

Lyons Muir Church  
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December 2021  
Volume 1, Issue 10



December 2021

“Rugs & Bugs & Honey ”

*In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*

Matthew 3:1-6

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

I’ve always loved this passage of Matthew’s gospel. He fills in a few more details about John the Baptist. But isn’t it curious that Matthew feels the need to comment on his wardrobe and his diet at all, both of which seem provocatively outlandish? At first glance, these details appear inconsequential, and neither of the gospels according to Luke and John choose to make mention of these things at all. So what is Matthew up to here? Why does he have John the Baptist wearing a rug, and eating bugs and honey? As a boy I just loved this... all the grown-ups wanted to teach us moral lessons from John about how bad it was to act out... but all we could think about was a man in furry pajamas eating grasshoppers. As a group of Sunday School boys, we liked John cause he was smelly and weird, not because he had anything important to say. Now as an adult, and someone trained to think theologically about my life experience, I wonder why it helps Matthew’s story-telling to make John the Baptist out to be so grubby and outlandish.

#### Attendance:

*The average attendance for the month of November was 30.*

#### WEEKLY

#### SCHEDULE

SUNDAYS	Worship on the Lord’s Day, 11
MONDAYS	No regular events
TUESDAYS	Office Hours, 9-12
WEDNESDAYS	Bible Study, 6:30-7:30 Ionia First UMC, Cafe
THURSDAYS	Office Hours, 9-2 Bible Study, 12-1

#### UPCOMING EVENTS

Board of Governors meeting  
Monday 12-13 at 7 P.M.

First UMC is hosting a Special  
Holiday concert  
Tuesday 12-14 at 7 P.M.

Sunday 12-19  
Potluck after Church

Christmas Eve Service  
12-24 at 4 P.M.

Church Office will be closed the week between Christmas and New Years Day.

Tuesday, January 4  
Blood Drive

The truth is, life is smelly and weird. If aliens from outer space only visited humans in a Christian Church on a Sunday morning, those poor souls would draw the erroneous conclusion that our species has it all together: “My, what interesting colors!” they’d say, “And the music....these humans all seem to move together... And look at the humans up front, polished up like those cardinals preening in the cedar tree!” And whether it was robes and stoles with hymns and organ, or skinny jeans, faded haircuts and rock and roll.... those poor aliens would be duped by our pretense into the wrong impression. Because human life from Monday through Saturday puts on quite a different face. On Monday through Saturday we get out of sync from one another, and even from ourselves. And as the polish of Sunday fades, things get smelly and weird... As the beauty of holiness recedes into memory, things get real.

Life is a struggle so much of the time, and it doesn’t matter what demographic any of us fall into. Everybody’s got trials and tribulations that come their way... everybody’s going through something. The question is, can we find in John the Baptist a prophet whose word to us is less important than the fact that he makes the strange smelly ugliness of human life something public, something that God wants to deal with... something that God will condescend to become part of, and touch, and taste and see for God’s own self?

Remember that John came from a very respectable house. His father and mother were of the house of Aaron, and Zechariah was one of the temple priests. By birthright, John should have been trained to take his father’s place. John could have reasonably taken up the wealth and privilege of the priesthood, lived in Jerusalem, and been protected from the Romans. Instead, he wanders through the wilderness until the Spirit of Wisdom and Truth drives him like the East Wind to the Jordan river with a message that the kingdom of heaven has come near. I think in the voice of the prophet, the LORD is trying to tell us that even though

the polished, uplifting beauty of Sunday worship has a place in our lives, we’ll most often find God in the wilderness of life. God is out in the ditch with the wounded... God is with us as we cry in the quiet of our bedrooms... God appears in the intensive care room just when the exhausted nurse doesn’t think she can go on... I think the prophet wants us to know that God does not remain distant from the hardness of human life, but instead comes among us to offer truth in the midst of duplicity, love in the midst of rancor, affirmation in the midst of disappointment, forgiveness in the midst of shame, and renewal in the midst of loss. The Spirit sends a man dressed in a rug eating bugs to tell us the Good News: that there’s more to life than appearances, and that the Spirit will call the outcast to be the prophet of the Most High God. In fact, the Most High God will become the outcast and, in the end, redeem all that seems written off as a loss.

Let us then take deeply to heart the message of the Baptizer, who points us to the Christ whose love is born in us each day we open ourselves to the promise that the Lord knows our suffering and has come down to deliver us.

