

# Messenger Newsletter

First and Grand Ave  
United Methodist Churches  
Porterville, CA

**Dovetailing Destinies**  
by Pastor Tom Buratovich

**December 2022**

Part of the mysterious blessing of Christmas is the journey leading up to the celebration of Jesus' birth. We know this day as Christmas day, the word 'Christmas' meaning the advent, or coming, of Christ. Part of the build up to Christmas is the revealing and grasping of the full significance of Jesus.

There are moments in our lives when we are sent into overdrive by the realization of something we had or took for granted for so long. For instance, when I realized as an adult how fortunate I was to have the parents I had, the same two parents, my whole life, the house I was raised in, the same house, and the stability of the town, the same town, I lived in for all my youth. I had breathed the air of stability that seemed normal to me. Attempting to explain a world of instability would be the equivalent of explaining to a fish that they breathe in water. It is such an automatically mindless thing; it is never considered to be different anywhere else.

My destiny dovetailed with other parties who understand the differences between growing up with a level of stability, or instability, that is unknown to another.

Luke in his gospel, tried to help Theophilus grasp the fullest significance of who Jesus was. He did this by ingeniously contrasting the birth of John the Baptist and

the announcement of Jesus' birth, and the birth of John the Baptist

To make a long story short he showed the vast superiority of Jesus to his forerunner. He shows the vast superiority between the way Mary received the word from Gabriel compared with Zachariah.

"Don't be like Zachariah," Theophilus. "Don't demand more signs of God's faithfulness. Rather respond with an open and humble heart like Mary, '*Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord.*'"

The brilliant part of Advent is that our destinies dovetail with Jesus's life. When we celebrate Christmas, really celebrate, acknowledge, and grasp the full significance of Jesus, who he is, what he has done and is doing, our destinies dovetail.

God continues to work a wonderful work in the world. God continues to work a wonderful work in us. God continues to work in our church, in the hearts of our loved ones, and in our dovetailing destinies as we interface with those who have an appointment with the coming man-God born on earth on Christmas Day.

"He will be great." The angel Gabriel said. Jesus is going to be a great man. We have all studied the lives of great men. We know what to look for. However, we need to look in different places for this kind of greatness. Dirt poor mother, questionable father

mother relationship, no royal connection at least in the current administration, no noble Roman affiliation, no official endorsement from the Jewish religious aristocracy. Yes, we must look at greatness and for greatness in different ways and in different places.

And yet, that is part of the beauty of Christmas. Unlikely destinies dovetail to form loose bonds of association that none could guess no matter how long they had to stare at the seemingly random circumstances. Status, favor, and success become meaningless chaff in the whirlwind of the divine revealing.

Many of you have said very kind things to me and my family about our impending move. The process of transplanting is shocking to the root system of humankind just like it is for plants. And yet there are dovetailing destinies that wait for me and for you. Your understanding and compassion touch us deeply and are evidence of our dovetailing destinies.

We will have lovely celebrations: Christmas clothing closet, shoebox sendoff, children's program rehearsals and performances, hand bells, Christmas choirs, candlelight services, Christmas parties, way too many sweets shaped like

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# Youth Ministry

*“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” – John 1:4-5*

One of the activities of the Christmas season I am most looking forward to this year is for my daughter to see all the Christmas lights on the houses in our community and beyond. There has always been something beautiful about seeing a house all lit up and shining bright in the darkness. It draws our attention as we drive down the road, causing us to stare at the intricate designs and often appreciating the beauty. It warms our hearts and naturally brings a smile to our face.

Sometimes, there are houses where the lines of Christmas lights are straight and everything looks wonderful, not a blemish in sight. But there are also houses where the lights are crooked and not quite as “Perfect”. Nevertheless, both houses shine in the darkness, drawing our attention, reminding us of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Similarly, we who have accepted Jesus as our Savior also have a light that is within us that shines bright for all to see. Our light is also beautiful because of who put that light within us. Sometimes our light might be a little crooked by our own doing, yet it still shines for all to bear witness that Jesus is our Savior.

