

OFFERTORY MOMENTS 2013

JANUARY 2

Today, (January 6) is EPIPHANY! This is the traditional time of the visit of the Magi to the Baby Jesus. Epiphany means “Manifestation” and signifies the revealing of the Christian story to the world. As we know, the Magi came BEARING GIFTS. The gifts were not to pay bills or meet budgets – but were given as a homage and expression of honor to Christ. Our gifts are in HONOR of Christ, and to pay homage to his coming. Let’s give an appropriate honor by our sacrificial gifts, as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

JANUARY 9

Today we remember the Baptism of Jesus by John, The Baptist. Baptism, along with Holy Communion are the two sacraments we continue in our tradition, because of the participation of Jesus and the connection with God. We celebrate the presence and activity of God in our lives, and because of that, GIVING becomes Sacramental, or SACRED, therefore HOLY. As we bring God’s presence and activity into our GIVING, our giving becomes sacred, or sacramental, and sacrificial. Let us now give sacramentally as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

JANUARY 16

By now, the hangovers of New Year’s Day have passed. Even the National Championship has been decided, and the bowl games are over. We may have received some bills for the Christmas gifts we bought. But, a new year is mostly still before us. There is new opportunity to show gratitude to God by our commitment to PRAYERS, PRESENCE, GIFTS, SERVICE and WITNESS. Let us be recommitted to these – at this time of year, and at this time of worship – especially the giving, as we now present God’s tithes and our offerings.

JANUARY 23

It has been said that a failure to plan is a plan to fail. Without a plan, there is no strategy. Without a strategy, nothing much happens. What is our Strategy for giving to God? Do we have one? Does it involve tithing, or even proportionate giving? Shouldn’t we have a strategy for honoring God by our gifts? Let’s pray about that, and develop our strategy about giving. Now let us present God’s tithes and our offerings to the work of God in the world.

JANUARY 30

The three MAIN essentials for life are Food, Clothing and Shelter. Today we also are in need of transportation, education and medical care. Recreation and leisure are important for our quality of life, as well as cultural experience. That amounts to 90% of our needs. What about the other 10%? Does it belong to God? Whatever we claim for ourselves from that 10% is, in a way, taking it from God’s portion. If God’s portion of our income is Not 10%, what percentage is it? Let us now present God’s portion as we give God’s tithe and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 6

This next Wednesday will be the beginning of LENT, when we prepare for the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem and the culmination of his ministry. Lent is a time of reflection, as we concentrate on confessing our sins and become repentant. Repentance means changing our course and going in a God-like direction. As we remember the journey of Jesus to the cross, may we repent of our tendency to be self-seeking, and become more God-seeking. Let’s start that journey as we now present God’s tithes and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 13

Studies show that 30% of church members give zero to God's work. Another 55% of church folks give a minimal amount of their household income. The remaining 15% of disciples give about 85% of the support for God's vision and work in the world. Which group are you in? Which do you want to be in? Christianity is about being Disciples and growing in our discipleship, so that we can MAKE disciples. Let us prayerfully grow as we now present God's tithes and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 20

When the Church brings up the subject of money, there are various reactions. Some people think that money-talk is beneath the spiritual nature of the church. Some are neutral about money. Some have found the joy that comes with giving. But, does God care? Does God notice our gifts? There is plenty of Biblical evidence that God DOES notice our gifts, and that God is pleased and accepting of our giving. Numerous passages in the Bible affirm that God loves a cheerful give. In that light, may we give sacrificially and joyously to God, who affirms our gifts, and we now present God's tithes and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 27

The very first act of worship in the Bible is the giving of gifts to God. Cain brought the produce of his fields, and Able, his brother, brought the first born of his flocks. The Bible says that God "approved" the gift of Able...the "first-fruit" of his flock, but did NOT approve the gift of Cain. Why is that? The Bible never gives us the answer. But could it be that because Able brought the FIRST of his flock to God, that his gift was preferred? Should we give to God FIRST, before we use our money in other ways? That seems to be a Biblical principle. When we tithe, giving God the first 19% of our income, God helps us to live well on the other 90%. So, let's give God's tithe, and our offerings as we present our gifts in an act of true worship.

