



# The eNewsletter

December 20, 2018

A publication of Covenant Presbyterian Church, 8451 East Brainerd Road, Chattanooga, Tennessee 37421  
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## *From the Pen of Elder John Wykoff...*

### **Looking Ahead...**

#### **December 23**

Morning Worship  
Combined Sunday School  
Celebration

#### **December 24**

Church Office Closed-  
Christmas Eve  
Lessons & Carols

#### **December 25**

Church Office Closed-  
Christmas

#### **December 30**

Morning Worship

#### **December 31**

Church Office Closed - New  
Year's Eve

#### **January 1**

Church Office Closed - New  
Year's Day

#### **January 2**

Session Meeting

#### **January 3**

Ladies' Thursday Bible Study

#### **January 4**

Men's Proverbs Bible Study

#### **January 6**

Lord's Supper Celebrated  
Sunday School

#### **January 7**

Ladies' Monday Night  
Hebrews Study

#### **January 9**

Wednesday Night Activities

#### **January 10**

Ladies' Thursday Bible Study

#### **January 11**

Men's Proverbs Bible Study

#### **January 12**

Men's Breakfast

#### **January 13**

Morning Worship  
Sunday School

#### **January 14**

Ladies' Monday Night  
Prophets Bible Study

#### **January 15**

Mother's Encouragement  
Group

### The Trough of Nativity

By the end of the page, this article will have picked up a stench. So allow me to start with something sweet.

Of all the pretty Christmas carols, one of the prettiest is surely the French carol "Quelle est cette odeur agréable." If you don't know it, go ahead and have a listen on YouTube or SoundCloud. John Rutter's arrangement is a good one, though perhaps sweeter and creamier than is good for you (but so is eggnog). So get a cup of eggnog and listen to Rutter's arrangement of "Quelle est cette odeur agréable."

The tune appears in our Trinity Hymnal (pg. 230) but with a different text. It's a good thing, too. "What is that agreeable odor?" as a title doesn't sound as mellifluous in English. The Trinity Hymnal uses instead a text by Frank Houghton, "Thou who wast rich beyond all splendor." It is one of my favorite carols. The music is gorgeous, mixing serenity with pain. It is full of those agreeable dissonances that give you a sense of longing. But I also love Houghton's poem. It dwells on the mystery of the great exchange, wherein Christ surrenders "thrones for a manger." It is beautiful to contemplate, but it may also be immediately relevant for you. Let me try to show how.

I have a troubled acquaintance, unconnected to our church community, who told me of his grief. He finds himself suddenly separated from his wife, alone, and face to face with his own failures. The timing, he says, couldn't be worse. In his words, "It's Christmas, and his life stinks!" "Stink" is the right word. He has discovered muck inside him he had been ignoring. Maybe you know someone who feels that way. Maybe you feel that way. It's Christmas, and life stinks. What is that stench? *Quelle est cette odeur?*

Actually, Christmas has a great deal to do with stink. You haven't gone very far contemplating the nativity of our Lord if you have not imagined the offensive smell of his birthplace. Or do you think Mary was diffusing Thieves oil? Think on this: what is the ultimate symbol of Christmas? What is its sign? Is it the tree? Come, come, we can do better. Is it the star? No. The star is for

Epiphany. It comes later. Is it the angel? No, Gabriel is not the sign, but he was a messenger sent to tell of the sign. Then what is the sign? "This shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." That is the ultimate symbol of Christmas, the babe lying in a manger. But push out of your mind for a moment the Kinkadian picture of the glowing manger with golden straw combed just so and the friendly beasts in a serene state of ideal bovinity. It makes a lovely holiday card, but it misses the crucial point. Take the glow off the manger and put the mud back on. The hay, if it is hay rather than slop, is half eaten and bug ridden. It may help to set aside the word "manger" itself. It has become sentimental through years of disinfecting. Let us call it what it is, a trough. The symbol of Christmas, then, is not a tree, but a trough--a filthy animal's trough with the baby inside.

And it matters. If you think your life stinks and you're wondering where to find Emmanuel, remember the sign. If you entertain the thought that Christ can't abide in you because you are so filthy, remember the sign. Or if you have deluded yourself into thinking that you have no stench, then beware and remember the sign. Ye shall find the babe. . .in the trough.

Now it is time to add the glow back to the manger, to spin the straw into gold. Because the most beautiful thing about it is that the manger never makes Christ dirty. His presence makes the manger holy. Christ's abiding presence always transforms the stench into a sweet fragrance.

*Quelle est cette odeur agréable?*

*What is this lovely fragrance?*

*Shepherds, what is it that stirs our senses so,  
Borne aloft, unlike any other,  
With the breath of spring flowers?*

*What is this brilliant light*

*That pierces the darkness?*

*Never has the noonday sun  
Shone so radiantly.*

*In Bethlehem, in a manger,  
to you has been born a Saviour.  
Go forth. Let nothing hinder,  
that you may worship Him.*



## What's Happening?

### Nursery Schedule December 23

**Front Desk**  
Tammy Bacon

### Worship

**Infants**  
Annabelle Cross

**Crawlers**  
Heather Morrison

**Toddlers**  
Brandon Cross &  
Maggie Middleton

**Sunday School**  
*Nursery Cancelled for  
Christmas Fellowship*

### SUNDAY SCHOOL CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

After worship Sunday morning, a church-wide Sunday school Christmas celebration is gathering in Schum Fellowship Hall. We invite all ages of our Sunday school folk to this time of fellowship and fun. Thank you to all who are bringing refreshments to share during this time, as well as Mary Caudle who is organizing the event.

### 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.

### MARRIAGE MINISTRY

The Marriage Ministry is beginning a special marriage event series on January 19. More information is forthcoming, but if you are interested, please contact Jon Harris or Pastor Jake Bennett.

### BUDGET REPORT

Through December 16:

Budget:	\$1,645,343
Actual:	\$1,455,309
Shortfall:	\$190,034
Needed by Year End:	\$255,848

### 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.

### YEAR END CONTRIBUTIONS

This year, the Church Office is closed on December 31; all end-of-the-year contributions need to be in the offering or locked offering box in the Lobby by noon on Sunday, December 30 to be counted as tax-deductible for 2018 contributions. Checks mailed and postmarked by December 31 will also be counted as tax-deductible contributions for 2018. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Carol Beatty, the Church Bookkeeper.

### OFFICE CLOSED

The church office is closed the following days for Christmas and New Years:  
Monday, December 24 - Closed  
Tuesday, December 25 - Closed  
Monday, December 31 - Closed  
Tuesday, January 1 - Closed

### NO ENEWSLETTER

No eNewsletter will be sent the following days:  
Thursday, December 27  
Thursday, January 3