

Gray Weekly News



Week Leading to Sunday, November 28, 2021

Jesus Before Christmas

By Rebekah Simon-Peter, www.ministrymatters.com

Christmas wasn't always part of the Christian experience. There's no record that Jesus or his disciples or the early church celebrated Christmas at all, as they did all the Jewish holy days and holidays. In fact, the first Christmas or Christ Mass wasn't celebrated until the 4th century.

It's likely Jesus wasn't even born in the winter. Rather, it's thought that December 25 was chosen as a day to celebrate his birth because it coincided with a pre-existing pagan festival. That would make it easy for non-Christians to add a new layer of meaning to their old celebrations. Stuff happens in the history of religion. December 25, however, wasn't merely the date of a pagan festival. It also overlaps with a festival that Jesus did actually celebrate.

Like Jews of his time, Jesus celebrated the Feast of Dedication, which occurs on the 25th of Kislev, a month in the Jewish calendar that most closely approximates December. "At that time," John's Gospel relates, "the Feast of Dedication took place in Jerusalem; it was winter. Jesus was walking in the Temple in the portico of Solomon. Tell us," the Jews said, "if you are the Messiah." Their comments were fitting, because the Feast of Dedication remembered

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First Sunday of Advent



Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalm 25:1-10

1st Thessalonians 3:9-13

Luke 1:5-20

“The Advent of Hope”

News and Notes

THIS WEEK

Sunday, November 28

Please join us on Sundays at 11 am. If you don't feel comfortable coming in person, you can watch our livestream at graymemorialumc.org/facebook.com or graymemorialumc.org/youtube, at 11 am or any time after that at graymemorialumc.org/



If you have prayer requests, please contact Norma Adams, Jennifer Skinner or Gail Teems.

You may also call the church office at 850/385-6441 or send a text to 850/933-8469.

2021 Church Financial Report

Budgeted Amount thru 12/31/21	\$ 151,400
Giving Amount as of 11/21/21	\$ 118,969
Amount Needed thru 12/31/21	\$ 32,431

ONLINE GIVING NOW AVAILABLE : For your convenience, we have established online giving through the church management program, Breeze. Here is the link:

<https://gmumc.Breezechms.com/give/online>

If you prefer, you can **text a contribution to 850/695-3434**. If you have questions regarding this, please call Anita Durham at the church on Tuesday or Thursday mornings. You can mail a check to 2201 Old Bainbridge Rd., Tallahassee, FL 32303. Thank you!

BASKETBALL AND BIBLE



This past Sunday, Pastor Beth announced a new initiative for Gray Memorial called "Basketball and Bible." This is a new ministry effort that will cost a little to establish, but will reap many rewards in the future for the community involvement of our church.

The Trustees have agreed to purchase one semi-professional basketball goal to be installed on the edge of the church parking lot. The parking lot will be painted as a half-court with free throw area. We already have several groups of neighbors who frequent the one portable basketball goal often and enjoy having a location nearby that welcomes them. **We are collecting a special offering to help pay for the goal and supplies to for this effort. The special envelopes printed for this purpose are available from the usher's station.** The new basketball goal and painted court will be enjoyed by our members, their children and the surrounding community for years to come and will serve as a wonderful example of Gray Memorial's outreach efforts. Please see Pastor Beth if you have questions.

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The last time a deliverer had arisen to save them from oppression. It was past time for another; the Roman experience was a cruel one indeed. The Feast of Dedication commemorates the rededication of the second Temple in Jerusalem, after its utter desecration at the brutal hands of Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 or 168 BCE. Today, that feast is known by its Hebrew name, Chanukah. Although Hanukkah (Feast of Dedication) only gets a line or two in the New Testament, it actually plays a significant role in the birth of Jesus.

