



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF PERRY

DECEMBER 2025 CALENDAR

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|---|---|---|---|--|-----|---|
| | 1 Craft & Fellowship 1:00 pm | 2 Beach Bible Study 9:30 am FPC Bible Study 10:00 am Fellowship meeting 5 pm Worship Meeting 6 pm | 3 Prayer meeting 9:30 Soup for the Soul 11:30 am Potluck Supper 5:45 pm Choir 7 pm | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 Sunday School 9:30 am Worship 11 am Holden Evening Prayer 6 pm | 8 | 9 Beach Bible Study 9:30 am FPC Bible Study 10:00 am Administration meeting 4 pm | 10 Prayer meeting 9:30 am Mission/Outreach meeting 4pm Cong. Care meeting 4:00 pm Fellowship Supper 5:45pm Choir 7pm | 11 Christian Education Meeting 10 am Finance Meeting 11 am | 12 | 13 Christmas Caroling & Wassil Party 4:30 pm |
| 14 Sunday School 9:30 am Worship 11 am Holden Evening Prayer 6 pm | 15 Craft & Fellowship 1:00pm | 16 Beach Bible Study 9:30 am FPC Bible Study 10:00 am Session Meeting 5:30 pm | 17 Prayer meeting 9:30 Soup for the Soul 11:30 am Fellowship Christmas Supper 5:45 pm Choir 7pm | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| 21 Sunday School 9:30 am Worship 11 am Christmas Program 6:00 pm | 22 Stuffing Christmas Treat Bags 9 am | 23 Beach Bible Study 9:30 am FPC Bible Study 10:00 am | 24 No Fellowship Supper Christmas Eve Service 6 pm | 25 Office Closed | 26 | 27 |
| 28 No Sunday School Worship 11 am Christmas Lessons & Carols | 29 Craft & Fellowship 1:00 pm | 30 Beach Bible Study 9:30 am FPC Bible Study 10 am | 31 No Fellowship Supper | | |  |

A letter from our Pastor

People of God,

This holiday season, some are more than a little excited to see family members, while others are summoning all the joy they can muster before facing unpleasant relatives.

Please receive this *Top Ten List of Means to Manage Holiday Stress*:

1-Go into an event with an exit strategy in mind. Please give what you are willing to provide and exit when you feel that you have given enough. (Luke 14:28-30)

2-Set realistic expectations for yourself. Understand what you're willing to give and what you're willing to take. Also, recognize your limits of 'too little' and 'too much.' You are responsible for yourself. Other adults are not your concern; leave them to their own devices and trust that the universe has plenty of life lessons in store. (Proverbs 16:3,9)

3-Set aside a space where you can retreat, escape, or be. God did not create you to handle the emotions and expectations of others. When you are tired — maybe tired of others — take a break, trusting that they can manage on their own. Rest is a gift, and you deserve it. (Mark 1:35, Mark 6:31)

4-Drink more water and less alcohol. Trust me. When we're better hydrated and less buzzed, we present a healthier version of ourselves to ourselves and others. This is a good thing. (Isaiah 5:11, 1 Timothy 5:23)

5-Know the topics you're unwilling to discuss. People aren't entitled to your information. Share it when, where, how, and if you choose. Your information is yours. Others can focus on their own. (Proverbs 10:19, James 1:19)

6-When it comes to others, we can't control their actions. But we can control how we respond. My grandmother used to say, "When you hear nothing from nothing, say nothing to nothing." Often, not reacting is the best response. (Proverbs 16:32, Proverbs 29:11)

7-Look for seeds of gratitude and share them. Gratitude shifts our focus, and when it is shared, it becomes contagious. (Psalm 103:1-5)

8-Know your people. Not everyone will like you, and that's okay. Most of us have relatives we love but also intensely dislike. That's just life. Spend time with those people as much or as little as you feel led to; instead, focus on giving your time to those who love, cherish, and empower you. Those are your people. You're not required to be liked by everyone... You don't even like everyone, do you? (John 15:18, Luke 6:27-28)

