

## THE GIFTS OF CHRISTMAS



Like most kids at Christmas, I loved opening presents. Lots of them! The more the merrier was my motto. Stuff, stuff, stuff! Don't stop to read the cards... just dive in!!!

It drove me crazy when our parents made us slow down, read the cards and open presents one at a time taking turns. Why did they do that? So that we would appreciate not just the gift, but the giver.

Gift giving at Christmas may have been fueled by ruthlessly greedy retailers here in America, but gift giving at Christmas originated with the birth of Jesus. And if we slow down a bit we may gain a new appreciation for the gifts of Christmas.

Think about it... everyone involved in the Christmas story gave something:

**Mary gave her body and reputation.** She willingly surrendered her body to bear the Son of God. Furthermore, because she wasn't yet married, she gave her reputation.

**Caesar Augustus gave a decree.** The Roman emperor called for a census to accomplish his plan of taxing all the people. Although Caesar thought it was

his idea, God was simply using him to accomplish His divine purpose.

**The innkeeper gave a stable.** When Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, the city was so crowded that there was no place for her to give birth. Although the inn was full, the innkeeper gave what he had—a stable for Jesus' birthplace.

**The angel of the Lord gave an announcement.** The first report of Christ's birth was delivered by a glorious angel to a group of simple shepherds.

**The shepherds gave a testimony.** After seeing the Messiah, they couldn't keep the news to themselves, but told everyone what they had heard and seen.

**The wise men gave gifts and worship.** They were probably astrologers or philosophers who came from Persia. When this star caught their attention, they went on a long journey to find the newborn King of the Jews. When they found Jesus, they worshipped Him and offered gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

**God gave His only begotten Son.** The greatest gift of all came from God the Father who gave His Son to the world to die as a sacrifice for our sins. What an awesome gift God gave us in His Son, Jesus!

**In fact, when you think about it, Christ's entire life was characterized by giving.** From the age of 12 when he sat with the Pharisees and Sadducees in the temple Jesus gave Himself to teaching the truth. He was able to do that because He gave His time to study the Word of God from the time He was a young boy.



*continued* →

As Christ matured, He gave Himself to healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, helping the lame to walk, and casting out demons. He gave Himself to training the twelve disciples and teaching the masses. And Jesus was always giving Himself away in friendship.

It's no wonder Paul gushed forth in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"

What's interesting is that when we truly receive the gift of Jesus into our hearts it utterly transforms us. Our whole way of thinking becomes more and more like Christ. Instead of takers we become givers... not just at Christmastime, but all year long!

For some of us it happens overnight like Ebenezer Scrooge who instantly became a joyfully generous man. For others it takes a while longer. Whatever the case, when Christ resides in your heart it becomes impossible to remain stingy and small. Generosity is the natural outflow of our inner transformation.

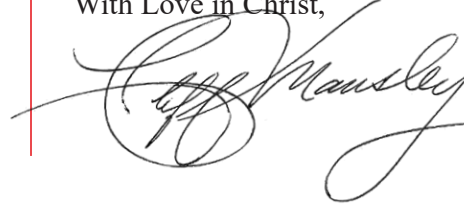
First, we will become very generous in sharing the good

news of the Gospel. Of all the gifts we've ever received, the gift of eternal life is by far the most valuable. That's why we look for opportunities to tell others about what Jesus has done in our lives. Because He can do for them what He's already done for us. What a gift!

Secondly, our natural response to God's blessings and provisions is to have a glad and generous heart. Just as we've received so much from God that we want to share it with others. Generosity actually stokes the fire of joy in our hearts... it feeds on itself. As 2 Corinthians 9:6 says, "whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

So, beloved, allow me to ask, where is your heart when it comes to giving gifts at Christmas? The generous gift of Jesus has dramatically changed our lives. How will our generous gifts do the same?

With Love in Christ,



## Offering for Missions



We have a great opportunity to give an over and above Christmas Blessing to our Missionaries.

Look for the special Missions Offering envelopes or simply write Missions on the memo line of your donation check.

*Thank you, GCC Missions Committee*

Join us for a  
Special Candlelight

## Christmas Eve Service



December 24 at 5 PM



During this Advent and Christmas season there are songs of old and new that we sing joyfully. One of my favorite ancient Christmas Hymns is “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

The origins of this plaintive carol date to medieval times. In the 800’s a series of Latin hymns were sung each day during Christmas Vespers from December 17 to 23. Each of these hymns began with the word “O” and were called the “Great” or “O” Antiphons. These hymns apparently were restructured into verse form from the 1100’s and finally published in Latin in 1710. In the mid 1800’s, they were discovered by an English minister named John Mason Neale, who wove together segments of them to produce the hymn we sing today. (excerpt from *Come Let Us Adore Him*, by Robert J. Morgan, 2005)

This prayerful hymn is sung in worship of Emmanuel (God With Us), calling us to worship Him.

