



# The eNewsletter

December 21, 2017

A publication of Covenant Presbyterian Church, 8451 East Brainerd Road, Chattanooga, Tennessee 37421  
423.899.5377 [www.covenantchattanooga.org](http://www.covenantchattanooga.org)

## From the Pen of Elder John Wykoff...

### Looking Ahead...

**December 23**

Youth Service Project

**December 24**

Morning Worship  
Lessons & Carols

**December 25**

Office Closed - Christmas

**December 26**

Office Closed - Christmas

**December 30**

Turnbull/Schreiner Wedding

**December 31**

Morning Worship  
Sunday School  
Youth Praise Team Rehearsal

**January 1**

Office Closed - New Years

**January 3**

Sanctuary Choir Rehearsal  
Session Meeting

**January 6**

Men's Breakfast

**January 7**

Lord's Supper Celebrated  
Sunday School  
Youth Praise Team Rehearsal

**January 8**

Ladies' Monday Night Luke  
Bible Study  
Ladies' Monday Night I Peter  
Bible Study

**January 9**

Women's Council Meeting

**January 10**

Wednesday Night Activities  
Resume

**January 11**

Ladies' Thursday Bible Study

**January 14**

Morning Worship  
Sunday School  
Missions Committee Meeting  
Walker/Forrester Shower  
Daconate Meeting  
Youth Praise Team Rehearsal  
Officer's Installation

It is nearly Christmas. Let us be like Tiny Tim. Let us think well of people. Let us not assume the worst. Let us not believe, for instance, that "Away in a Manger" is a precious bit of heresy written by a self-promoting fibber who used the name of a great reformer in order gain some indirect notoriety - as has been variously alleged. In this short article, I will defend "Away in a Manger," not because I like it, but because my children do. And when it comes to kids at Christmas, I'm as sappy as the tree.

I will take up the theology of the carol presently. Allow me to begin with the questionable authorship. It is true that in 1882 the anonymous contributor of a little poem known today as "Away in a Manger" claimed what is certainly false, that Martin Luther wrote it for his children. It is also true that as the claim was repeated again and again, "Luther's Cradle Song" rapidly spread on the wings of a dozen tunes. And that this fabrication was roundly believed - it was published in a reputable collection as an example "from the German Fatherland" - is, once again, true.

Now, "Away in a Manger" is about as German as Samuel Clemens. If it was written by Martin Luther, then *Nunc Dimittis* was written by Huckleberry Finn. Fortunately, no one believes it anymore (note the Trinity Hymnal attribution: "Anon. Philadelphia".) But why the false report in the first place? Why didn't the original author take credit? One theory - let us call it the Scrooge theory - is that the author, knowing that his poem stood little chance of making it on its merits, invented the false attribution as a way to promote it. For shame! Another theory - let us call it the Bob Cratchit theory - is that the misattribution was an honest mistake involving a children's play to celebrate the anniversary of Luther's birth, a play in which Luther sings to his children at Christmastime (this is an honest-to-goodness theory, I'm not making it up). Since it is almost Christmas, and I would rather not think of my daughter's favorite carol as a specimen of fake news from the Gilded Age, I will go with the Cratchit theory.

So much for the authorship. There remains the dubious theology. The offending line is, "But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes." The objections are two. First, this line goes beyond scripture. None of the Gospels records anything about baby Jesus crying or not crying or, for that matter, whether the cattle really were lowing or merely chewing the cud loudly. Of course, if "Away in a Manger" receives demerits for its

slight poetic apocrypha, than so do many other carols, such as "We Three Kings," "See Amid the Winter's Snow," and of course, the beloved Unitarian hymn "Here Comes Santa Claus."

The second objection is more serious. The portrayal of a serene baby Jesus who doesn't cry comes dangerously close to Docetism, the belief that Jesus wasn't really human. We can't have that. As Jeremy Gaines and the choir recently helped us to understand, Christ's humanity is as necessary for our salvation as His deity. Unaccustomed as it is to say, a crying and burping baby Jesus is as central to our doctrine as an ascended and glorified Jesus.

