



Sandston Presbyterian Church Newsletter December 2023

Worship Service is at 11:00am every Sunday in person.

Sunday School Classes (9:45am)

- The Shurley Class: meets in room 7
- Men's & Women's Class: meets in the library

CONTACT US...

Email us:

sandspres@verizon.net

Call us: **804-737-1527**

Office hours: **Monday -
Thursday (8:30am -
1:30pm)**

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@sandstonpc

Check out our website:
www.sandstonpc.org



A Note from Pastor Todd...

Christmas is a time for traditions. I'd wager every family has them in some way, shape, or form. In my family growing up, we had a specific order things were done on Christmas morning so that – especially when my brother and I were younger – 'Christmas' wasn't over by mid-morning. And while I would guess that there is some uniformity in everyone's traditions there are certainly also some tweaks and unique things rooted in a person's specific family history and experience. I thought about this recently when I read an article by Nancy Haught titled; *Christmas Symbols are in the Eye of the Beholder*. My life experience has led me to believe that while there is certainly black-and-white in the world there is also a whole lot of gray. I don't know that I had ever thought of this in regard to Christmas though so I thought I'd share. May this holiday season and all its traditions bless you richly.

Pastor Todd

When is a candy cane not just a candy cane?

For some people, its red and white stripes might signify the sacrifice and purity of Jesus, or maybe just a 19th-century candy-maker's twist intended to dazzle his grandchildren. Both stories are alive and well on the Internet.

Is Santa Claus the imagined incarnation of the fourth-century St. Nicholas of Myra, the vision of a 19th-century poet or the carefully rendered creation of a 20th-century ad man?

And there's the tree. Is it a powerful, pre-Christian sign of enduring life? Or what remains of Martin Luther's Reformation teaching moment? Perhaps a natural reminder of renewal and hope, or a spiritual testament to resurrection?

Christmas has become a hybrid holiday, a mix of sacred and secular, depending on who is celebrating it. For some, the holiday is a religious occasion recalling the birth of Jesus. For others, Christmas signals the end of winter's darkness and the promise of returning light. Christmas may be a day devoted to family and memories of a shared past, or an opportunity to exchange gifts, even an opportunity to boost the struggling U.S. economy.

If Christmas has come to mean different things to different people, then it's not surprising that some familiar Christmas symbols bear the weight of more than one interpretation.

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"Everything is open to interpretation," said Sharon Sherman, a professor of folklore at the University of Oregon. When folklorists study holidays, they look at the origins of symbols, how their interpretations have changed over the years and what purpose they serve in a given culture. But Christmas poses a special challenge, she added. "The great majority of Christmas tradition has nothing to do with the birth of Jesus," she said.

The Confraternity of Penitents, a private Roman Catholic group centered in Middletown, R.I., might disagree. Their website offers "the Christian meaning" behind 44 common Christmas symbols. Gingerbread men, according to the site, are like human beings; they do not create themselves but are created. "Spices, reminiscent of those mentioned in the Old Testament, make the gingerbread man the color of earth (Adam was created from the dust of the earth)," the site continues. "Like us, gingerbread people are not immortal. They are destined to be eaten and thus to unite with their creators."

The Internet is home to many theological theories and secular interpretations of holiday symbols, many of which can't be proven one way or another, according to Sherman. "There's how something functions for you and how it functions for someone else," she said, arguing that it's less a matter of who is right and who is wrong.

Folklorists recognize that symbols function in different ways. Simon J. Bronner, a professor of American studies and folklore at Penn State Harrisburg and author of "Explaining Traditions: Folk Behavior in Modern Culture," said symbols offer a way to deal with nostalgia, express inner anxieties or conflicts and encourage more intimate connections between human beings.

Christmas symbols function all three ways: as links to a shared past (either real or imagined), expressions of deeply held values (sacred or secular) and as signs that others agree with one's own beliefs.

Arguments about the meaning of Christmas symbols are as old as the celebration itself. But practically speaking, does it matter if a candy cane is a religious symbol or simply a sweet and sometimes sticky treat? Or whether Santa Claus is selfless as a saint or "a right jolly old elf," as Clement Moore described him in "A Visit from St. Nicholas"?