O come O come Emmanuel

O come Thou Wisdom from on high

O come thou rod of Jesse

O come thou Day-spring come and cheer

O come Thou Key of David

O come Thou Root of Jesse’s tree

O come Desire of nations

This Advent season we will be singing different verses of this ancient hymn every week as part of the Call to Worship and the advent candle lighting. In addition to this ancient hymn about Emmanuel, we will be singing a newer song about Emmanuel written by three contemporary writers connected with Getty Music. This song “Sing We the Song of Emmanuel” calls us to sing the song of Emmanuel, come to welcome Emmanuel, and to go and spread the news of Emmanuel. Take a listen by [CLICKING HERE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbG78Ky7TA8) (or go to [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbG78Ky7TA8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbG78Ky7TA8)).

May your Advent and Christmas be filled with Joy as we worship Emmanuel.

Michele Southerland, Music Director

### ***Sing We The Song Of Emmanuel***

#### **Verse 1**

Sing we the song of Emmanuel  
This the Christ who was long foretold  
Lo in the shadows of Bethlehem  
Promise of dawn now our eyes behold  
God Most High in a manger laid  
Lift your voices and now proclaim  
Great and glorious Love has come to us  
Join now with the hosts of heaven

#### **Verse 2**

Come we to welcome Emmanuel  
King who came with no crown or throne  
Helpless He lay the Invincible  
Maker of Mary now Mary’s son  
O what wisdom to save us all  
Shepherds sages before Him fall  
Grace and majesty what humility  
Come on bended knee adore Him

#### **Verse 3**

Go spread the news of Emmanuel  
Joy and peace for the weary heart  
Lift up your heads for your King has come  
Sing for the Light overwhelms the dark  
Glory shining for all to see  
Hope alive let the gospel ring  
God has made a way He will have the praise  
Tell the world His name is Jesus

# OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD A **HUGE SUCCESS!!!**

Many thanks to all of you who helped make Operation Christmas Child a wonderful success!! Because of your effort, 188 boys and girls will not only receive a box of Christmas presents, but they will also hear about the true meaning of Christmas. In fact, many of these children will hear about Jesus for the very first time. Together, we brought in more Christmas boxes this year than any previous year. Great work Grace Community!



## 21 NEW MEMBERS!

Grace Community Church is excited to welcome twenty-one new members into our family of faith. Each of these friends completed a five-week series of classes, met with a sponsor and had several opportunities to interact with our leadership. Classes included a review of the basics of Christian belief and practice as well as an introduction to life at Grace Community.

Having made the decision to formalize their relationship with GCC, it is a great honor to extend an enthusiastic welcome to the following friends:

Shirley Breen  
Darlene Bruere  
Sandra Case  
K. Clement  
Sathya Clement  
Susan Lee Farrier  
Marcia Gaskill  
David Gordon  
Tammy Gordon  
Jerry Hartman

John Krest  
Rosemary Krest  
Priscilla Lords  
Lanny Mellinger  
Mary Mellinger  
Judy Marie Miller  
Bette-Jo O'Connor  
William Roeder  
George Sampson  
Orian Sampson  
Burt Sibley

*Classes led by Dr. Clement*

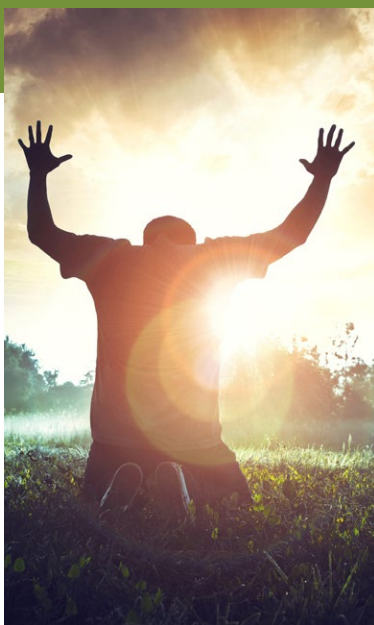
### PRACTICES OF THE PRAYING HEART

How the Prayers of the Bible Shape our Relationship with God  
Sunday Mornings at 8:30 a.m. in the Prayer Room

**New Class  
Beginning in  
December**

### MISUNDERSTOOD PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE

Wednesdays at 10:00 a.m.  
in the Fellowship Area



# Sharing & Caring

## SUPPORT GROUP

The Sharing and Caring support will continue meeting this month on the 1st & 3rd Thursdays of the month at 10:30 a.m.

