

■ DECEMBER 2025 ■
■ JANUARY 2026 ■

Whisperings



Contents

Pastor Kris	1-2
Sermon Series	3
Hope Office Notes	4
Meetings and News	5-8
Upcoming Event.....	9
Adult SS Classes	10-11
Hope Preschool	12-14
Thank You Notes	15
Wild Church	16
Christmas Word Search .	17
Clyde's Nature Note	18
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year	19

■ ■ ■ A Word from Pastor Kris

Advent is the strangest kind of waiting—because even as we prepare for what is coming, we already know the story by heart. Yet every year, something about it feels new. Maybe that's because, in ministry, we rarely live in just one season at a time.

Over the past few weeks, I've been planning worship from January through Easter. I found myself outlining Ash Wednesday readings and Easter sermon notes... and then I laughed, because Christmas hasn't even happened yet. That moment reminded me of something I've learned over the years: in preaching and worship leadership, we are almost never fully present in the current season. We have to live several seasons ahead—and at the same time, we must remain deeply rooted right where we are.

And there is something beautiful about that. Something grounding. Even when details shift and circumstances surprise us, our purpose remains steady. We will still celebrate that Jesus came into the world as Messiah for all. We will still walk the road of Lent and face the cross with honesty and hope. The church calendar keeps us oriented, even when the world around us feels unpredictable. The story moves forward with purpose, anchoring us in God's steady presence.

For me, I am grounded not only by the calendar, but also by you—this community. When we gather, whether in joy or in heaviness, we gather with compassion and kindness. We seek to be light, not because the world is utterly dark, but because there is always room for more light. Our shared purpose, our shared transformation, and our shared journey with

— CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Hope United Methodist Church

3474 Rothsville Road, Ephrata, PA 17522 (717) 738-3774

office@hopeumcephrata.gov ■ www.hopeumcephrata.org ■ www.facebook.com/hopeumcephrata

Sunday School 9 a.m. ■ Worship 10:30 a.m.

Jesus keep us moving forward. The Holy Spirit has been with us all this time, and that same Spirit continues to send us out with confidence—lifting us up before anything has the chance to bring us down.

Scripture reminds us again and again—Old Testament through New Testament—that God’s people have faced uncertainty, injustice, and grief, and yet they persevered because they were rooted together. Rooted in God’s promises. Rooted in shared purpose, shared struggle, and shared hope. I don’t believe God desires our grief, but I do think God meets us in it. And more than that, God can use us—even in the deepest moments—to bring hope and healing into the world.

That brings me back to the church calendar. We know what’s coming. We plan for it faithfully. But we also hold those plans loosely. Because God may call us to rise to a new need, even as we bring our frankincense and myrrh. God may ask us to love in a new way, even while lament feels close at hand. We cannot be so committed to our plans that we miss the holy moments breaking in right in front of us.

So my encouragement for us this Advent is simple: Let this season draw you back in. Don’t miss the moments. Let what is familiar feel new again. Open your heart to receive what God is doing, and then be ready to be sent out in surprising, Spirit-filled ways. Time marches on—not to leave us behind, but to give us each day as a fresh opportunity for the Lord’s light to shine through us.

May this season bring you grounding, wonder, and holy interruption—and may God’s light guide us into a new year filled with hope.

Pastor Kris

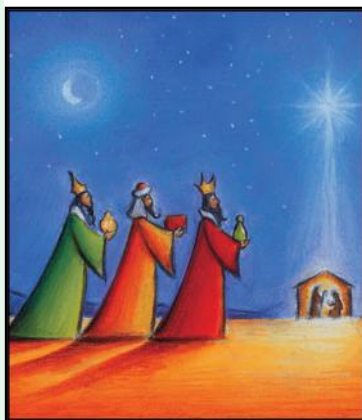


Beautiful nativity displays in our Sanctuary.