For some people, it does matter. They find the answers they seek and circulate them to those who share their views. But for many others, it doesn't matter, Sherman said. "What's important in most people's minds is how a given symbol or tradition is explained within his or her own family," whether it's their biological family or a more intentional grouping. It's family that pulls us all "home" for Christmas, she added, across the miles or in our hearts. And Christmas, whether one assigns it religious significance or not, is, after all, all about traditions, she said. "Whether we're spiritual or not," she said, "traditions hold us together."

Our Prayer List...

Please keep the following individuals below in your thoughts and prayers.

- Alice Baldwin
- Robin King
- Laura Greer
- Joe Woodham
- Jan & Wayne Richter
- Leon App
- Joanne McCabe
- Richard Young

Keep in your prayers Kim Bender and family on the passing of her mother Judi Saunders on November 11th.



Christmas Families...

As you all know we are partnering up with Eastern Henrico FISH this year and helping to collect much needed items to help make Christmas very special for some children this year. This is just a reminder that all items and donations are due by December 4, 2023. The deadline is much earlier this year, because FISH needs time to distribute all of the items to the families in need. Thank you to everyone who has helped out so far with this collection!



Daily Devotionals

Our Daily Bread devotionals are now here for December, January, & February. They are located outside of the church office & the church narthex. We also have 2 special devotionals for Advent available as well which are "O Holy Night" Carols of Christmas and Advent 2023 "A Calendar of Devotions."

Poinsettias...

We are continuing to take orders for poinsettias in the sanctuary for Christmas. The cost is **\$14.00** this year. **The deadline to place an order is Sunday, December 3rd.**



What's going on in our community...

Eastern Henrico FISH

We are collecting canned lima beans and carrots for the month of **December**. Please remember to pick up a can or two the next time you are grocery shopping. There is a box outside of the church office you can drop them off in. **The Deadline is December 31st.** For the month of November we were able to collect a total of 25+ cans of Brunswick Stew. Thank you to everyone who donated this month! Every donation makes a difference.

Camp Hanover

Mark your calendars! A **Hanover Christmas** returns Friday, **December 8th and Saturday, December 9th** for two magical nights celebrating the birth of Jesus. From **6:00 to 9:00pm** each evening. Stroll a candlelit path and experience musical performances and dramatic reenactments and enjoy refreshments afterward. A donation of \$10 per person to the Annual Fund for Camp Hanover is appreciated!



Wreaths Across America

Just a reminder that **Wreaths Across America** will be at the **Seven Pines National Cemetery** to remember and honor our veterans through the laying of remembrance

wreaths on **Saturday, December 16th, 2023 at 12:00pm.** All are welcome to join in on this humbling event!

December Birthdays

1	Elizabeth Breckinridge
9	Ed Johnston, III
11	Joan Curle
11	Lee Ann Warriner
17	Jane Monacell
17	Stephen King
22	John Warriner
22	Paulette O'Berry



PW Circle Meetings

- The Finley-Walker Circle will meet on **Wednesday, December 13th at 10:00am.**
- The Davis Circle will meet on Tuesday, **December 12th at 6:00pm.**

Meetings this month...

The Beekeepers of Richmond will meet on **Tuesday, December 5th from 7pm to 9pm.** If you have an interest in bees this may be the place for you. If you have any questions please contact Arlo Amstutz.

December Activity Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3 9:45am Sunday School 11:00am Worship Service & Communion	4	5 7-9pm Richmond Beekeepers Meeting	6	7	8	9
10 9:45am Sunday School 11:00am Worship Service	11	12 6pm Davis Circle Meeting	13 10am Finley Walker Circle Meeting	14	15	16
17 9:45am Sunday School 11:00am Worship Service	18	19	20	21	22	23
24 Christmas Eve 9:45am Sunday School 11:00am Worship Service 7pm Christmas Eve Service	25 Christmas Day	26	27	28	29	30
31 New Year's Eve 11:00am Worship Service						

