

Byron Presbyterian Church
"The Spirit" Church Newsletter
January – February 2021

Annual Meeting

of the Congregation and Corporation
Sunday, January 24, following 9:45 AM Worship

Elect new church leaders
Review the 2021 church budget
Discuss who we are and where we are going!

The Basics

Sunday Worship begins at 9:45 AM, in the church sanctuary and on Zoom.
Sunday School and Nursery Care are currently on hold due to the virus, except for occasional gatherings in the Dining Room.

Contact Pastor Jim Renfrew at 548-2800

Sunday Worship 9:45 AM

The Byron Presbyterian Church is open on Sunday mornings for 9:45 AM Worship, of course with the health precautions you would expect. Our service can also be joined on Zoom from home at the same hour. Please look inside this newsletter for the Zoom access codes you will need to sign on via your computer or telephone.

A Star in the East *Keep Your Eye on the Sky Quiz*

- 1. On a clear night how many stars are usually visible in the sky?** (a) 200-300 (b) 2000-3000 (c) 2-3 million
- 2. One theory is that the star over Bethlehem was a planetary alignment. What is the technical name for such an alignment?** (a) Galileus (b) Syzygy (c) Conjunction (d) Ptolomeyism
- 3. What modern description could we use to describe the magi?** (a) Wizards (b) Sorcerers (c) Astrologers (d) Palm-readers
- 4. It is traditionally believed that the magi came from what eastern country?** (a) China (b) India (c) Persia (d) Babylonia
- 5. Another explanation for the star over Bethlehem is that it was a**

(a) Super-Nova (b) Comet (c) Globular Cluster (d) Black Hole

Nowhere else in history was the Star mentioned or reported, no one but Matthew. How could millions of people not have seen it? The Bible is not meant to be a scientific textbook, its purpose is to get our attention about what's really important, its purpose is to get us thinking of the big picture, its purpose is to get us looking up in hope rather than down in despair. When it comes to stories like the Star over Bethlehem think not "science", but "poetry", "music" or "art". God is trying to reach us in every way possible, God is composing stirring poetry, God is singing to us, God is painting a beautiful picture. In our world filled with so many distractions, with our heads buried in the sand of simply surviving each day, it's important to see that big picture of what God is doing in the world to stir hearts everywhere, getting us to look up to find inspiration to live lives not filled with fear or dread, but dedicated to peace, justice, love and hope.

Answers: 1-b (if your vision is 20-20), 2-d (a great Scrabble word), 3-c (they studied the stars seeking omens and portents), 4-d, 5-a or b,

Session Notes

Session has now hired Matthew Hilbert to serve as Zoom Manager each Sunday. Approximately one half of our worshipers each Sunday join us on Zoom. Session has approved a bid from Parson's to repair our organ, using Piano and Memorial Funds. Session has also approved a bid from Able Electric for an upgrade to our sanctuary electric system. The Annual Meeting of the Congregation has been called for Sunday, January 24, immediately following worship.

Deacons

Deacons meet following worship on January 10th. Generous holiday contributions allowed us to present stockings for children at the North Bergen Food Pantry, as well as financial support to the Christmas season work of the Byron Bergen Faculty Association.

We continue to gather food contributions for the emergency food distribution by Genesee County Churches United at the Salvation Army building in Batavia. Place items in the food cart at the side entrance to the church and we will make sure that they get to Batavia.

Prayer Chain: Too Heavy?

Ever see one of these signs as you drive onto an old bridge? Could there be a weight limit on our prayers? Imagine this, that some prayers are too heavy to get off the ground and rise to heaven. So, instead, just pray for the light, fluffy stuff? Pray for a sunny day, but don't bother with a prayer for world peace because that one's just way too heavy!

Fortunately, our Prayer Chain pays no mind to minimum or maximum weight prayers. They're all important, and it may be that our prayers defy basic science with the heaviest prayers rising most quickly! No scale needed, just contact the Church Office.

