



# *The First Word*

## *December 2025*

### *First United Methodist Church, Racine*

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#### **"All Earth Is Waiting"**

Dear First Church family,

As we enter this Advent season, we join the long, faithful line of God's people who have learned how to wait—not with resignation, but with attention and hope. The hymn '*Toda la Tierra Espera (All Earth Is Waiting)*' captures this beautifully: creation itself is leaning forward, straining toward justice, healing, and God's promised future. In a season filled with lights, gatherings, familiar carols, and the touchstones of Christmas tradition, we are invited to notice the deeper longing beneath it all—the yearning for Emmanuel, God-with-us, to draw close again. Advent calls us to look with clear eyes at our world, our families, and our own hearts, and to ask: Where is God already near? Where is God preparing something new? Even in the ordinary moments—sharing meals, writing cards, welcoming loved ones home—we catch glimpses of God stitching hope into the fabric of our lives.

As this year comes to an end, we also turn our thoughts toward the year ahead. We often set goals or make resolutions, but this Advent, our church is choosing something deeper: to practice hope. Hope is not wishful thinking or ignoring hard realities; it is a learned posture of trusting that God is at work even before we see the results. It is the kind of hope that pays attention, that listens like Joseph did, that believes like Mary did, that prepares room in the heart and in the home for Christ to be born again. As we celebrate Christ's birth and anticipate a new year together, may we become a community shaped by this hopeful watchfulness—steady, prayerful, ready to respond to God's nudges, and eager to join in what God is doing. All the earth is waiting. And so are we—hopefully, purposefully, and faithfully.

*"The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." -Romans 15:12-13*

In Hope, Have a Merry Christmas!

Pastor Temo Rios

**“ALL EARTH IS WAITING”  
- Advent 2025 Sermon Series**

Advent begins a new Christian year with a posture of expectation. It's not passive waiting but the kind of watchfulness that pays attention to the longings of the world—longings for justice, restoration, healing, and hope. The hymn *Toda la Tierra* (210 in the United Methodist Hymnal) reminds us that creation itself strains toward God's promised future. Advent invites us to listen to that longing, to open our eyes to the signs of God's nearness, and to join in the work of preparing room for Christ in our communities and in our hearts. All the earth is waiting—so we wait with hope, with purpose, and with faith.

**Song “Toda la Tierra Espera  
(All Earth is Waiting)”**

**“All earth is waiting to see the Promised One, and the open furrows, the sowing of the Lord. All the world, bound and struggling, seeks true liberty; it cries out for justice and searches for the truth.**

**Thus says the prophet to those of Israel, “A virgin mother will bear Emmanuel,” for his name is “God with us,” our brother shall be, with him hope will blossom once more within our hearts.**

**Mountains and valleys will have to be made plain; open new highways, new highways for the Lord. He is now coming closer, so come all and see, and open the doorways as wide as wide can be.**

**WEEK 1 — NOVEMBER 30, 2025**

**Sermon Theme: “Signs and Times”**

**Scriptures: Isaiah 2:1–5 & Matthew 24:36–44**

**WEEK 2 — DECEMBER 7, 2025**

**Sermon Theme: “Signs and Stories”**

**Scriptures: Isaiah 11:1–10; Matthew 3:1–12**

**WEEK 3 — DECEMBER 14, 2025**

**Sermon Theme: “Signs and Truths”**

**Scriptures: Isaiah 35:1–10;  
Matthew 11:2–11**

**WEEK 4 — DECEMBER 21, 2025**

**Sermon Theme: “Signs and Faithfulness”**

**Scriptures: Isaiah 7:1–16; Matthew 1:18–25**

**DECEMBER 24 - CHRISTMAS EVE**

**CANDLELIGHT SERVICE at 5:00 pm**



**HELPERS ARE NEEDED** to light the Advent Candles each week. There will be a signup sheet on the fellowship table. Please indicate which Sunday you would like to help and take the reading associated with that Sunday. We will also need help on Christmas Eve.



**CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT**

**SERVICE** will take place on Wednesday, December 24 at 5:00 pm. Join us as we welcome the birth of the Christ Child.



**Patrick “Rick” Reinhart** – We are sad to announce the recent death of our former custodian, Rick Reinhard. Our condolences are extended to Denise Ferguson and his family.

***Angel Thiel***

We are sad to announce the passing of our dear Angel Thiel resulting from the failure of the liver transplant she received this year. There will be a memorial service at the church on Sunday, November 30 with visitation at 1:00 pm and the service at 2:00 pm. Memorials to the family are appreciated.

**FOOD BANK ITEM FOR DECEMBER**

The Food bank item for December will be Hamburger Helper. This is just a suggestion – all non-perishable food products are always welcome. The local food banks are serving many, many more families this year and your donation of food is not only greatly needed, but greatly appreciated. Bring your items to church anytime.

**DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS**

5 - Jan Rosellini  
6 - Jakes Quaye  
11 - Cody Baker  
17 - Daelyn Toutant  
21 - Karen Robotka  
22 - Samantha Baker  
29 - Pete Feest Sr.

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7 - FFRANC**

Breakfast at 8:30 am. Bring a breakfast dish to share and enjoy!

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14 – “Ugly**

Christmas Sweater/shirt day”. Find an ugly Christmas sweater or shirt to wear to church that day! If you don’t have one, visit the local thrift stores. You’ll be supporting their missions.



***The First Word***

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### “Christmas Memories”

Historically, children of the church, celebrated Christmas by performing programs to tell the story of the Christ Child. During December Sunday afternoons, practices were held so everyone would be ready to recite their parts. As time went on, parts were not memorized, children no longer came to Sunday School, adults played some roles, and now we celebrate these memories. Those of us who performed enjoyed the experiences, and congregation members loved the memories of their children on stage or seeing the humor as the performances were held.

As a Sunday School student in a congregational church, I remember the church being filled, the ushers looking for places for people to sit, and as a child, I was seated on a little red chair under the branches of a huge live Christmas tree, waiting for my turn to speak my part. I can still close my eyes and smell that tree as a memory of Christmas.

Members of this church might remember these stories. Often the younger children were dressed as a donkey or sheep as the nativity story was performed. One time, a youngster named Tommy was dressed in a black and white costume, taking his position in the choir loft. As he walked back and forth along the pews, the audience could only see a head moving along the choir pews, and occasionally, he would pop up and wave to the audience.

Some parents were upset with their children as they found naughty things to do during play practice. Maris Kneeland, the Sunday School superintendent, planned a wonderful play for the holiday, but found she couldn't watch all the children who were at the practice, so she called in parents to help. The children or parent will not be named, but it was so much fun to be naughty at other places in church besides play practice. One wouldn't believe that, now that they are parents and adults!

Accidents could happen during these performances, lines were forgotten, youngsters wet their pants, equipment didn't work or fell apart as the Christmas story was told. Various people often portrayed Joseph and Mary. Austin was a sheep and kept pestering his sister Alex who was Mary. Today, Alex is a mom of beautiful children and Austin will soon be a parent to be pestered by his own child.

Pastor Jakes's daughter portrayed Mary one Christmas. She either had her baby and played Mary with her own child, or she was pregnant and played the part of Mary with a doll. It was a very realistic sharing of Nativity, but memories sometimes get confused.

Pastor Brad was a great one to get involved in church activities. One Christmas, he had the children attend the service in their pajamas. In playing a role in a play, as the character of Star of the East and wearing a huge cardboard star, he missed a step going up on stage, and the congregation all gasped as he recovered his trip and hoped he remembered his lines. We didn't know what happened to the Wise Men! Peter Feest who played Santa one year, also missed the step as he was departing the stage. Now you know why we use the handrail as we travel up or down the steps to and from the stage.

Performances for these programs were performed by children who were just learning to play their violins, or the piano; this gave them wonderful confidence and pride in presenting their skills. Even adults dreamed of performing a duet with their daughter on Christmas Eve. This was Marge Hannon, an alto in our choir and her daughter, Lisa, sang "O Holy Night." For Marge, it was a dream come true.

One Christmas, Pastor Brad's daughter performed a beautiful Christmas solo, then she took her seat at the rear of the church. When we began to light our candles to sing "Silent Night," the product in her hair caught fire as she leaned over to light her candle. It was a blessing that she was near the Bride's Room bathroom so that she could put out the fire quickly. My family and Scott and Joy McClelland remember this event very well and share it every Christmas.

During the time that Christmas Eve was held at 11 o'clock p.m., Pastor Harvey had milk carton luminaries with candles placed along the street in front of our church. Guests would file in through the narthex where the Christmas Eve service was held. What an image of Main Street!

At the end of the service and program, in my Congregational Church, the children all filed to the basement and received a brown paper sack filled with nuts, ribbon candy, an orange, and chocolate peanut clusters. This was a German tradition my family brought when they immigrated from the Volga River Valley.

Here at First United Methodist Church, singing "Silent Night" at the end of the service is always moving. As our new pastor, Pastor Temo had to learn how the service was managed with the lighting of the candles and getting in position for the last carol. Marcia, as worship leader, had to review the process each time with any pastor who forgot. We have often heard the story of "Silent Night." One year, Tom Wolfe, our choir director, was playing the guitar as we sang in the dark sanctuary with lit candles. Thanks to the beautiful acoustics in our church, how meaningful this was for all of us.

Finally, why do we come to church on Christmas Eve, what memories do you and your family have, what is the meaning of Christmas for you? Blessings to all as we worship together during this special time of the year.

Merry Christmas, enjoy the memories,

Patti Walker

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## **First United Methodist Church**

**The Vision statement:  
Inspire all to live faithfully in Jesus Christ**

**The Mission statement:  
Gather, Equip, and Serve our community and the world in the name  
Jesus Christ!**