► SERMON SERIES:

“SANCTUARY: ROOM FOR ALL”

November 30	Part 1 - First Sunday of Advent
.....	Room, When Pressure is Closing In
.....	Joshua 2:1-21, Matthew 1:1-5
December 7	Part 2 - Second Sunday of Advent
.....	Room in Your Heart
.....	Mark 1:1-8
December 14.....	Part 3 - Third Sunday of Advent
.....	Room in Relationships
.....	Luke 1:24-45
December 21.....	Part 4 - Fourth Sunday of Advent
.....	Room for Hope
.....	Matthew 1:18-25
December 24.....	Part 5 - Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
.....	Making Room
.....	Luke 2:1-20
December 28.....	Part 6 - First Sunday after Christmas Day
.....	Refuge and Sanctuary
.....	Matthew 2:1-18



CHRISTMAS EVE AT HOPE

We are in the Advent season of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love! **A Christmas Eve candlelight service will be held at 7 p.m.** There will be performances by the church choir and bell choir. Join us!

Office Notes

Office Closed - December 25 and January 1

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

FOR A USEFUL CALENDAR

Please fill out the yellow forms on the Administrative Assistant's desk to schedule meetings.

UPDATES

Please inform the church office whenever you set your next meeting date or select your next book or topic for your Sunday school or study. Thank you!

DEADLINES

Please submit all items for the bulletin by **12 p.m. Wednesdays** and by the **15th of the month** for the next Whisperings.

FLOWERS & BULLETINS

Contact Sandy Muckle if you want to sponsor altar flowers less than a week in advance.

You may share an altar flower order with a friend, so that each person keeps one bouquet of flowers after the service and the total price still equals \$50. Two dedications may go in the bulletin.

Sponsor Flowers - \$50.00

Available: December 7, 14, 21 and 28

Available: January 4, 11, 18 and 25

Sponsor Bulletins - \$10.00

Available: December 7, 14, 21 and 28

Available: January 4, 11, 18 and 25

CAN WE HELP?

For financial assistance, please contact Pastor Kris at 717-738-3774

Please notify the office of any changes to your contact information.

Hope UMC Staff and Office Hours

Pastor: Rev. Kris Pursel

Administrative Assistant: Laura Luciano

Director of Music: Lisa Helock ■ Organist: Dave Luck ■ Sexton: Doreen Deamer

Tuesday - Friday ■ 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Meetings and News

December/January Dates

- 7 Second Sunday of Advent - Peace
- 14 Third Sunday of Advent - Joy
 - Giving Tree and Christmas Cards Deadline
 - Staff Christmas Gift Deadline
 - Christmas Cookie Exchange and Sweater Jamboree
- 21 Fourth Sunday of Advent - Love
- 24 Solo Concert at Wiest Church
 - Christmas Eve Candlelight Service - Christ
- 25 Merry Christmas**
- 28 First Sunday after Christmas
 - Hymn Sing Service
- 31 New Year's Eve
- 1 Happy New Year**
- 4 Epiphany Sunday
- 6 Epiphany of the Lord
- 11 Baptism of the Lord Sunday
- 18 Second Sunday after the Epiphany
- 25 Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Weekly Events

Bells of Hope

Wednesdays at 6 p.m.
Sanctuary

Senior Choir

Wednesdays at 7:15 p.m.
Choir Room

Monday Night Bible Study

Mondays at 7 p.m.
Conference Room
(Room 226)

Women's Book & Bible Study

Thursdays at 10 a.m.
Wide Awake (Room 221)

Men of Hope

Fellowship Hall
(First Friday of each month
is at Gus's restaurant.)

Church Administration Meetings

All meetings are at 6:30 p.m. unless specified.

Trustees Meeting - Tuesday, December 2

WPCM Meeting - Monday, December 8

Worship Planning - Thursday, December 11

SPRC Meeting - Tuesday, December 16

One Great Year of Sharing Good Samaritan Ministries

Through Sunday, **December 28**, we will be collecting for Good Samaritan Ministries. The donation jar is in the Sanctuary. As of **November 30** we have collected a total of **\$351.00**. Thank you!

