Marilyn El-Zahr at 908-392-0934 or [marilyn.lastname@gmail.com](mailto:marilyn.lastname@gmail.com).

## **BIBLE STUDIES AND YOUTH GROUPS**

**Women's Bible study** meets the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays of the month (December 2 and 16), from 7:00-8:30 in the Parish Hall. We are currently studying the book of Esther. Please join us!

**Men's Fellowship:** There's plenty of bible study, but that's not all. Join us on Saturdays at 8 a.m. on Zoom. We share life and wrestle with scripture together. At the present we're spending time in the Gospel of Judges. Contact Chad to join.

### **Middle School Youth Group (6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders)**

Yes, we are living in a difficult time to gather a group of middle schoolers and let them run wild in the Parish Hall for an hour and a half each week, however, we all still need community. Middle school youth group takes place on Wednesdays from 7-8:30. You'll need a mask and we'll remain socially distanced, but we can gather for some 9 square, prayer, bible study, and other socially distanced games.

### **High School Youth Group**

We're too large to meet in person, so keep watch for details on upcoming meetings. Rest assured we will make sure that you all get to take Pastor Chad's famous Christmas quiz!

## **STEWARDSHIP REMINDER**

Please remember to return your 2021 pledge offering card as soon as possible so that Session can begin planning the budget for next year. You should have received a stewardship campaign letter a few weeks ago. If you didn't receive it, please let the office know.

December 2020  
Lower Valley Presbyterian Church  
445 County Road 513  
Califon, NJ 07830

## **The Vision of our Church**

Lower Valley Presbyterian Church is a community of believers who worship God in word and deed, nurture each other through prayer, friendship, and education, and seek to serve others in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Our four areas of ministry are faith development, caring for each other, outreach ministry and supporting ministry.