It is easy for us to look out at the world right now and see a whole lot of darkness. There is war, hate crimes, mass shootings and division amongst people on a vast array of topics. As Christians, where there is darkness, we have the opportunity to shine all the brighter. How do we shine bright in such dark times? We live as Jesus calls us to live, and that is by faith in Him and a heart full of love for

all people. We are patient with the impatient, kind to the unkind, and forgiving to those who have sinned against us. We feed the hungry, clothe the poor, stand against injustice, and pray for the lost. We share the gospel of Jesus Christ with all-listening ears and speak words of life to those in need of hearing it. We volunteer, give our time to worthy causes, invite people to church, and reach out to that one person we have avoided for far too long.

The bright light put within us when we become believers is meant to shine for all to see. Just as Christmas lights are put on houses and they light up the night sky, the light of Jesus within you shines bright in a world of darkness. I pray that this Christmas season you will allow the light of Jesus Christ to shine for all to see. Hold nothing back; live for Jesus fully and completely. I wish each one of you a very Merry Christmas. Shine bright, my brothers and sisters in Christ.

God is Love,  
*Ryan Ridenour*

**Title**  
**continued from page 1**  
*by Pastor Tom Buratovich*

Christmas characters and accessories.

Could it be that all the celebration, singing, and giving and receiving of gifts are a celebration of the resulting dovetailing destinies? What would be a greater gift this Christmas than to realize part of the answer of our prayers is praying our prayers so fervently while we grow in our ability to understand that all that God intended to occur has done so to strengthen us and grow us into his image?

Our dovetailing destinies remind us that God is in the business of showing himself superior, preeminent, renown, and distinguished beyond on all other and any other.

*“The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”* The dovetailing destinies of our hopes as they co-mingle with our fears and the prolonged ache in our souls for God to be with us has created an appointment with our destiny as God’s children. That is a reason to celebrate and to re-examine the gift of ‘God with us.’

I pray we do so with all that we are. Gloria in excelsis deo!

## Thank You

On behalf of  
**Operation  
Christmas Child,**  
we want to thank  
you for your prayers and support!  
This past week, the Porterville  
Drop-off location at GAUMC was  
blessed with 1,798 shoeboxes. We  
want to express our heartfelt  
gratitude to GAUMC for serving  
as a drop-off location, and Greg’s  
AAA Hula Towing for  
transporting the shoeboxes the  
past 12 years! Please join us in  
prayer as these shoeboxes begin  
their journey around the world!  
Have a Merry Christmas!

Abundantly Blessed,  
*Kathy Chavez and Diana Perry*





# What Are You Following This Christmas?

December is here. This is an exciting month full of fun activities. For Children's Church, on December 17 there will be a practice for the children from Grand Ave and First Church at First Church at 10:00 a.m. for the Christmas Program that they will present on December 18. **The Christmas Program will take place at 10:00 a.m. at First Church on December 18.** The program will be presented during the Worship Service. Immediately following the service, Santa will be there to give the children gifts and take a picture with them. At the same time, there will be a Coffee Hour that everyone can enjoy together.

Christmas is a time that is filled with lots of fun activities. This month there are so many things to do and activities to enjoy. For example, there are musical events to attend. At First Church, Sierra Vocal Arts will be performing "The Messiah" on December 4. Porterville High School Choir will have their Christmas Concert on December 10. Monache High School Choir will have their Christmas Concert on December 13. These are the Christmas Concerts at First Church; and just a few of the many concerts that will take place in Porterville.

The month of December is always full of extra activities that keep us moving from one place to another. There are school activities for the children, Christmas Parties, Christmas Balls, School Christmas Programs, family get-togethers, Office Christmas Parties, Christmas Parties at friend's houses, family reunions, out-of-town guests, Christmas shopping, Christmas wrapping, Christmas dinners, and driving around looking at Christmas lights.

In the Christmas Story, the

Magi followed the star through many lands and places before they finally reached their destination, baby Jesus. Many things happened to them on their long journey but they never got distracted from their destination. The Messiah was always on their mind, in their hearts, and in their conversations.