MARCH 6

Is Giving to God anything like Taxes? The IRS takes its cut of our money. The county gets its share out of our property taxes. The state gets its cut when we buy anything through sales tax. Is there anything left to GIVE? Giving is altogether different from taxes. We give to God to express our appreciation for God's love, to help feed the hungry, clothe and help the poor, and provide comfort to those who are hurting. Giving is a joyous way to participate in an eternal activity in God's love. So, may we experience the joy of giving as we now present God's tithes and our offerings.

MARCH 13

A wealthy man gave a significant gift to a church. The church used the money in a way the donor had NOT intended. When asked about his reaction, the man said, "My gift was between me and God. What they chose to do with it is between THEM and God." When we give, we relinquish the control of the gift, and our gift is between us and God. If our gift to God reflects the true depth of our felling and thankfulness to God, then is is a worthy gift. Let us now generously give God's tithes, and our offerings.

MARCH 20 (for Palm Sunday)

There is a seeming contradiction about Palm Sunday, isn't there? We remember how the crowds cheered for Jesus as he came into Jerusalem with the people putting down robes and palms to honor him. We sing, "Hosannah, Loud Hosannah!" with the little children waving palm fronds. But we know this week ahead will bring us the observance of the hardest week in the life of Jesus. We'll remember Maundy Thursday, then Good Friday, as we ponder the sacrifices Jesus made for us. As we ponder these things, what sacrifices is God calling us to make? What portion of our time, our talents and our treasure belongs to God? In the spirit of the gift of our salvation through Jesus, let us now give God's tithe and our offerings.

MARCH 27 (for Easter Sunday)

The Resurrection of Jesus has been called “The Greatest Story Ever Told.” We’ve heard it so often and so regularly that we almost take it for granted. But without the Resurrection, there would be no Christianity, no church and no Easter Sunday. And, while the Resurrection was for the world and all its people, it is also, JUST FOR YOU. Everything God has done in Christ, God did JUST FOR YOU! How do we respond? Can we go into the world and live the Easter life, with our faithfulness through prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness? And not just for today, but every day? Let us celebrate Christ’s victory over death by giving sacrificially and generously, as we present God’s tithe and our offering.

APRIL 3

Easter, for far too many Christians, is simply a day on the calendar. We dress nicely, go to church, smell the lilies, sing “Christ The Lord Is Risen Today,” and go on about our lives. But WE ARE EASTER PEOPLE EVERY DAY! CHRIST IS RISEN! Has the resurrection of Christ reached our checkbooks and bank accounts? Do we dare let it? The prophet Micah tells us that God’s faithfulness exceeds our faithfulness. Let’s be faithful in giving God’s tithe and our offerings, every Sunday of the year.

APRIL 10

Take a deep breath, and hold it in. (Pause) OK, when you can’t hold it any more, let it go. The air we breathe is a source of life, isn’t it? But, if we try to keep that breath of air, and not give it back, bad things begin to happen. First, we are unable to breath in another fresh bit of life. Secondly, our bodies build up a toxic amount of carbon dioxide, and we die. It’s the same way with our giving. Everything we have comes to us because of an interactive society and God’s grace. When we fail to give back, we slowly die from our lack of generosity. Let’s give off a great breath out, and give generously to the God who gives us life, as we give God’s tithes and our offerings.

APRIL 17

You know about the Dead Sea, don’t you? It’s over there in Israel. The Sea of Galilee flows down through the Jordan River into the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea has a high concentration of salt, so nothing can live in it. So, the Dead Sea is.....well.....Dead! Why is the Dead Sea Dead? Because it receives, and keeps, but it never gives. When we receive God’s love, grace blessings and life itself, we cannot keep it all to ourselves. We are “blessed to BE a blessing.” We receive new life when we give, as we have so freely received. Let us live abundantly as we GIVE generously, and present God’s tithe and our offerings.