# TUESDAY MORNING

— PRAYER GROUP —

MEET US IN THE  
PRAYER ROOM, EVERY  
TUESDAY AT 9:45 AM

# THE GOSPEL IN GENESIS

FINDING FAITH & HOPE  
IN A FALLEN WORLD

Pastor's Bible Study  
Tuesdays at 11:00 a.m.

# CHRISTMAS CONCERT



**FRIDAY - 12/8 - 4 PM**

Join us for our  
Christmas concert  
featuring  
Park Place Brass.

**Sign-up online  
at [GCC-EPC.com/  
events](http://GCC-EPC.com/events)**

## OTHER UPCOMING CONCERTS

January 12, 2024, 7 PM  
**GOLD RUSH**

February 9, 2024, 4 PM  
**GUITARS ON FIRE** - Gal Drimmer

March 8, 2024, 4 PM  
**WOMEN IN SONG**

April 19, 2024, 7 PM  
**BLACK RIVER JAM**



## DECEMBER'S SCRIPTURE MEMORY PASSAGE

### JOHN 1:1-5

- <sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.
- <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.
- <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him,  
and without him was not any thing  
made that was made.
- <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life  
was the light of men.
- <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness  
has not overcome it.



## ONLINE GIVING AVAILABLE

For your convenience our church has online giving available on our website. Visit our site at, [GCC-EPC.com/donate](http://GCC-EPC.com/donate) to make donations using a credit card or bank account.

*Thank you for giving.*

# Women's

## BOOK CLUB



The Women's Book Club will not be meeting during the month of December.



## WHY READ THE BIBLE?

### *It's Full of Truth*

*Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.  
(John 17:17, NIV)*

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)*

God is truth. That's another aspect of His character that shows itself throughout the Bible. Some say truth is relative, and it can be overwhelming to know where to go for truth. These days, data and personal opinion are two things people often turn to.

But the Bible is ultimately where truth is found. Ask God to show you His truth when you read the Scriptures; He will reveal it to you. The Old Testament Book of Proverbs contains wisdom for life and is a great place to start if you are looking for biblical truth.

# DECEMBER 2023

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<b>LEGEND</b> <span style="background-color: #d9ead3; padding: 2px;">Worship &amp; Study</span> <span style="background-color: #f4cccc; padding: 2px;">Group Meetings</span> <span style="background-color: #cfe2f3; padding: 2px;">SPECIAL ACTIVITIES</span> <span style="background-color: #fce4d6; padding: 2px;">GCC Rehearsals</span> <span style="background-color: #d9ead3; padding: 2px;">Other Groups</span>					1 TOPS Meeting 8 AM - 10 AM	2
<b>DECK THE HALLS DECORATING</b>						
3 Class w/ Dr. Clement 8:30 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM <b>Communion</b> ADVENT BEGINS	4 Men's Breakfast at GCC 8:00 AM Women's Bible Study 9:30 AM Worship Meeting 11:00 AM	5 Prayer Gathering 9:45 AM Pastor's Bible Study 11:00 AM Trail Life 6:00 PM	6 Dr. Clement Class 10:00 AM Parkinson Support Group 3:00-4:30 PM	7 Sharing & Caring 10:30 AM Bell Choir 1:00 PM Choir Rehearsal 2:00 PM	8 TOPS Meeting 9:00 - 11:00 AM <b>PARK PLACE BRASS CONCERT 4:00 PM</b>	9
10 Class w/ Dr. Clement 8:30 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM	11 Men's Bible Study 9:00 AM Women's Bible Study 9:30 AM Worship Meeting 11:00 AM	12 Prayer Gathering 9:45 AM Pastor's Bible Study 11:00 AM Trail Life 6:00 PM	13 Dr. Clement Class 10:00 AM <b>CHRISTMAS PARTY 11:30 AM</b>	14 Deacon's Meeting 2:00 PM Women's Book Club 10:30 AM Choir & Bell Choir Rehearsal 1:00 PM Celebration of Christmas	15 TOPS Meeting & Party 8 AM - 11 AM Sharpshooters 9:30 AM	16
17 Class w/ Dr. Clement 8:30 AM Worship Service 10:00 AM	18 Men's Bible Study 9:00 AM Women's Bible Study 9:30 AM Worship Meeting 11:00 AM	19 Prayer Gathering 9:45 AM Pastor's Bible Study 11:00 AM Trail Life 6:00 PM	20 Dr. Clement Class 10:00 AM	21 Sharing & Caring 10:30 AM	22 TOPS Meeting 8 AM - 10 AM	23
24 Worship Service 10:00 AM <b>Christmas Eve Service 5:00 PM</b>	25 <i>Christmas Day (Office Closed)</i> 	26 <i>(Office Closed)</i>	27 Game Day 1:00 PM	28	29	30
31 Worship Service 10:00 AM						