9-Do something that blesses, recharges, or inspires you, whether alone or with others. I plan to spend Thanksgiving with my wife and dogs. No offense, world, but I'm done with crowds. Black Friday... is a hard pass for me. Soon, the Bryant residence will become a no-peopling zone. Follow the example of Jesus in #3. (Hebrews 10:24-25, Galatians 6:9)

10- If someone says something ignorant, problematic, racist, or anything else off-color, it's okay not to engage. You aren't required to get caught up in their sticky, icky, ideological goo. But it's just as OK to look at those folks and say, in the words of Stephen M. Bryant, "Ok. I heard you. What do you want me to do with that information?" That will probably shut them down. People dislike feeling called out for their foolishness. (Proverbs 26:4-5, 11)

Okay—that's enough smoke from this altar. Have a wonderful holiday season. Focus on Jesus. Stay safe. Get what you need for yourself. The best holiday gift you can ever give yourself and others is a mentally healthy, authentically happy, Christ-centered you!

Let's pray: Holy child of Bethlehem, you are the hope of the world, the song of the angels, the treasure of our hearts, and the glory of God among us. Call us to worship you in the places where your love is born anew: wherever kindness prevails, justice flourishes, and peace reigns. Send us out to serve you, sharing good news of great joy, and praising God through you in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen. *(prayer from PCUSA Office of Theology and Worship)*

Peace,
JDB+

Notes and Reminders



Advent lessons begin Nov. 30, 9:30, for adult Sunday School

During the season of Advent, Sunday School classes for adults will be led by Susan Lincoln, featuring the insights of J. Ellsworth Kalas' "Christmas from the Back Side." The Advent poems of Ann Weems will also be incorporated.

Please join the group in the fellowship hall at 9:30 a.m. beginning Sunday, Nov. 30, and continuing through Dec. 21.

Save the Dates!

November and December have many opportunities to fellowship and worship as a church family here at First Presbyterian as celebrate the Advent and Christmas seasons. Also, we need donations of unshelled nuts, individually wrapped hard candy, apples and oranges for Christmas Treat bags to give to worshippers on Christmas Eve. Please bring your donations by Sunday, December 21st.

November 23, 2025 @ 4:00 p.m.} Advent Decorations & Light Refreshments; come assist with decorating the Chrismon Tree and hanging wreaths.

November 30, 2025} Advent Sunday 1
9:30 a.m.> Sunday School with Susan Lincoln
11:00 a.m.> Worship Service
6:00 p.m.> Holden Evening Prayer



December 7, 2025} Advent Sunday 2
9:30 a.m.> Sunday School with Susan Lincoln
11:00 a.m.> Worship Service
6:00 p.m.> Holden Evening Prayer



December 13, 2025 @ 4:30 p.m.} Christmas Caroling & Wassil Party; we will gather at the church for prayer, then disperse in teams to carol to members at Dowling Park, Lafayette Nursing Home, and locally here in Perry. We will come back to the church for a Wassil Party with fun and treats!

December 14, 2025} Advent Sunday 3
9:30 a.m.> Sunday School with Susan Lincoln
11:00 a.m.> Worship Service
6:00 p.m.> Holden Evening Prayer

December 15-17, 2025 @ 5:00 p.m.} Decorate Tables for Christmas Dinner. Volunteers needed, sign up with Juanita.

December 17, 2025 @ 6:00 p.m.} First Presbyterian Christmas Dinner; we gather for fellowship at 5:45 p.m. Bring a friend and come enjoy!

December 21, 2025} Advent Sunday 4 (Christmas Treat Bag Donations Due!)
9:30 a.m.> Sunday School with Susan Lincoln
11:00 a.m.> Worship Service
6:00 p.m.> Christmas Musical Presentation & Reception

December 22, 2025 @ 9:00 a.m.} Stuffing Christmas Treat Bags

December 24, 2025 @ 6:00 p.m.} Christmas Eve Service

December 28, 2025 @ 11:00 a.m.} Christmas Lessons & Carols with Leah & Juanita



Christmas Card Exchange Center will be in the Narthex beginning November 30th the first Sunday in Advent.



Mark your calendars now for our upcoming Christmas program!