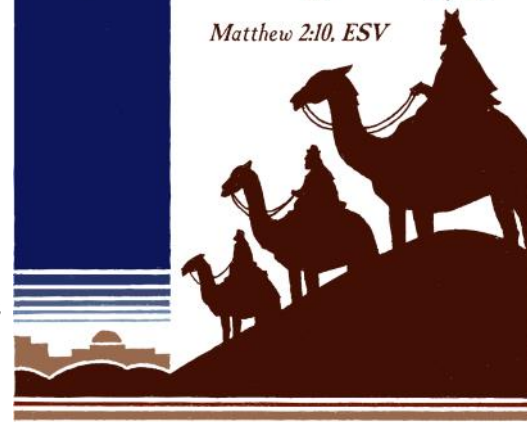
At Christmas, there are so many Christmas activities to do that it is easy to find ourselves following each activity to the next. It just happens. While doing this, are we keeping, Jesus, in our hearts and minds? Like the Magi did. Or are we just moving around in a hustle and a bustle? Are we following mindlessly from event to event, not thinking of what each event is supposed to be instilling in us, JESUS. Our beautiful Savior, Jesus who came to earth for us. He was born in a stable and placed in a manger. A God, a King. Placed in the lowest of low. He lived His life to give us an example of how we should live. Then He gave everything He had when He willingly gave His life on the cross, for our sins, to give us eternal life. Not for His sins, He gave everything He had for OUR sins. Wow! Never once was He distracted from His mission.

I pray that this Christmas Season, as we follow each event to



*When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.*

*Matthew 2:10. ESV*



the next, we will be like the Magi and remember that with each event; we are following "our star" to find Jesus. I pray that this Christmas we will find a peace-that-passes-understanding from "our star", our events that we follow. That through each event, we will remember that we are seeking Jesus and I pray that we will find Him, at the end of our journey, on Christmas Day in our hearts.

May God bless you and your family throughout this Christmas Season. Merry Christmas.

*Melody Burkhart*

Children's Sunday School

## **Advent Season Combined Worship Services**

**Sunday, December 18 • 10:00 a.m. at First UMC**

**Saturday, December 24 • 4:00 p.m. at First UMC**

**Sunday, December 25 • 10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave UMC**

**Sunday, January 1, 2023 • 10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave UMC**

**Sunday, January 8, 2023 • 10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave UMC**



# Is The Timing Right?

By Judy Lowery

*“But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:20-21 NIV*

Signs of Christmas were popping up everywhere. It just seemed too early! We hadn't even celebrated Thanksgiving yet!

A few houses around the neighborhood were already adorned with festive holiday lights, while others still had inflated turkeys in the yard and autumn wreaths on the front door. A huge skeleton from Halloween remained in one neighbor's yard. Ours was a neighborhood in transition!

“Have you seen any Christmas tree lots yet?” I asked Al when we were driving home from church one Sunday. According to him, there were trees for sale outside Home Depot.

“But those trees are going to be dried out completely for Christmas,” he said. “They're a real fire hazard.”

An early snowfall covered everything in white, again very early for “I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas.” We were looking forward to going to Schuss Village in Northern Michigan to spend Thanksgiving with our son-in-law, daughter, and the family. Maybe it would be a white Thanksgiving!

Different outreaches for the holidays were well underway even at the beginning of November, one of which was filling Christmas stockings for children in a needy neighborhood of Detroit.

I was on the way to the Dollar Store to buy some stocking stuffers for the Christmas stocking project when I decided to stop at the pharmacy to pick up a prescription first. Instead of parking and

walking inside, I drove up to the window, pulling as close to the building as I could.

After receiving the prescription, I inched the car forward aware that there was a metal box attached to the wall, but thinking I had cleared it. Suddenly there was an awful crunch. Inside, the clerk at the window had a shocked expression on her face.

I explained what happened, pointing to the box, but did not get out to assess the damage. She just shrugged as though it happened all the time and motioned me on. So, I went on my way to the Dollar Store, figuring everything was okay.