Stewardship & Finance

2021 Offering Envelopes are now available, even if you have not submitted a 2021 Estimate of Giving card. Please speak to Robin Glazier and she will provide a box for you.

Byron PC on Facebook

Byron Presbyterian Church is on Facebook. We're easy to find, just search for "Byron Presbyterian Church" when you get to Facebook. You can also find a link to the Facebook page when visiting our website, byronfpc.org. Become one of our friends!

Newsletter Information

The newsletter is usually sent bi-monthly, but sometimes more frequently in the fall. The deadline for submissions is Sunday, February 21 for the March-April issue. We prefer to send the newsletter to you as an e-mail attachment. Please submit your email address to the church office, 548-2800. We will not give out your address without your permission. The newsletter is always posted to the church website, www.byronfpc.org, and pieces of it appear from day to day on our Facebook page. If you miss the Sunday worship service you can see each week's Sunday bulletin and most sermons on line, too.

Thank You!

We have received many positive comments from our newsletter readers, and we welcome your encouragement. We invite you to keep our Byron Presbyterian Church newsletter coming to you in months and years to come. If you are not already a church contributor, your contribution to help cover mailing and Internet costs would be welcomed. Checks may be made out to "Byron Presbyterian Church". Thank you!

- YES, I want to help support the cost of the Byron Presbyterian Church newsletter. I enclose \$__.
- I prefer to receive the newsletter as an e-mail attachment
- I prefer to receive the newsletter through the US Mail

Name

Address

Town/City

State

Zip

Phone

E-mail

Note: we do not circulate or publish e-mail addresses

Vital Congregations Initiative

While the national Vital Congregations Initiative has taken an Advent break and will resume in January, we at Byron Presbyterian are still working on new strategies for the coming year. We know that we are still in Phase 1 of getting to know the Seven Marks. This entails understanding how our church family applies the Marks as well as how and where we could do more within each Mark. Last spring, I tried to define each of the Seven Marks in a single sentence. That worked somewhat but what if we tried to reduce that to one or two words! I became aware of this the other night at Session when Rev. Renfrew opened the session with a "VCI Reflection on Outward

Incarnational Focus". He asked me if I remembered what I had written in the spring to explain this Mark. Absolutely not! But, I did remember it was mission focused. If I could just remember this much, I would be in much better shape to not only answer questions but incorporate the Seven Marks into my life and the life of the church. So, here goes:

- Mark 1: Deepening Faith
- Mark 2: Sharing the Good News
- Mark 3: Community Mission
- Mark 4: Servant Leadership
- Mark 5: Spirit Inspired Worship
- Mark 6: Caring Relationships
- Mark 7: Prayerful Discernment
(of God's calling)

At Session, Rev, Renfrew posed two questions to think about related to Mark 3: What does our community need? What does our community think of us? This refers to the community around us not just to the community within our walls. This is Genesee County, the Town of Byron, Byron-Bergen School, North Bergen Presbyterian Church, the migrant community, and the national and international church. These are all places where we have answered some of the need; but, what else and where else? The second question deals with finding out more about what the people around the more immediate area think of us. How do we know? Is there a way we could find out? And, what do we do with what we learn? The Vital Congregations Initiative will ask us to find answers to these questions. That is exciting work! Think about how each of us can join in this adventure! We can do it!

May 2021 bring God's many blessings to everyone. Please stay safe.

Ruth Andes

Annual Meeting , January 24

The Annual meeting of the Congregation and Corporation of the Byron Presbyterian Church will take place on Sunday, January 24 immediately following worship. We will receive the 2020 financial statement, review the proposed 2021 budget, elect new church officers, hear reports from church committees, adopt changes in the sexual misconduct policy, and conduct any other business that may come before us. The Annual Report will be distributed by e-mail and US Mail to all church members in advance of the meeting. If you are not a member, you may request a copy of the report by contacting Rev. Jim Renfrew.