APRIL 24

Do you remember that Jesus said, “Where your heart is, your treasure will be also?” Did he say that? NO....he said, “Where your TREASURE is, there will your HEART be also.” We often hear misquotes of wisdom, like, “That’s not Rocket Surgery,” or “It’s not Brain Science.” But Jesus knows that where our TREASURE is, there will be our interest, our dedication, our loyalty, and our commitment. So, where is your treasure? Is it in a bank, a piece of property, a brokerage account, or buried in a hole? Or, is your TRUE treasure invested in God’s love and grace? For God’s love is the truly most important thing in the world. And we have it by God’s mercy and grace. Even though we don’t deserve it, God loves us. So let’s put our earthly treasure into God’s hands, as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

MAY 1

A was leaving church with his father. The sermon had been about helping others. He asked, “Daddy, if we’re here to help others, what are the others here for?” When you think about it, it is really a profound question. The consistent message of the Bible is that we are “Blessed to be a Blessing.” As we reach out to help the “Others,” the others are empowered to reach out to even more “others,” and the spirit of generosity, caring, compassion and kindness spreads way beyond our individual powers. Giving is where generosity begins. Let us help others, and give generously, as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

MAY 8

The Apostle Paul wrote that the fruits of God’s Holy Spirit are LOVE, JOY, PEACE PATIENCE, GENTLENESS, GENEROSITY, KINDNESS, FAITHFULNESS AND SELF-CONTROL. These nine fruits are evident when we live in the spirit of God’s love and will. Do you know the next word from Paul? He said, “AGAINST THESE, THERE IS NO LAW!” We can freely produce these fruits, and it is legal, permitted, and encouraged! So why not? Let’s produce these fruits, and especially the one about generosity, as we present God’s tithe and our offerings.

MAY 15

Today, (Sunday, May 19) is known as PENTECOST SUNDAY! This is the celebration of the birthday of the Church. The Jews were gathered in Jerusalem to this feast that followed Passover by fifty days. In Acts 2, according to Eugene Peterson’s version of the scripture, THE MESSAGE, “there was a sound like a strong wind...gale force – no one could tell where it came from. . . . Then, like wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.” When Peter and John were told by those in authority to keep silence, they responded, “We can’t keep quiet about what we’ve seen and heard.” On this birthday of the Church, can we keep silent? We are called to spread the blessings of God throughout the world. One way we can speak in a loud voice is through our gifts. Let us shout the story as we present God’s tithe and our offerings.

MAY 22

Tomorrow, (Monday, May 27) is Memorial Day. This Holiday is set aside to honor those who have died in the service of their country while serving in the Armed Forces. For the sacrifices of many people over a hundred and fifty years, we give thanks and honor. For some, this weekend signals the beginning of the summer vacation days. As we look forward to trips and travels, leisure and cookouts, let’s remember those who have sacrificed on our behalf, and preserved our freedoms. Let’s also remember the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who gives us life through the Grace of God. Now, let us give generously as we present God’s tithe and our offering.

MAY 29

Two-thirds of the name of God is “GO!” While we often emphasize “coming to church” or “Going to church,” this is important, but it is not even the half of it. We, AS the church, are called to “GO” out into our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplaces and into the whole world, and BE the representative of Christ for others. Our giving is the beginning of our Going. Let’s GO into the world as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

JUNE 5

A Pastor was leading a Kairos weekend at a prison. At the end of the weekend, each inmate is allowed to give a story about what God has done in their lives that weekend. One inmate, who was an unlikely convert, had decided to follow Jesus. Exuberant with joy, he shared about how awesome God was in giving him new life that weekend. He had been reading the Bible and God's love was made real. After he shared through profuse tears how God had been so good, he announced his intention to give ten percent of everything he made in his job at the prison to the Kairos ministry so that others like him could know the love of God. He said "I have read my Bible and it tells me to tithe, or give ten percent of my increase back to God." He then challenged other inmates to do the same! If that prisoner were here, he would challenge us to follow his generosity example. If he can do it, can we? Let us now give God's tithes, and our offerings.