The store was in full holiday mode, its aisles full of Christmas wrapping, cards, candy, toys... It was easy to find things to fill two small stockings. Looking for something relating to Jesus' birthday though was harder. Finally, two small activity books caught my eye... “Jesus Loves Me!” Perfect!

Later, when I told Al about the accident, we went out to inspect the car and discovered that the front left panel had a gash in it and had been unclipped from the car's frame. I apologized, mortified at the damage.

He was very kind, accepting my apology and reassuring me by saying that he would take our car into the mechanic to see if it could be repaired easily.

We drove back to the pharmacy to see if the metal box

had been damaged as well. I had been rehearsing an apology to the manager of the store, including an offer to replace the box if necessary and was relieved to find that it was okay.

It was a humbling experience, one that was a reminder of the reason why the celebration of Jesus' birth means so much to me. When the angel Gabriel told Joseph that his fiancé, Mary, was going to have a baby and that the name of the baby was to be Jesus, he was pointing to the future role that their child would have as the Savior of all those who trust in Him.

“Jesus” is a form of “Joshua” which means, “The Lord saves.” Considering how easy it is to sin and how sin just seems to be a part of our human nature, forgiveness is a wonderful gift. But forgiveness, although free for us to receive, was costly for God to give.

He paid an unimaginable price by letting go of His beloved Son. The baby in the manger was to become the Savior of the world through His death on the cross. Forgiveness, deliverance and salvation are freely offered. Will we receive? Dare we not?

Yes, I am ready for Christmas!



Judy and Al Lowery

# December 2022 Prayer Calendar

**Thursday, December 1** - Pray for Ryan and Melody as they plan and do activities this Christmas Season with the children of our churches.

**Friday, December 2** - Pray for those in our church families who are ill and those who are recovering. Pray for healing and strength.

**Saturday, December 3** - Pray for this Advent Season as we celebrate the gifts of **hope, peace, joy and love** from our Savior Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

**Sunday, December 4** - Pray for the Sunday Worship Service GAUMC 9:30 a.m. and FUMC 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, December 5** - Pray for the ones who lead and who are involved in the Prayer Groups of our churches.

**Tuesday, December 6** - Pray that we will remember God is with us as we go through different situations.

**Wednesday, December 7** - Pray for the Online Bible Study led by Pastor Tom at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, December 8** - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Matthew 1:21 *"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

**Friday, December 9** - Pray for the Praise Team as they prepare for Worship Services.

**Saturday, December 10** - Pray for the Greeters who will welcome all to Sunday Worship Services.

**Sunday, December 11** - Pray for the Sunday Worship Service GAUMC 9:30 a.m. and FUMC 11:00 a.m.

**Monday, December 12** - Pray for the ones who are involved in the committees of our churches as they help make important decisions.

**Tuesday, December 13** - Please take a moment and pray for our church families.

**Wednesday, December 14** - Pray for the Online Bible Study led by Pastor Tom at 10:00a.m. via Zoom.

**Thursday, December 15** - Please pray for our community of Porterville.

**Friday, December 16** - Pray for Pastor Tom as he prepares his sermons for the next few Combined Worship Services.

**Saturday, December 17** - Pray and reflect on Bible verse Isaiah 7:14 *"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*

**Sunday, December 18** - Pray for the **Combined Worship Service at FUMC at 10:00 a.m.**

**Monday, December 19** - Pray for safety and wellness as our church families travel during this Christmas time.

**Tuesday, December 20** - Please pray and read Bible verse Luke 2:7 *"and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloth and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."*

**Wednesday, December 21** - Please pray and read Bible verse Luke 2:8-9 *"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified."*

**Thursday, December 22** - Please pray and read Bible verse Luke 2:13-14 *"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

**Friday, December 23** - As we prepare our Christmas celebrations, may we do so with a deep gratitude that flows from a wellspring of knowledge of our Lord, Emmanuel, God with us!