Congregational Learning Day March 6th, 8:30 - 11:30 AM

6 Virtual Classes to choose from

Worship led by Rev Dr. Stanley Bhasker from the Bath, NY Presbyterian Church. He is delighted to be a part of the learning day which includes both Geneva and Genesee Valley Presbyteries.

8:30 – 9 AM Meet and Greet

9 - 9:30 AM Introductions & Worship

9:30 – 11:30 AM Courses

(offered simultaneously in separate Zoom rooms)

Called and Equipped: Training for Elders & Deacons *Rev. Laura Fry & Rev. Mike Fry*

Finance Forum (formerly Church Treasurer Forum) *Cheryl Battaglia & Colleen Allen*

Essentials for Trustees, Finance and Property Elders *Barb James*

Rethinking Stewardship – New Strategies for Changing Times *Rev. Roula Alkhouri*

The Cross and the Lynching Tree *a book study on racism and the church with Rev. Deb Grohman*

Teaching without Preaching *Rev. Colin Pritchard*

As this year we are all virtual, there are no fees. If interested, please contact Rev. Jim Renfrew.

Music to Lift our Spirits

Every year, for the January edition of the *Spirit*, I always give a list of resolutions to consider for the New Year ahead, in terms of singing and joining the choir! As we enter this new year, I would just like to offer a simple invitation: Come join the choir! We are committed church family with a love for serving our Lord through the gifts of music. We meet most Wednesday evenings from 7:00-8:00 pm. There is ALWAYS room for more, even during these tumultuous times. We are committed to singing SAFELY and RESPONSIBLY in our musical servitude. Finally, if you don't think that you can sing, the answer is, YES, YOU CAN! You just haven't found your true voice yet. Come find it and share it with us in 2021! We hope to see new singers in the Wednesdays to come!

[Laurence Tallman, Music Director]

CHORUS REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

JANUARY:

6 (Wednesday) – Practice, 7:00
13 (Wednesday) – Practice, 7:00
20 (Wednesday) – Practice, 7:00
27 (Wednesday) – Practice, 7:00
31 (Sunday) – ANTHEM SUNDAY; practice 9 AM

FEBRUARY:

3 (Wednesday) – Practice, 7:00
10 (Wednesday) – Practice, 7:00
17 (Wednesday) – Practice, 7:00
24 (Wednesday) – Practice, 7:00
28 (Sunday) – ANTHEM SUNDAY; practice 9 AM

Ash Wednesday, Feb. 17th

We invite you to receive ashes on Wednesday, February 17, 6:30 PM, during a brief service prior to 7:00 PM choir practice. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent, a time of preparation for the Cross

Mission News

Here's a photo showing all of the Christmas boxes prepared at North Bergen Presbyterian Church for distribution to families in the community. We collected Christmas stocking items at Byron Presbyterian to include with this effort. Many thanks to those donated!

The **Food Pantry** at North Bergen Presbyterian Church distributes food Wednesdays, January 20 and 27, 5:30-8:30 p.m. and Saturdays, January 16 and 23, 9:30 a.m. to noon. Mission Associate Jordan Sloat invites you to join him there. Patty Iamon invites you to contribute warm winter clothing to the Food Pantry, such as coats, scarves, sweaters, gloves and hats.

Backpack Program: Food insecurity is a growing issue in our community during continued Covid concerns. We always appreciate monetary donations to help keep the program running. We are now assembling the bags in our own church basement.

Trustees

Happy New Year from Trustees!

The company that maintains our pipe organ recommended that we have the wind reservoir restored. There have been several patches installed over the years but it is time to remove it and have this done. Larry has assured us that he can provide music with our piano while this is being completed.

The church electrical upgrade will be starting soon with the installation of a new panel box. This will allow us to proceed (as we can afford to) with several other prioritized updates in the future.