Fifth Collection Sunday

We collected a total of **\$418.00** for Stacey Everline and Bible Church Ministries on November 30. Thank you.

Fellowship Sunday

(the 3rd Sunday each month)

Fellowship Time follows morning worship service on the **3rd Sunday of each month**. Do you have a special snack that you enjoy? Bring it for all of us to enjoy on Fellowship Sunday! As a congregation, we are all responsible for the goodies we munch on while we visit and catch up with each other. Write it on your calendars: "Bring a snack to share at church!" (In lieu of a snack, donate drinks and paper products.) – Thank you for taking part in Fellowship Sunday!

Crocheting/Knitting Group

Melissa Readman is planning to host the group in the coming year. Meetings will take place every other Tuesday from 10:00–11:30 AM beginning January 13. Participants are welcome to bring their own projects, or the group may decide on a mission project to support together. Reach out to Melissa if you have suggestions. Enjoy time creating alongside others, with a brief devotional and an opportunity to share prayer requests each week. We'd be glad to have you join us. Meetings will be held on these days, so mark your calendars.

January 13 and 27

February 10 and 24

March 10 and 24

April 7 and 21

May 5



The Giving Tree - Went up after Thanksgiving, in time for the First Sunday of Advent on November 30. We will be sponsoring 3 families. Food and gifts will be due on Sunday, **December 14**. All gifts are expected to be delivered by Wednesday, **December 17**. Thank you!

Christmas Card Recipients - bags were set up in the lobby on Sunday, **November 30** to collect your cards for our church family who are or may be homebound at times. All cards are due on **Sunday, December 14**. Thank you!



■ **STAFF CHRISTMAS GIFTS:** We will be showing our deep appreciation to our church staff again this year with monetary gifts. If you would like to share in this giving, please see Melissa Readman or Paul Trella. Last day to donate will be Sunday, **December 14**. Thank you!



Attention – Attention

OFFICE HOURS UPDATE

Beginning **January 1**, the church office will be open **Tuesday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM**. If you have any questions, please see **Pastor Kris**.

FEBRUARY BRINGS A NEW NEWSLETTER FORMAT

After discussion and evaluation, we have decided to move away from the formatted newsletter you are currently reading and transition to a weekly format that will require much less administrative time while sharing news more frequently. The newsletters will still be printed for those who wish to receive them in this way, but the shift will be digital-first, where the best experience will be for those receiving it by email. I believe that for those who like the long-form, paper version monthly, you won't feel like much has changed besides the design. What this does is enhance it for others who use computers and need digital information, making them more aware and connected. So please, know that we are making this shift with the purpose of meeting everyone where they are and avoiding anyone feeling left out or unseen. We will welcome constructive feedback as we move forward, and we will take it all seriously. If you would like to receive it digitally and aren't today, let us know so that we can help set you up well. My sincere hope is that some small changes will make big positive impacts in the ministry of Hope now and for the future.





CHRISTMAS COOKIE EXCHANGE AND SWEATER JAMBOREE



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14
FELLOWSHIP HALL
RIGHT AFTER WORSHIP SERVICE

Bring three dozen (3dz.) cookies to share (sign-up sheet available on the lobby table) and wear your favorite Christmas sweater or sweatshirt for a chance to be recognized in one of our festive categories: most loudest, festive, most original, and funniest!