JUNE 12

Sometimes people object when the church asks for money. But, far more than money, the church needs people to be Disciples of Jesus Christ with Jesus-like generosity. The heart for generosity is far more important than the dollars. When we develop a generous heart and a passion for making disciples of Jesus Christ, our money becomes a "Holy Tool" for the cause, which we gladly give in God's love. Let us develop generous hearts and a Jesus-like generosity, as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

JUNE 19

A child, trying to raise money for the "Imagine No Malaria" campaign approached his minister and asked him to give to the campaign. Unknown to the child, the pastor had promised God that he would respond to the first gift for charity asked of him that day by matching whatever that person had given. The child asked the pastor for the gift. Coincidentally, the pastor had just taken \$200 from an ATM for a trip he was planning. The pastor said, "I will match what you will give to the campaign." The child walked away with a dejected look. The pastor asked, "Why are you leaving? I told you I would match your gift." The child said, "Pastor, I have no more to give, because I have given everything I have." Have you ever given all you have? Are you willing to give the tithe? Let us have generous hearts as we give God's tithe and our offerings.

JUNE 26

Are you where you want to be as a generous giver? Do you have a desire to be more generous? Are you a tither, or are you moving up to tithing, or beyond tithing? Wherever you are in your journey to extravagant generosity, if you want to grow, the place to start is where you are. Do you give 2%, or 3%? If so, can you grow a percent each year till you get to the tithe? If you tithe, can you move to a greater level of generosity? Remember, it is NOT about the money. Our giving reflects our personal spiritual growth, and our Discipleship to Jesus Christ. Without an intent and a plan, we will not grow. Let us grow in generosity as we give God's tithe and our offerings.

JULY 3

Across our land this week, we will celebrate our great nation's freedom. Fireworks, festivals, feasts and family gatherings will take place. One of our major freedoms is our freedom to worship as we please....or not to worship at all. We are free to follow God's vision for our church and our spiritual journey, or we are free to neglect it. For those choosing to reach for God's vision, we are free to give generously to help reach out to those in need. It is our free choice. Let us now exercise our freedom as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

JULY 10

When we give, are we doing God a favor? Are we helping God to accomplish his will in the world? Are we pleasing God? We can be sure that our generous giving to the church pleases God, but we are not doing God a favor, nor is God dependent on our gifts for the accomplishment of his will. God can do very well without us. But WE need to give to God for our own spiritual discipline and our own spiritual growth and health. God can use our gifts, but the giving strengthens US even more. So, let us grow in grace as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

JULY 17

John Wesley, that brilliant little Anglican priest who started the Methodist movement, determined how much money he needed to live on in his first year of earning money. He lived on that yearly amount the rest of his life, giving everything else away. One of his legacies is the saying, "Do all the good you can, at all the times you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can." That is not a bad purpose for our living today. Can we decide more about what we can do without, and become more generous like John Wesley? Can we do all the good we can? Let us do good as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

JULY 24

Retired Bishop William Willimon has written, "Now, in the offering, it is your chance to do something. The offering is, in a way, the test of our worship. Is this service only a time to sing a few hymns, think a few lofty thoughts, feel a few warm fuzzies, and go home to a big meal? Or is this a time to put our money where our mouth is? Remember how Jesus noted that our hearts are usually where our money is and vice versa." These are good questions, as we remember that giving is worship, and worship is giving. Let us give to God as God has given to us, as we present God's tithes and our offerings, and truly worship God.

JULY 31

In the New Testament, Jesus gives the Great Commandment, when he says that we should love God and love other people. Then, Jesus gives the Great Commission, telling us to go and make Disciples. There are many possibilities as to how we may do these two things. One way for sure, if for us to give sacrificially and generously to the work God does through the church. We reach out to God's children and we reach out to those in need of the Good News. Let's give generously and sacrificially to love God and others and to make Disciples, as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

AUGUST 7

An author by the name of Chuck Ingram says, "Christian living = generous giving." He goes on to say that one way to intimacy with God is the practice of generosity. How often we wonder, "How can I be SURE that I am doing God's will? What can I do to please God?" There can be no doubt that when we are generous to the work of God's kingdom, that our generosity is pleasing to God. We remember the words of the Apostle Paul, "God loves a cheerful giver." Though we do not give to "earn" God's favor, we are assured by Scripture that God is "pleased" by our generosity. So, to be more intimate with God, to please God, and to do God's will, one thing we can practice is sacrificial giving and generosity. Let's be closer to God as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