We appreciate those who volunteer to shovel the sidewalks and front steps for Sundays through the Winter season. There is a sign up sheet in the rear of the sanctuary or you can contact Tom Nesbitt if you would like to help. Please remember when there is snow to be careful walking on the West side of the side entrance. When the sun hits or the temperature rises there can be a small avalanche of snow off the roof without notice.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact any of the Trustees. [**Tom Nesbitt, Chair**]

Zoom Access Info

For Zoom access codes, please contact the church office at 548-2800.

Coffee Hour / Tea Time

4:00 PM on Tuesdays

I don't drink coffee or tea, never have, and I'm fairly sure I never will, but many of the rest of you do! So bring your own cup at 4:00 PM, traditional British Tea Time via Zoom. It's a virtual gathering, just as well because I couldn't brew coffee or boil tea to save my life. Contact Rev. Renfrew for access information.

Ways to Give

There are offering plates at the front and rear of the sanctuary where you can place your offerings as you enter or depart. No plates will be passed. You may send offerings by check to: Byron Presbyterian Church, PO Box 206, Byron, NY 14422-0206. We now have a secure on-line donation feature. Please visit our website at <http://byronfpc.com> and click the big "Give Now" button at the top . We have arranged access to Vanco for on-line contributions through the Presbyterian Foundation.

Free Food Distribution

If you have any concerns about food, our neighboring congregation, the North Bergen Presbyterian Church, offers free Foodlink food distribution on 3rd and 4th Wednesdays, 5:30 - 8:00 PM, and 3rd & 4th Saturdays, 9:00 AM - 12:30 PM. North Bergen also welcomes your donations of food and funding. For more information, please call Pastor Dave 290-5487.

Preaching Texts

JAN 3	Psalm 147	"Snow, Frost & Hail"
JAN 10	Psalm 29	"Over the Waters"
JAN 17	Psalm 139	"What God Knows"
JAN 24	Psalm 65	"My Rock and Salvation"
JAN 31	Micah 6:1-8	"God Has Told You"
FEB 7	Mark 1	"Jesus Starts Out"
FEB 14	Mark 1:40-42	"Jesus Chooses"
FEB 21	Mark 2:1-12	"Nothing Like This!"
FEB 28	Psalm 26:1-10	"Lift Up My Soul"

In case you miss a Sunday, sermons are usually posted each week on the church web site.

We Get Letters

"To the congregation of Byron First Presbyterian Church: On behalf of the entire Byron Bergen Faculty and our community we would like to thank you for your continued support in our Holiday Fundraising. Your generous donation will be put to great use helping to purchase holiday essentials for more than sixty children. Merry Christmas to you!" **[Byron Bergen Faculty Association]**

On December 8 we arranged for Janet Pike to be honored during the worship service for her work as our church secretary. She had retired in January, but because of the pandemic we waited for a safer moment to honor her.

"Thank you so very much for the generous gift for my retirement." **[Janet Pike]**

Bible Study

Our next Bible Study will be Tuesday, January 19th, 7:00 PM. It's all on Zoom contact Pastor Renfrew for access information. All are welcome! We are fortunate to have a team of Bible Study leaders available for each month's Bible Study .

Rev. Renfrew will lead the January session, a conversation about Micah 6:1-8, "***God has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.***"

For us this is the start of an "onion exercise" or an "artichoke challenge". If you strip away the outer layers of the Biblical message, what do you discover at the core? There are many such examples to consider, such as the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Parable of the Great Judgment", or Jesus' instructions on the mountaintop after the resurrection. Micah's "core" teaching is our doorway into this conversation and it leads us to share what each participant thinks is at the core of Biblical belief. [Rev. Jim Renfrew]

Christian Education & Worship Committee

As our Christmas season draws to a close, we would like to take a moment to thank everyone that worked behind the scenes and out front to make this season as meaningful and traditional as possible during a year with more than a few challenges. Our sanctuary was decorated for the season. Our candles were lit during Advent and even on Christmas Eve, with the help of a battery, our candlelight service went on.

We caroled, we had cookies, we sang, we celebrated. For those that could not join in person we offered Zoom services as well as telephone and parking lot serenades! We found ways to be together! We discovered that God has given us the ability to think, to plan, to pivot. If we cannot do this, then let's find a way we CAN do that! What a gift!