To explain, we look back in history over three hundred years before the birth of Christ. Alexander the Great ruled the ancient world around the Eastern Mediterranean. After conquering the Persian Empire, Greek culture, or Hellenism, spread like wildfire. The Jews living in Israel quickly found themselves surrounded by it, and then almost swallowed up by it. Hellenism was to the ancient world what Western culture is to the modern world. Just as you can find a McDonald's in nearly every corner of the world, not to mention American pop music, blue jeans, TV re-runs, Western style Christianity, and the English language, so in that day, you could find Greek culture, religion, and language permeating every other culture of the world. Needless to say, it wasn't all good, especially for those in the minority, like the Jews. It put their entire distinctive way of life at risk.

After Alexander died, his empire was split into quarters and the region including Israel and Syria was eventually inherited by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Epiphanes means "face of God," but a more apt description was the moniker the Jews gave him: "Epimanes" or "crazy man." He was the Hitler of the intertestamental period. He was obsessed with wiping out the Jewish people. He began with the slaughter of the citizens of Jerusalem and the desecration of the Temple.

Alfred Edersheim explains what happened in his book, [The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah](#): "All sacrifices, the service of the Temple, and the observance of the Sabbath and of feast days were prohibited; the Temple at Jerusalem was dedicated to Jupiter Olympus (a Greek god); the Torah was searched for and destroyed; the Jews forced to take part in heathen rites; in short, every insult was heaped on the religion of the Jews, and its every trace was to be swept away." Antiochus was bent on genocide. The final straw was the slaughter of a pig on the sacrificial altar in the Temple. Definitely not kosher. This occurred on the 25th of Kislev, the month that generally corresponds to our December.

A Jewish deliverer rose up, whose name was Mattathias. Even though they were outnumbered and overpowered, under his leadership the Jewish people began a campaign of guerilla warfare against Antiochus and his Syrian armies to reclaim the Temple. Mattathias died fighting, but his five sons carried on, including one whose name you might know: Judah Maccabee. He led the fighting till the Temple could be purified and its services restored.

Christmas without Hanukkah

Exactly three years after its desecration, the Temple was rededicated. This took place on the 25th of Kislev, approximately 165 years before the nativity of Christ. If Antiochus had carried out his

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plan for genocide of all the Jews, there would have been no Mary, no Joseph, and no Jesus. There would have been no Messiah of Israel, no Savior of the World. Bottom line: without Hanukkah, there would probably be no Christmas.

As we prepare for Advent, let us remember the minor Jewish holiday that celebrates freedom of religion and which makes possible the major Christian one. Let's do like Jesus did and rededicate ourselves to freedom of religious expression, to the freedom that allows our devotion to God, to the freedom that motivates us truly love each other.

ADVENT POINSETTIA ORDER FORMS

We will be placing poinsettias in the Sanctuary again this year to celebrate Advent. The poinsettia plants are \$10 each and can be purchased to honor a loved one or in memory of a deceased family member or friend. The order forms will be in the bulletins for the next 3 weeks; deadline for ordering is December 12. The poinsettias will be placed in the Sanctuary on December 19.



Prayer Requests

Betty Hair, still in rehab recovering from recent fall

Sam Adams - continued recovery

Family of Brenna MacKinlay, 17 yr old with leukemia - family members with health issues

Bella Gray-Helene West & the Maxwell's young niece, needs continued prayers

Chris, Sarah, Rose, Nancy and George

Joyce Brady - ongoing health issues

All those who are suffering from accidents, illnesses and surgery

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, November 24		No Choir Practice or Bible Study this week
Thursday, Nov. 25		THANKSGIVING DAY Church will be closed
Sunday, Nov. 28	9:30 am 11 am	Advent Bible Study with Pastor Beth Worship Service*
Wednesday, Dec. 1	7 pm	Advent Bible Study via Zoom, led by Pastor Beth
Thursday, Dec. 2	8:30 am 10 am 5:30 pm	Yoga Class Bible Study Yoga Class
	6:30 pm	SPRC Training with District Superintendent Wayne Wiatt via Zoom
Sunday, Dec. 5	9:30 am 11 am	Advent Bible Study with Pastor Beth Worship Service*