AUGUST 14

Our best theological understanding is that Jesus shows us what God is like. Do we want to be like Jesus? One consistent characteristic of Jesus is generosity. He gave of himself and gave his life for us. Maybe we aren't called on to give up our lives, but we ARE called to give generously of what we have. What percentage of your annual income is God calling you to give? Do you want to be like Jesus? If we want to do that, one small step is to be generous and sacrificial in our giving. Let us give to God as God has given to us, as we present God's tithes and our offerings, and truly worship God.

AUGUST 21

A man who was in his mid-eighties was planting a peach tree in his back yard. His neighbor came over and said, "You don't expect to be around to enjoy the peaches that will grow on this tree, do you?" The older man said, "No, but I have enjoyed many peaches that came from trees I did not plant. Others who come after me will get to enjoy the peaches from this tree. It's my way of paying forward the blessings I have enjoyed in life." Today and throughout our lives, we can plant many trees from which blessings will flow for others. We are "Blessed to be a blessing." We can pay forward with our generosity. Let us now plant trees for others as we give God's tithes and our offerings."

AUGUST 28

A successful businessman advertised that he was hiring workers and those he hired could choose their own salary. Many people showed up to apply for such generosity. In each interview, the businessman explained that he was a Christian, and he believed in the Biblical principle of tithing. Therefore, he told each applicant that he would pay them ten times what they had given to the work of God through their church the previous year. Most wouldn't take the job. Could we live on ten times what we give to God through the church? Let us work toward the tithe as we give God's tithe and our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 4

Have you ever had a pebble in your shoe? Even a small pebble can cause us to walk funny, or not at all. A pebble can cause an athlete to be unable to perform. Until we remove the pebble, we are crippled and unfulfilled. Do we have a pebble called "fear of not having enough?" Are we afraid if we give generously to God that we will be deprived? Do we have a pebble, or a doubt that causes us to hold back on our generosity, fearing that we'll run out of resources? The prophet Malachi challenges us with the words of God, by saying, "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse and put me to the test, says the Lord of Host; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing!" Do we trust God? Can we take out the pebble of doubt and practice real generosity? Let us now be generous as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 11

It has been said that giving isn't about how much we give. It IS about what we keep. If you think about the implications of giving 10% of all we earn, one way to see it is that tithing allows us to KEEP 90%. A pastor did a children's sermon on tithing and used ten pennies to illustrate. He laid the pennies out, took one, and moved it over, saying that this was God's part. An observant little girl said, "Poor God!" The level of our giving is a reflection of our spiritual health. God doesn't need our money as much as we have a fundamental need to give to God. Let's feel blessed to keep the 90% as we give the 10% to God, along with our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 18

A church was situated on a busy highway, and the driveway into the parking lot provided a convenient turn-in. One day the pastor observed that in a fifteen minute period, three cars pulled into the church parking lot, only to make a turn-around and leave. The pastor observed "We should put up a sign that says, 'This is not a turning place!'" Then, he realized what he'd said, and thought, "If this is not a turning place, what is it?" A church must be a place where lives can be turned from futility to faith, from despair to hope, from selfishness to generosity. Our gifts provide for this "turning place" to exist and minister to the needs of hurting and needy people. Let us be a "turning" place as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 25

Someone once said, "Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread." Whether it is the latest great movie, a wonderful new restaurant or some other moment we've enjoyed, we want to tell our friends, relatives, associates and neighbors. We love to share good news. That's another definition of Evangelism...The Good News! As a church family, we must remember, over and over again, that we are not here just for ourselves. We are here to share bread with those who are not yet here. We can't hide the bread and keep it for ourselves. Our bread is for sharing. Let us share God's Good News by giving our bread to other beggars. We can do this by giving generously to God's work through our gifts of God's tithes, and our offerings.