**Saturday, December 24** - Pray for the **Combined Candlelight Christmas Eve Service • 4:00 p.m. at FUMC.**

**Sunday, December 25** - On this **Christmas Day**, pray and give thanks for our blessings as we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ and His Love for us during the **Combined Worship Service at GAUMC at 10:00 a.m.**

**Monday, December 26** - Pray and reflect on John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*

**Tuesday, December 27** - Pray and reflect on Ephesians 2:10 *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

**Wednesday, December 28** - Pray for those who have been helped through the Care Portal ministry.

**Thursday, December 29** - Please pray and read Job 34:32 *"Teach me what I cannot see, if I have done wrong, I will not do so again."*

**Friday, December 30** - Pray and reflect on Colossians 3:15 *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."*

**Saturday, December 31** - As we end 2022, pray that 2023 will bring wellness and new beginnings. In this coming new year, may we strive to have a closer relationship with God. *May God protect all who travel this day.*

**Sunday, January 1** - Pray for God's blessings in the New Year.





### **First UMC**

Robert Keck • December 4  
Rev. Don Roulsten • December 29  
Ethan Burkhart • December 29

### **Grand Ave UMC**

Jan Geiling • December 4  
Amanda Ridenour • December 5  
Fernando Gutierrez • December 10  
Elizabeth Gill • December 15  
John White • December 31

## Announcements

### **Advent Season Combined Worship Services**

Sunday, December 18 • 10:00 a.m. at First UMC  
Saturday, December 24 • 4:00 p.m. at First UMC  
Sunday, December 25 • 10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave UMC  
Sunday, Jan 1, 2023 • 10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave UMC  
Sunday, Jan 8, 2023 • 10:00 a.m. at Grand Ave UMC

### **Clothing Closet at First UMC**

Clothing Closet is open on Saturday, December 3 between 8:30 –10:00 a.m. Call Ann 559-920-0977 for more information. Thanks to all who help.

### **Dinner and Prayer Night**

Join us for a Soup and Bread Potluck Dinner on Wednesday, December 7 at 5:00 p.m. at Grand Ave. Enjoy dinner and pray with us for the future.

### **Christmas Party and Potluck**

Everyone is invited to the Christmas Party at First UMC on Saturday, December 17 at 5:00 p.m. Bring your favorite side dish or dessert to share and a White Elephant wrapped gift (\$15 or less).

### **Christmas Choir**

Combined Christmas Choir rehearsals continue on Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m. at First UMC. All are invited to sing with us! Contact Christine Klippenstein for more information.

### **Church Offices Closed**

Monday, December 26 and January 2

### **Next Newsletter Deadline**

Please send information for the Messenger Newsletter to Judy at judy.bur87@gmail.com. The deadline for the January 2023 Messenger is **December 18**. Thank you.

### **Tithes and Offering**

Thank you for your continued support of the ministries of First UMC and Grand Ave UMC.

### **First United Methodist Church Grand Ave United Methodist Church**

[www.grandavenue.org](http://www.grandavenue.org) or  
[www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC](https://www.facebook.com/PortervilleFUMC) or  
[www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC](https://www.facebook.com/GrandAvenueUMC)

**View Past Worship Videos on Vimeo**  
<https://vimeo.com/grandavenueporterville>

#### **Grand Ave Staff**

Senior Pastor • *Rev. Tom Buratovich*  
Director of Youth Ministries • *Ryan Ridenour*  
Children's Director • *Melody Burkhart*  
Worship Administrator • *Judy Buratovich*  
Treasurer • *Beverly Farquharson*  
Custodian • *The Congregation*

#### **First Staff**

Senior Pastor • *Rev. Tom Buratovich*  
Administrative Assistant • *Melissa Sutherland*  
Music Coordinator • *Christine Klippenstein*  
Children/Custodian • *Melody Burkhart*

#### **Grand Ave Office Hours:**

**Monday–Thursday**  
9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

**Phone:** 559-784-3791

**Fax:** 559-784-3798

**info@grandavenue.org**

**www.grandavenue.org**

*Grand Ave United Methodist Church  
776 W. Grand Ave.  
Porterville, CA 93257*

#### **First Methodist Office Hours:**

**Monday–Thursday**  
9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

**Phone:** 559-784-4232

**pvfumc@ocsnet.net**

*First United Methodist Church  
344 E. Morton Ave.  
Porterville, CA 93257*