# Christmas Party



✦ **WEDNESDAY** ✦  
**12/13 AT 11:30 AM**

Join us for a fun-filled afternoon featuring a wacky gift exchange.

Lunch will be catered from Rudy's BBQ.

**The cost is \$15 per person.**

*Please bring along a dessert to share.*

For the gift exchange each participant should bring a wrapped white elephant or gag gift. The more silly, fun or outrageous the gift the better!

**Sign-up in the Holy Grounds**

## Holiday

### OFFICE SCHEDULE

**OFFICE CLOSED**

Monday & Tuesday  
December 25 & 26

**OFFICE CLOSED**

Monday  
January 1



# Christmas Card

## EXCHANGE

Bring in any Christmas cards you have for your fellow Grace attendees from

**SUNDAY, 12/3 -  
SUNDAY, 12/17**

Volunteers will sort them by recipient for pick-up in lobby.





# CHOICES PREGNANCY CENTER

As we support the Choices Pregnancy Center through our church Missions Donation Programs, I would like to just add some updates I received, from the Month of September, from the Director of Ministry Partnerships, Sam Yonan.

- 353 New Clients for a total of 2,795 this year so far
- 1,355 All Client Visits or a total of 11,069
- 331 Pregnancy Test Clients for a total of 2,905
- 193 Ultrasound exams for a total of 1,769
- 24 STD Clients for a total of 279
- 24 Change to Carry Clients for a total of 269

Amazing totals toward helping families to understand that they are loved, and there are choices for them for a sweeter life ahead.

*“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints...”*  
- Ephesians 6:18.

Please also keep in mind that we take donations, through the year, for Choices and special needs they might have. Right now they are in need of:

- Baby Wipes
- Baby feeding items
- Diapers (sizes NB, 3, 4, 5, 6)
- Teething toys and pacifiers



We, the CPC Committee, would also like to invite any church members to join our little group of ladies who carry on the Annual church activities for Choices as follows: The Baby Bottle drive; The Baby Shower luncheon and gifts; and the March for Life. These activities usually take place in our church from January through April, more information to come.

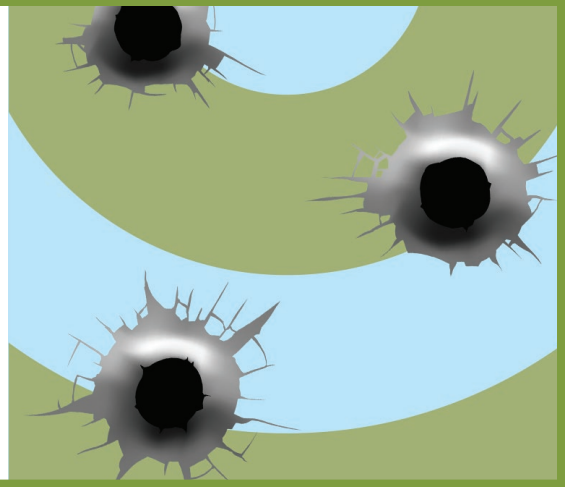
Thank you all and through our Love for all Godly activities, let us move forward in health and charity.

Margo Treller, *Liaison for Choices Pregnancy Center*

# SHARPSHOOTERS CLUB UPDATE

The club meets every month on the 3rd Friday in the church parking lot at 9:15 a.m. Then they carpool to the range at 9:30 a.m. **December 15th is the next trip.**

Shooters will need hearing and eye protection, paper targets, ammunition, a pistol and or rifle. Please bring \$10 (cash) for range charges. We ask that you watch the following safety video <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=W2Vrc2R1oGU> if you haven't already.



# LIFE GROUPS

Here at Grace Community, we are organizing Life Groups who will meet together for fellowship and spiritual growth outside of Sunday Morning.

We want everyone to find community, not only because life is more fun when we are together, but because we know faith deepens in new ways when we are in relationship with others who are pursuing Jesus!