OCTOBER 2

A sportswriter wrote about an overachieving team. He said, "they don't accomplish their goals by superior talent, but by superior effort!" We all are aware of that indefinable but observable quality that we know when we see it. We've all burned the midnight oil, done the extra work and walked the extra mile when something important was needed. We've gone on diets, started exercising and avoided the harmful habits to get better health. Do we give extra effort in matters of our faith? When we join The United Methodist Church we commit to be faithful through Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service and Witness. Do we give effort to these? Can we give extra effort? Can we grow in our commitment? One place where growth is observable and measurable is in our generosity and giving. We can grow to the tithe, and beyond. Let's do that as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

OCTOBER 9

A man owned an aging car. In the span of a few weeks he had to replace the tires, the shock absorbers, the battery, the alternator, the water pump, the belts and the radiator. He looked up the trade-in value of his car and discovered he had spent TWICE as much fixing the car as it was worth. The sum of the PARTS was worth more than the WHOLE! That is absolutely not true of our life together as the church. When we put our efforts and lives together to worship, serve, reach out and minister to the community and to the world, our individual efforts add up to much more than any of us can do individually. When we present our sacrificial and generous gifts to God, God multiplies these gifts and creates a new blessing for those in need of God's love. Let us put our gifts together as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

OCTOBER 16

A Jesuit theologian named John Haughey writes these words; "We read the Gospel as if we had no money, and we spend our money as if we know nothing of the Gospel." That may seem a little harsh to us, but if we are honest, we must admit to a tendency to think of our financial condition as being "poor," and our giving tends to reflect our fear that we do not have "enough." Scripture calls for us to be generous in giving to God's work, and promises that God will help us to have enough, even when we give sacrificially. May we trust God's providence for our future, as we give God's tithes and our offerings?

OCTOBER 23

John Wesley, the little Anglican Priest who started Methodism once said, "Gain all you can, save all you can and give all you can." Twenty-five years later he said, "Of the three rules which are laid down, you may find that many observe the first rule, namely, `Earn all you can.` You may find a few that observe the second, `Save all you can.` But how many have you found that observe the third rule, `Give all you can?`" Wesley went on to describe the eternal danger for those who keep the first two rules without practicing the third. Wesley openly solicited money from the modest as well as from the wealthy, because he saw money as the holy tool to accomplish God's work in the world. Can we give as generously as we have received? Let us now present God's tithes and our offerings, for the work of God's will.

OCTOBER 30

In India, in the state of Mizoram, Christian believers are raising millions of dollars for global mission, one handful of rice at a time. Each family sets aside a part of their rice from every meal, and when it has accumulated, they donate it to their local church. The churches in Mizoram are self-sufficient and participate in much mission work, including the support of 1,800 missionaries. Many Mizo people give more through gifts of vegetables, firewood and other resources. A Mizo pastor says, "It is not our richness or our poverty that make us serve the Lord, but our willingness. So we Mizo people say, 'As long as we have something to eat every day, we have something to give to God every day.'" Does that inspire you? It should inspire all of us who have so much, to give to God every day. Let us share from our plenty, as we give God's tithes, and our offerings.

NOVEMBER 6

A pastor once said to his congregation one Sunday, these exact words. "I'm sorry to have to talk to you today about money, but it's mentioned in the Bible, so I guess I should preach about it once on a while." It is well known that pastors feel a little squeamish about the subject of money and giving in the church. The great spiritual giant of Catholicism, Henry Nouwen wrote, "Asking people for money is giving the opportunity to put their resources at the disposal of the Kingdom." Giving our money is a practice of spiritual vitality. Spiritual maturity and generosity go hand in hand. In this month of thinking about harvest and thanksgiving, let us think of our spiritual growth as we give generously of God's tithes and our offerings.