Yet does "Away in a Manger" really deny the doctrine of Christ's humanity? I think not. Again, let us think the best. Let us put "Away in a Manger" in its proper context, a child's bedroom at night. It is not, after all, a hymn to be compared with Wesley's majestic and theologically rich "Hark, the Herald Angel's Sing" (which, incidentally, also dabbles with docetism: was Christ only "veiled in flesh"?). Compare it instead with, "Now I lay me down to sleep." It is only an expanded Christmas version of a child's bedtime prayer. In the first stanza, boys and girls look at Jesus. Joining the stars in the bright sky, they look down where He lay. The parent wants her child to be at peace, unafraid. "Hush, little baby, don't you cry." She asks her child to imagine a serene baby Jesus and to imitate Him in His peace.

Then in the perspective shifts. The child no longer looks down toward the manger. Instead, he finds himself in the manger, looking up at Christ the King. "I love thee Lord Jesus, look down from the sky, and stay by my cradle. . ." The child learns that he can't imitate baby Jesus' peace without King Jesus' help. Then, finally, as in all good bedtime prayers it deals with death. The original third verse (composed by a different author) seems to have been, "and take me to heaven to live with Thee there." This is something like, "If I should die before I wake. . ." Sleep has long been taken by Christians as a rehearsal for death.

As a congregational hymn, "Away in a Manger" doesn't quite stand up with others, like "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence." But as a bedtime lullaby, quieting a child in preparation for sleep - that frightening prospect - it is a lovely and useful song.

~John Wykoff



## What's Happening?

### Nursery Schedule December 24

**Front Desk**  
Mark Watne

### Worship

**Infants**  
Jim & Connie Hildebrand

**Crawlers**  
Kansas Bradley  
& Josh Cook

**Toddlers**  
Ernie Brown  
& Jonmark Beatty

### TURNBULL/SCHREINER WEDDING

You are invited to share in the celebration of God joining together Hannah Marie Turnbull and Micah David Schreiner in marriage, on Saturday, December 30 at 2:30 p.m. at Covenant Presbyterian Church.

### CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

Come celebrate the birth of our Savior on Christmas Eve, December 24, at 5:30 p.m. with a service of Lessons and Carols.

### CHRISTMAS CARD STAMPS

Please remember to save those Christmas card stamps. Deposit them in the mailbox by Pastor Mullinax's office. These used stamps are processed and re-sold with all proceeds going to finance Sunday School curriculum in Latin America.

### MEN'S BREAKFAST

The Men's Ministry invites men of all ages to their monthly Men's Breakfast on Saturday, January 6, at 8:30 a.m. Young Brock is speaking on *When God Called Me*. Nursery provided, up to 36 months.

### PESEVERERS CLASS

The Peseverers Class is beginning a study of I John on January 7, 2018, led by Dr. Lamar Allen. John's letter is powerful and important. In his own words the Apostle John states that the primary purpose of his letter is to reassure believers. He says, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life" (I John 5.13). Join us for good fellowship and a detailed study of God's Word.

### OFFICER'S ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION SERVICE

New Elders and Deacons are being installed during an Evening Worship Service on Sunday, January 14 at 6:00 p.m.

### DIRECTORY UPDATES

Please make the following update to your CPC Membership Directory.

Jason Coffey  
Email..... jason@canaangroup.com

### NURSERY VOLUNTEER SIGN UP

CPC members willing to serve in the Nursery, select your volunteer date(s) at [www.volunteersignup.org/CCQKC](http://www.volunteersignup.org/CCQKC). If you need help signing up, please contact Joanna Watne at 423.667.7347 or [cpcnursery@covenantchattanooga.org](mailto:cpcnursery@covenantchattanooga.org)

### YEAR END CONTRIBUTIONS

All end-of-the-year contributions need to be in the Church Office or postmarked no later than December 31 to be counted as tax-deductible contributions for 2017.

### WEDNESDAY NIGHT SUPPERS

Wednesday Night Suppers will resume on Wednesday, January 10.

### BIRTHDAY/ANNIVERSARY

#### CALENDARS

The January calendar is available for pick up at the Welcome Center.

#### OFFICE CLOSED

The church office is closed the following days for Christmas:

Monday, December 25 - Closed  
Tuesday, December 26 - Closed

#### NO ENEWSLETTER

No eNewsletter will be sent on:  
Thursday, December 28  
Thursday, January 4

#### SAVE THE DATE

Mark your calendars! 2018 Men's Conference is January 26-27. Details to follow.

#### BUDGET REPORT

Thru December 17:

Budget: \$1,563,417  
Actual: \$1,342,854  
Shortfall: \$220,563

Needed by December 31 to make budget: \$281,873.