It will take place on Sunday, December 21st, at 6pm with a reception to follow. This program will feature vocalists from our First Presbyterian Choir as well as our beloved musicians from Tallahassee. We are looking forward to another great year and we hope to see you there!



Dear People of God, Pr. Bryant is out of the office 12/28-1/13, taking time to rest and check on GA relatives. Please call Fr. Kent Thompson (850.843.0369) in the event of a pastoral care emergency. Have a safe, blessed, Christ-centered Christmas season. JDB+



We look forward to the visit of our lead presbyter, the Reverend Dr. David Rollins, who is joining us 12/21/25. David will be with us for worship and for the Christmas Cantata. We look forward to our time with him and to hearing him preach during Sunday morning worship.

FPC Website:

www.firstpresperry.org

Office Phone:

1(850) 584-3826

Email:

office@firstpresperry.org

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 837 Perry, FL 32348

December Birthdays

Melissa Everett—December 3

Stan Whiddon—December 6

Denise Kepler—December 12

Chuck Eckel—December 16

Jeanne Raulerson—December 21

Edwin Williams—December 24

Kim Torres—December 25

Kristie Harper—December 27

Marissa Ratliff—December 28

December Anniversaries

Charles & Tuckie Maultsby—December 2

Scott & Sally MacNeill—December 14

Stan & Shona Whiddon—December 20

The Face in the Sky

And in that region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy, which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. ---*Luke 2:8-12*

As the Italian film *La Dolce Vita* opens, a helicopter is flying slowly through the sky not very high above the ground. Hanging down from the helicopter in a kind of halter is the life-size statue of a man dressed in robes with his arms outstretched so that he looks almost as if he is flying by himself, especially when every once in a while the camera cuts out the helicopter and all you can see is the statue itself with the rope around it. It flies over a field where some men are working in tractors and causes a good deal of excitement. They wave their hats and hop around and yell, and then one of them recognizes who it is a statue of and shouts in Italian, "Hey, it's Jesus!" whereupon some of them start running along under the plane, waving and calling to it. But the helicopter keeps on going, and after a while it reaches the outskirts of Rome, where it passes over a building on the roof of which there is a swimming pool surrounded by a number of girls in bikinis basking in the sun. Of course they look up too and start waving, and this time the helicopter does a double take as the young men flying it get a good look at the girls and come circling back again to hover over the pool where, above the roar of the engine, they try to get the girls' telephone numbers, explaining that they are taking the statue to the Vatican and will be only too happy to return as soon as their mission is accomplished.

During all of this the reaction of the audience in the little college town where I saw the film was of course to laugh at the incongruity of the whole thing. There was the sacred statue dangling from the sky, on the one hand, and the profane young Italians and the bosomy young bathing beauties, on the other hand—the one made of stone, so remote, so out of place there in the sky on the end of its rope; the others made of flesh, so bursting with life. Nobody in the audience was in any doubt as to which of the two came out ahead or at whose expense the laughter was. But then the helicopter continues on its way, and the great dome of St. Peter's looms up from below, and for the first time the camera starts to zoom in on the statue itself with its arms stretched out, until for a moment the screen is almost filled with just the bearded face of Christ—and at that moment there was no laughter at all in that theater full of students and their dates and paper cups full of buttery popcorn and la dolce vita college-style. Nobody laughed during that moment because there was something about that face, for a few seconds there on the screen, that made them be silent—the face hovering there in the sky and the outspread arms. For a moment, not very long to be sure, there was no sound, as if the face were their face somehow, their secret face that they had never seen before but that they knew belonged to them, or the face that they had never seen before but that they knew, if only for a moment, they belonged to.

I think that is much of what the Christian faith is. It is for a moment, just for a little while, seeing the face and being still, that is all. There is so much about the whole religious enterprise that seems superannuated and irrelevant and as out of place in our age as an antique statue is out of place in the sky. But just for the moment itself, say, of Christmas, there can be only silence as something comes to life, some spirit, some hope; as something is born again into the world that is so strange and new and precious that not even a cynic can laugh although he might be tempted to weep.