NOVEMBER 13

One of the themes of the Teaching of Jesus was that of growth. A prime example of this is the example of the Mustard Seed. Though the mustard seed is tiny, it grows into a large shrub, sometimes ten feet tall. Our faith is capable of growing from a small inkling to a large and functional discipleship. As we approach the season of thanksgiving, how is our thankfulness? Has it grown as we have experienced God's grace and abundance in our lives? Has our response in faithful giving also grown, as God has prospered us? We think about Thanksgiving, feasts, family and happy gathering. In this season of welcoming our blessings, let us grow in our sharing our blessings, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

NOVEMBER 20

For many people, Thanksgiving is the favorite holiday. It was first established as a celebration of Harvest! From bountiful harvest of crops, reflecting on hard work in planting, cultivating and nurturing of the fields, our forbearers were rewarded with the fruit of their efforts. Today, we don't plant so much, nor do we plow or water or weed. But God grants us the bounty of our work in other ways. Of all nations and peoples, we have much for which to give thanks. In our giving of thanks, may we give richly from what we have received, as we extend God's bounty across our land and the world by our generous gifts; God's tithes and our offerings.

NOVEMBER 27

As we welcome the first Sunday of Advent, our thoughts turn to the most beloved story in the Christian Faith...the story of the birth of Jesus. We often let this season dominate our schedules and lives, without appreciating how we can be a PART of the story. As the Apostle Paul puts it, in "The Message," "Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!" How do we dress ourselves in Christ? We do it by demonstrating the giving, caring, outreaching manner of Jesus in the way we live. Generosity becomes our way of dressing in Christ. Let us be generous to God, as God has been so generous to us, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 4

John the Baptist announced the coming of Jesus' ministry by saying, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!" Eugene Peterson's version of that is "Prepare for God's arrival!" Advent helps us prepare for God. In this busy day and age, with all the diversions and distractions, perhaps we need this reminder that it is actually GOD for whom we prepare. And how do we prepare for God? John declared, "Repent!, For the Kingdom of God is at hand!" God's Kingdom comes near in the person of Jesus. In these weeks, let us focus on the teaching and example of Jesus, not just as a babe, but as the revolutionary presence of God's will. One way to see the evidence of the closeness of the Kingdom in our lives is through our generosity. Let's give generously and sacrificially as we celebrate the coming of the Kingdom, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 11

What was it like for Mary, the mother of Jesus? As a teenage girl, she was a product of poverty, traveling on a tedious journey, finding refuge in a smelly, damp and cold stable, and going through the experience of giving birth without adequate sanitary or medical conditions. In reality, it was not a very glamorous or cozy situation. Yet, Jesus comes in lowly circumstances. No one noticed at the time, except maybe some shepherds. But out of all these limitations, God is able to enter human existence, to become like us, and to provide hope and salvation to the world. From our limitations and hesitations, God can do great things, if we surrender to God's will. Let us return our best to God, who has given us the best, by presenting God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 18

Christmas! It's almost here. We search for the true meaning of this celebration. Eugene Peterson, who wrote THE MESSAGE, says it this way, summarizing the gift of Jesus to the world. In Romans 1, he says, "Through him we received both the generous gift of his life and the urgent task of passing it on to others who receive it by entering into obedient trust in Jesus. You are who you are through this gift and call of Jesus Christ! And I greet you now with all the generosity of God our Father and our Master Jesus, the Messiah" Did you hear that? The generous gift is ours...but to PASS ON to those who may enter into OBEDIENT TRUST in Jesus. And "WE ARE WHO WE ARE" through this gift of Jesus. None of us would be who we now are without God's gift of Jesus to the world! That is a life-changing gift! How do we respond? One way is through our generosity to the work of Jesus in the world through the church. Let us give generously to God's work, by presenting God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 25

The Sunday after Christmas always feels a little "down." Sometimes it is called "Low Sunday." Church attendance is off, people are traveling to either be with family or get away from family. Gifts are opened and nearly forgotten. Wrapping paper is in the trash. Leftovers are for dinner. It feels a little depressing. But the reality is that GOD IS WITH US! The blessings of God that we celebrated just a few days ago are here with us always. In the old days, Christmas was celebrated and "kept" for twelve days. We sometimes let it go too quickly. But, recognizing God's continuing and abiding presence, we can still celebrate by our generous gifts to God, who is always giving to us, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.