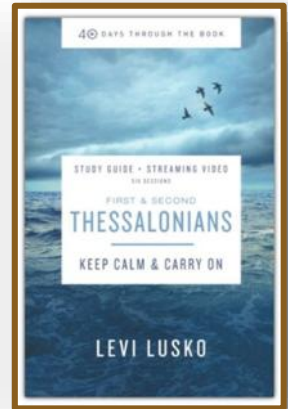
Adult Sunday Schools & Studies

Seekers - Bruce Tucker

Sundays 9 a.m. in Fellowship Hall

Studying ***First & Second Thessalonians: Keep Calm & Carry On*** by Levi Lusko

Join Levi Lusko on a journey through Paul's words to the Thessalonians that will encourage you to stay grounded, remain faithful, and keep being diligent as you wait for Jesus' return. To the believers in Thessalonica, Paul addresses many of the core beliefs and practices that Christians of all maturity levels need to know to honor Jesus and impact *the world*. In this six-session study (streaming video included), bestselling author and pastor Levi Lusko guides you through these short letters from Paul, revealing how to press on and not become discouraged in your faith.



The Way - (*a name given to the earliest followers/disciples of Jesus*) - Rev. Kevin Readman

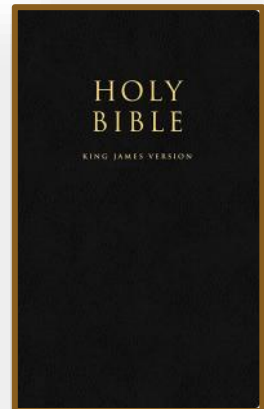
Sundays 9 a.m. in the Conference Room (Room 226)

During December we will be learning about The Church Calendar and how it supports our journey through The Bible and Jesus' life. The Liturgical Calendar helps us focus on various aspects of our spiritual life.

Please come and join the conversation the four Sundays of December.

Any questions please speak with Kevin Readman: 717-203-8452; at Kevin_readman@yahoo.com; or in person.

In January, we will return to a more traditional Bible Study as we look at the Book of James. Hope many of you will be able to join in this time of thought and exploration.

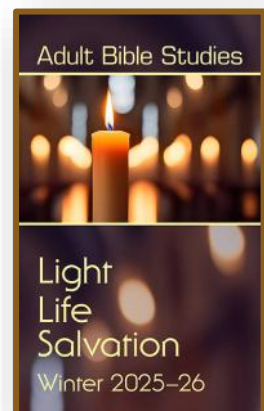


Wide Awake - Melissa Readman and Sandy Schmid

Sundays 9 a.m. in Room 221

Studying ***Adult Bible Studies - Winter 2025/2026 - Light. Life. Salvation*** by Betsy Haas

For our winter quarter, *Adult Bible Studies* will be considering two major questions: Who is Jesus? Who are we? These lessons and Scriptures around the theme of "Light. Life. Salvation." will build up our faith and deepen our relationship with God as our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.



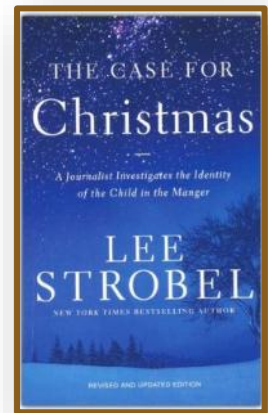
Men of Hope Book & Bible Study

Fridays at 7:30 a.m. in Fellowship Hall

(First Friday of each month is at Gus's Restaurant)

Studying ***The Case for Christmas*** by Lee Strobel

In this updated edition, Strobel investigates the evidence behind Jesus' birth, affirming faith and addressing skeptics with fresh research and compelling historical insight.

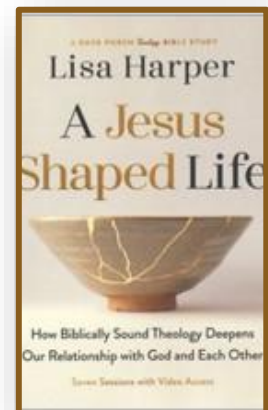


Monday Night Bible Study - Bruce Tucker

Mondays at 7 p.m. in the Conference Room (Room 226)

Studying ***A Jesus Shaped Life*** by Lisa Harper

This seven-week Bible study by Lisa Harper, titled *A Jesus-Shaped Life*, is your invitation to explore the depths of God's character, God's love for you, and how your relationship with Him transforms you. Ultimately, you will experience how biblically sound theology deepens your relationship with God and each other.