The face in the sky. The child born in the night among beasts. The sweet breath and steaming dung of beasts. And nothing is ever the same again.

Those who believe in God can never in a way be sure of him again. Once they have seen him in a stable, they can never be sure where he will appear or to what lengths he will go or to what ludicrous depths of self-humiliation he will descend in his wild pursuit of humankind. If holiness and the awful power and majesty of God were present in this least auspicious of all events, this birth of a peasant's child, then there is no place or time so lowly and earthbound but that holiness can be present there too. And this means that we are never safe, that there is no place where we can hide from God, no place where we are safe from his power to break in two and recreate the human heart, because it is just where he seems most helpless that he is most strong, and just where we least expect him that he comes most fully.

For those who believe in God, it means, this birth, that God himself is never safe from us, and maybe that is the dark side of Christmas, the terror of the silence. He comes in such a way that we can always turn him down, as we could crack the baby's skull like an eggshell or nail him up when he gets too big for that. God comes to us in the hungry people we do not have to feed, comes to us in the lonely people we do not have to comfort, comes to us in all the desperate human need of people everywhere that we are always free to turn our backs upon. It means that God puts himself at our mercy not only in the sense of the suffering that we can cause him by our blindness and coldness and cruelty, but the suffering that we can cause him simply by suffering ourselves. Because that is the way love works, and when someone we love suffers, we suffer with him, and we would not have it otherwise because the suffering and the love are one, just as it is with God's love for us.

The child is born in the night—the mother's exhausted flesh, the father's face clenched like a fist—and nothing is ever the same again. Nothing is ever the same again for those who believe in God, and nothing is ever the same again for those who do not believe in God either, because once the birth has happened, it is no longer just God whom they have to deny, but it is also this event that they have to deny. Those who do not believe must also fall silent in the presence of the newborn child, but their silence can have only tears at its heart because for them this can only be another child born to die as every child is born to die, and no matter how bravely and well he lives it, his life can have no meaning beyond the meaning that he gives it, and then like all life it must be like a dream once it has been dreamed. For those who do not believe, all the great poetry of the birth—the angels, the star, the three Kings coming out of the night to lay their gifts in the straw—can be only like words that for all their beauty are written on the sand, not poetry that points beyond itself to the very heart of reality, which is beyond the power of time and change to touch.

But what of those who both believe and do not believe, cannot believe—which is some people all of the time and all people some of the time? The statue with its outstretched arms hovers in the sky, the still face looks down, and they recognize the face and call its name. They wave and go running a little way along the uneven ground beneath it. The night deepens and grows still, and maybe the only sound is the birth cry, the little agony of new life coming alive, or maybe there is also the sound of legions of unseen voices raised in joy.

For them too, the believing unbelievers, nothing is ever quite the same again either, because what they have seen and heard in that moment of stillness is, just possibly, possibly, the hope of the world. And what they feel in their hearts as they wave—maybe only with one hand, a little wave, not very certain, but with his name on their lips—is the stirring of new life, new courage, new gladness seeking to be born in them even as he is born, if only they too, we too, the wide world too, will stretch out our arms to those arms and raise our empty faces to that bewildering face.

Lord Jesus Christ, thou Son of the Most High, Prince of Peace, be born again into our world. Wherever there is war in this world, wherever there is pain, wherever there is loneliness, wherever there is no hope, come, thou long-expected one, with healing in thy wings. Holy Child, whom the shepherds and the kings and the dumb beasts adored, be born again. Wherever there is boredom, wherever there is fear of failure, wherever there is temptation too strong to resist, wherever there is bitterness of heart, come, thou Blessed One, with healing in thy wings. Savior, be born in each of us as we raise our faces to thy face, not knowing fully who we are or who thou art, knowing only that thy love is beyond our knowing and that no other has the power to make us whole. Come, Lord Jesus, to each who longs for thee even though we have forgotten thy name. Come quickly. Amen.

“The Face in the Sky” was initially delivered to Frederick Buechner’s students when he was Director of the Religion Department at Phillips Exeter Academy. It was first published in *The Hungering Dark* and later in *Secrets in the Dark*.