We have five year-round groups that are already meeting and we are particularly looking for seasonal life group interest (November - April).

Please share your interest in a Life Group by signing up on the clipboard at church or by contacting Deb Schmitt, Life Group Coordinator, at [debschmitt3@gmail.com](mailto:debschmitt3@gmail.com) or 360-871-0851 (call or text).

Deb will contact you to get the details needed to connect you with a Life Group.

**SIGN UP SHEET IN LOBBY**

## WATCH OUT FOR SCAMS

There is a scam going around that has affected many churches, including ours. A scammer will send an email or a text claiming to be the pastor or a member of the church staff. They will then ask for gift cards to be purchased and the activation codes to be sent to them.

### PLEASE KNOW THIS...

1. Your pastor will never ask you to purchase gift cards for any reason.

The church will never contact you and request gift cards (or other purchases) of any kind, especially not through email or text messages.

2. If you have any doubts about an email or text message you receive please contact Pastor Cliff or the church office (623-975-9038). Never call a phone number provided in a potentially phony email or text message.

# GAME DAYS

**UPDATE:**

Game Day will not be held on Wednesday, December 13th due to the GCC Christmas Party. However, Game Day will be held at its regular time of 1 PM on Wednesday, December 27th.

# WHAT IS EVANGELISM EXPLOSION?

Evangelism Explosion is a presentation developed by Rev. D. James Kennedy. It teaches us how to articulate our faith in an orderly way. St. Peter tells us that we should always be ready to do this.

This course does require some memorization, but it is thought for thought learning not word for word accuracy.

Beginning in mid-January, we shall be teaching Evangelism Explosion.

**KEEP WATCHING FOR DETAILS.**

**SIGN UP IN THE HOLY GROUNDS**

# MEN'S BREAKFAST

AT GRACE COMMUNITY

The Men of Grace Community Church will be holding our second-ever on-site Men's Breakfast December 4th at 8 a.m. Our men's cooking team are excited to prepare pancakes, bacon (thick-cut!), sausage, coffee, juice and more!

Please sign-up early in the Holy Grounds Room as we need to know how many men to prepare for. This is going to be a fantastic!!

**DECEMBER 4<sup>TH</sup> - 8:00 AM - GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH**

# ATTENTION TICKET HOLDERS FOR DREAM CITY CHURCH'S CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS:

Please be at the church at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday,  
December 14th to go see *Celebration of Christmas*.

**Make sure to bring your tickets with you!**

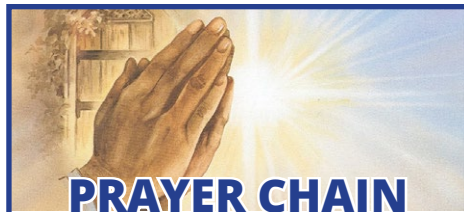
## DECEMBER

### ANNIVERSARIES

Art & Betty Paulsen ..... 12/18  
Tim & Maureen Tunnell..... 12/21

### BIRTHDAYS

Barbara Ratliff..... 12/5  
Jerry Hartman..... 12/6  
Ginny Paetz..... 12/9  
Barbara Wilson..... 12/10  
Susie Ashburn ..... 12/13  
Linda Weiland ..... 12/14  
Dick Rogeness ..... 12/16  
Ken Marshall..... 12/17  
Tom Merritt..... 12/18  
Sandra Case..... 12/22  
John Krest ..... 12/22  
Pete Kosky ..... 12/24  
Mary Mellinger ..... 12/29



### PRAYER CHAIN

Prayer requests can be submitted on our website at [gcc-epc.com/prayer-warriors](http://gcc-epc.com/prayer-warriors)

If you prefer, you can also directly contact Pastor Cliff ([pastorcliff@gcc-epc.com](mailto:pastorcliff@gcc-epc.com)), the church office ([grace@gcc-epc.com](mailto:grace@gcc-epc.com)), or your assigned deacon.

You can also sign up to be included in the prayer chain at the webpage listed above.



**Evangelical Presbyterian Church**

**Rev. Cliff Mansley**  
Pastor

16165 W. Mountain View Blvd.  
Surprise, AZ 85374

Worship Service Time:  
10:00 a.m.

Office Hours:  
Monday - Friday  
8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Contact Information:  
Phone: 623-975-9038  
Fax: 623-537-5565

Website Address:  
[gcc-epc.com](http://gcc-epc.com)

E-mail Address:  
[grace@gcc-epc.com](mailto:grace@gcc-epc.com)