Christmas doesn't end on December 25th. We are headed toward Epiphany, toward Lent, toward Easter. We will continue to work to offer everyone the very best worship experience we can. Let's all do our part. Reach out to someone in the congregation you might not normally call. If you are feeling a bit down or blue - let someone know. Social distance is in place to keep us healthy, but that distance can also bring us down. Let's all work together to stay connected. Join a Zoom service or the Tuesday Zoom coffee hour. If you have new ideas for programs, chat rooms, etc. - let us know!! Or if you would rather speak with Rev. Renfrew or someone else on the committee please reach out to them. We'll see what we can do to make it happen.

On behalf of the Christian Education and Worship Committee, we wish you continued Christmas blessings and a happy, healthy new year!

From the Pastor ; "Pack Your Bags, Load Up Your Camel!"

Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child ..." [Matthew 2:1-2a]

We call them the Three Kings, the Wise Men, or the Magi, but in everyday life they were teachers, philosophers, or sages. More accurately, they were astrologers who tried to understand, explain and predict human events from the movements of the stars and planets.

Some people think they came from Babylon, a great city far from Bethlehem across the desert. Perhaps their primary job was to give advice to the rulers of Babylon about matters of war and peace, planting and harvests, justice and sharing, or life and death. Each night they would look to the heavens and in the morning report to the king to give their advice. Their job, in short, was **illumination**. In a dark world, they were the ones who

could tell others where to find the candle, the spark, the light switch, or the pilot light. They were dedicated to illumination, not just for themselves, but for others, which is why their illumination becomes our illumination.

They must have spent a lot of time looking up at the sky ... watching ... looking ... wondering ... thinking ... dreaming. You can see between two and three thousand stars in the sky on a clear night, if you have good vision. The wise men saw many amazing things: eclipses, comets, meteors, the phases of the moon, the movement of Jupiter and Mars and Venus. But one dark night they saw a light that they had never seen before. What kind of light was it? Some think it was star brighter than any other, others that it was bigger, or more sparkling. The story in Matthew doesn't say. But one thing we do know; when they saw the star they decided to stop their daily routine and to risk something new. They crossed over the boundaries of their existence and they followed that star. Without hearing a single word they understood its message: come and see something new and illuminate your life.

Some modern astronomers have speculated that the star in the sky was a large comet, or a planetary conjunction, a far-away exploding star, a supernova. But such explanations would have meant nothing to the wise men. Because their concern was not what caused the star; their concern was what it meant. Something so unusually big or bright must mean that God is doing something amazing. And if God is doing something amazing, let's go find out what it is.

By the way, I think that's what it means to belong to a church. Whether its Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian or Catholic, the point of our existence as Christians is to tell our friends and neighbors what God has done, is doing in Jesus Christ. The world is not stuck in sin and pain, because God is doing something about it! If God is doing something important in this world, we're the ones who invite others to come and take a look. God is working for healing, forgiveness, peace and justice, come along and see, take a look, get involved!

I always wondered why only the wise men traveled to Bethlehem. Surely others saw the star too? But the Wise men were the only ones to go looking. Maybe many people intended to go, wanted to go, even had their bags packed and camels loaded up, but only these were the ones who actually made the journey.

Think of all the things we intend to do, but don't. Even the most common intentions in our lives are difficult to complete: to repair a leaking faucet, to clean the closet, to telephone a friend, to call the doctor, or to get some exercise. Yet so few intentions are completed - though the light appeared, the idea flashed, the star shone. And if the star is not followed, then nothing happens. Everything remains the same. That star is not there to be watched, it's there to be followed. Those three were wise, because when they saw that new star indicating a new life, a new king, a new ruler, a new child they followed faithfully, in spite of all the uncertainty and the risks. Let us follow this star, too, until we arrive.

Blessings and Peace in the New Year,

Jim Renfrew, Pastor