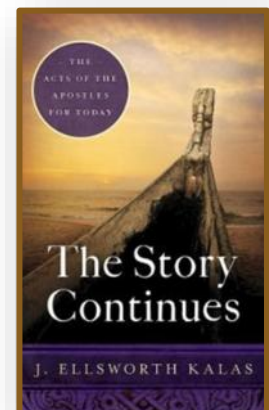


Women's Book & Bible Study - Sandy Schmid

Thursdays at 10 a.m. in Room 221

Studying ***The Story Continues*** by J. Ellsworth Kalas

At the very beginning of our faith, the Christian population numbered a few thousand, measuring only one percent of the world population. Today a single mega-church can boast a comparable number, and together, Christians now number more than two billion people. It all began with this little body of believers who knew a secret that needed to be shared. How did they do it? And what can we learn from them? Join best-selling author and beloved pastor, J. Ellsworth Kalas, as he explores the book of Acts to uncover the ministry motivations of the first followers—ordinary people who accomplished the extraordinary and who can serve as a guide for today's believers to carry on. Because the work is not done.





► Hope Preschool Prattle

Happy Fall & Welcome to the Holiday Season!

November was a whirlwind of activities and fun. The classes all learned about nocturnal animals, leaves, Fall and Thanksgiving. Every class enjoyed a Thanksgiving celebration. Each one looked a little different due to a variety of allergies in the rooms this year, however everyone had a wonderful time!

December is an even busier time for our students and staff. They are busy making Christmas trees, stockings, nativity scenes, candy canes and celebrating the birth of Baby Jesus. All of the classes will be working on a community service project this year. Details are still being decided for this. Currently we are looking to support families that are going through rough times by lifting them up with needed items. We are also currently working on starting a food pantry and hope to share more information regarding that soon.

December will also hold Christmas parties and celebrations for all of our students. Parents will participate in these activities. The theme is "The Christmas Tree". They will have a snack, make a craft, read a story and play a Christmas tree game. We will dismiss at 12PM those days to get the holiday break started for everyone!

The hallways will be covered in fun and festive projects for Christmas and each classroom will be decorating their door. Be sure to come down and check out all of the beautiful displays.

Have a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy new year!

Additionally, I would personally like to thank everyone who reached out to me and/or prayed for me during my medical testing. I am incredibly touched and blessed by all of the support I received.

Mrs. B

Pre School Pictures



Pre School Pictures



THANK YOU NOTES■■■

- ❖ **Thank you** for all the cards, gifts, and kind words shared during Pastor Appreciation Month. Your thoughtfulness means so much and is one of the many reasons serving as a Pastor in this Church is so fulfilling and life-giving.
- ❖ **Thank you** - to all who donated to Harvest Home. This year, Hope helped two families with the remainder going to Ephrata Area Social Services. Thank you for your generosity - Sandy Schmid
- ❖ **Thank you** - We collected **15** Christmas Child Shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse - Sandy Schmid
- ❖ **Thank you** - to the Wide Awake Sunday School Class for the generous \$300 donation to City Gate. This gift will support daily expenses and help provide needed items for the winter months.
- ❖ **Update on Christmas Cards for Prisoners** - A big thank you to all who participated. We sent **150** signed Christmas cards to the conference office for this project.
- ❖ **Giving Challenge Update** - We met the \$5,000 challenge goal thanks to your generosity! We're grateful for every gift already shared. If you feel led to continue contributing, please mark any additional giving as "**Giving Challenge**" so it can be recorded properly. Thank you — Rodger Landes



Wild Church

Partnership with Hope Meadow

Praise the light of late November, the thin
sunlight that goes deep in the bones.

Praise what little there's left:
The small boats of milkweed pods, husks, hulls,
shells, the architecture of trees.

Praise the meadow of dried weeds: yarrow, goldenrod, chicory, the
remains of summer.
Praise the blue sky that hasn't cracked yet. Praise the sun slipping down
behind the beechnuts,

praise the quilt of leaves that covers the grass: Scarlet Oak, Seet Gum,
Sugar Maple. Though the darkness gathers, praise our crazy fallen world;
it's all we have, and it's ever enough.

----By Barbara Crocker

Upcoming Gatherings:

January 25 at 3 p.m.

February 22 at 3 p.m.

March 22 at 5 p.m.

April 26 at 5 p.m.

Our gatherings include reflections, observations, poetry, and your input!



CHRISTMAS

WORD SEARCH

Find the words listed below and mark them.

O	B	W	R	E	A	T	H	O	P	S	C
R	A	C	H	O	L	L	Y	U	R	T	H
N	F	I	R	E	P	L	A	C	E	S	I
A	E	G	I	X	W	Y	Z	V	I	N	M
M	F	D	B	A	G	I	F	T	N	O	N
E	H	I	B	E	L	L	S	E	D	W	E
N	K	J	O	B	G	C	F	D	E	M	Y
T	G	I	N	G	E	R	B	R	E	A	D
L	M	N	S	L	E	I	G	H	R	N	Y

- GIFT
- BELLS
- RIBBON
- GINGERBREAD
- SLEIGH
- REINDEER
- FIREPLACE
- SNOWMAN
- HOLLY
- WREATH
- CHIMNEY
- ORNAMENT



Decorative Cones and Berries

by Clyde McMillan-Gamber

Decorative cones on pine and spruce trees and colorful berries on trees, shrubbery and vines add much beauty to many suburban areas in Lancaster County during fall and winter. Those attractive cones and berries are miracles of God's creations, as everything in the universe is. And birds and mammals that ingest seeds in cones and consume berries are also created by God. Those kinds of wildlife add their beauties and intrigues to those of the cones and berries.

In summer, cones, that grow from female flowers, are green with tightly-shut scales. But late in summer, when their seeds are mature, the cones open their scales to release brown, winged seeds, many of which are dispersed by the wind.

Native white pines and Norway spruces from Eurasia are the majestic coniferous species most commonly planted on local lawns. White pines are characterized by long, soft needles in bundles of five and long, brown, slightly curved, sap-splattered cones. Norway spruces have long, handsome, beige cones, and needled limbs that sweep gracefully out, down and up at the tips. Both kinds of elegant conifers have many lovely cones hanging decoratively from their needled boughs through autumn and winter.

Mice, squirrels and a variety of little birds, including crossbills, pine siskins, American goldfinches, dark-eyed juncos and others, ingest the small seeds of coniferous trees. Crossbills, that nest in coniferous forests farther north, have crossed beak mandibles that pry open the scales of cones more so that their moist tongues can extract the seed under each scale.

Bright-orange berries on planted pyracantha bushes and alien, feral Asian bittersweet vines, and red berries on native American holly trees and winterberry bushes are attractive in fall and winter. In November, and through much of winter, innumerable orange berries on bittersweet vines cascade down from treetops. And scarlet berries of American hollies are highlighted beautifully by the hollies' thick, evergreen foliage.

A variety of rodents, and several species of berry-eating birds, including starlings, American robins, cedar waxwings and others, consume the striking berries of these plants, and many other kinds of berry-bearing plants. The birds add to the beauties of the berries, and the landscape their dining in. And the birds digest the pulp of the berries, but pass the seeds in their droppings, spreading each kind of berry-producing plant across the countryside, insuring future birds of a food supply.

The appealing cones and berries add beauties to winter landscapes, including in suburbs. And they feed a variety of wildlife species, which liven winter scenery, including on lawns right at home.



Check out Clyde's nature blog: NaturesWondersByClyde.blogspot.com.
Each short story is like taking a walk with your very own park naturalist!



**MERRY
CHRISTMAS**

AND

**HAPPY
NEW YEAR**