Thanks be to God.  
Jonathan





## **Christmas Around the World**

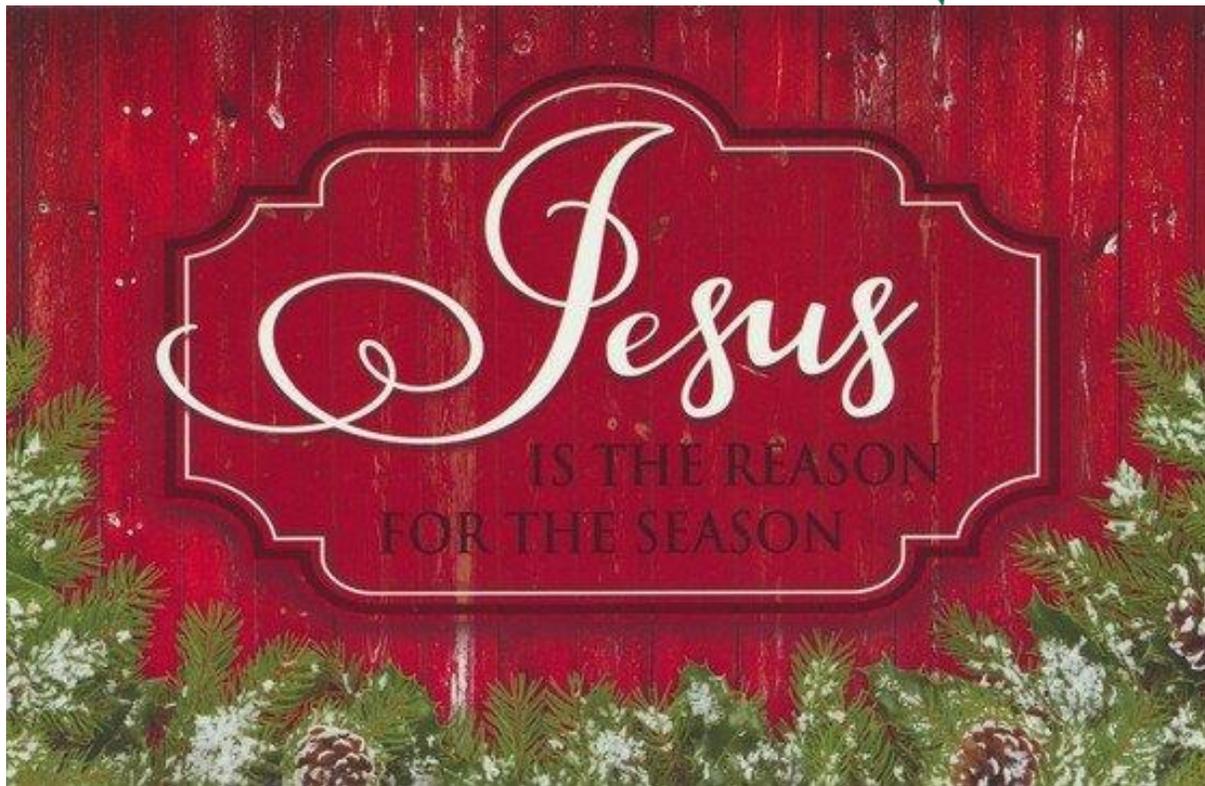
In Mexico, on days leading up to Christmas, the search of Mary and Joseph for a place to stay is reenacted, and children try to break a pinata filled with toys and candy.

Christmas is a great summer festival in Brazil, including picnics, fireworks, and other festivities as well as a solemn procession of priests to the church to celebrate midnight mass.

Japan serves as illustration of a different sort. In that predominantly Shinto and Buddhist country, the secular aspects of the holiday-Christmas trees and decorations, even the singing of Christmas songs such as “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” or “White Christmas”-are widely observed instead of the religious aspects.

Christmas is often known as 'Jól' (Yule) in Iceland. This comes from the ancient winter solstice celebrations, that were taken over by the early Christians. Jól also includes the New Year celebrations.

Holly was first used by pagans to decorate for the festival of Saturnalia. When Christians began celebrating Christmas in honor of Christ, they adapted that decorating practice to reflect Jesus' life and death. Holly's pointed leaves symbolize the crown of thorns and its red berries symbolize Christ's blood shed on the cross. Because holly thrives and its berries retain their brilliance even in harsh winter conditions, non-Christians saw it as a symbol of eternity — which is fitting for Christians as well.



### **"BE BORN IN US TODAY"**

In 1865, Phillips Brooks, an Episcopal preacher from Boston, went on a Holy Land pilgrimage. Riding horseback from Jerusalem to Bethlehem for Christmas Eve worship at the Church of the Nativity was so moving that he wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem." The hymn's final stanza addresses the town's most famous newborn:

O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

# Needs at RAVE

**Quiet boxes:** Uprooting your family and bringing them to a strange place can result in some different behaviors in kids. It can be difficult for mom's in crisis to be able to occupy their children while trying to get things organized for their future. The shelter provides "quiet boxes" to mom's who need to get things accomplished, or simply take a break. These boxes are full of little, age appropriate activities that children can play with during these times. Maintaining these boxes can be expensive and need to be re-supplied every couple of weeks. If you are interested in donating toward these boxes we are looking for the following items:

Small coloring books	Crayons	Toy cars	Fun necklaces
Small stuffed animals	Masks	Yoyos	Silly putty
Small puzzles	Card games	Notepads	Party favors
Feather boas	Playdough	Slinky	Stickers
Water coloring books for babies	Fidget toys		Dress up supplies

And anything else you can think of that would keep little people occupied!

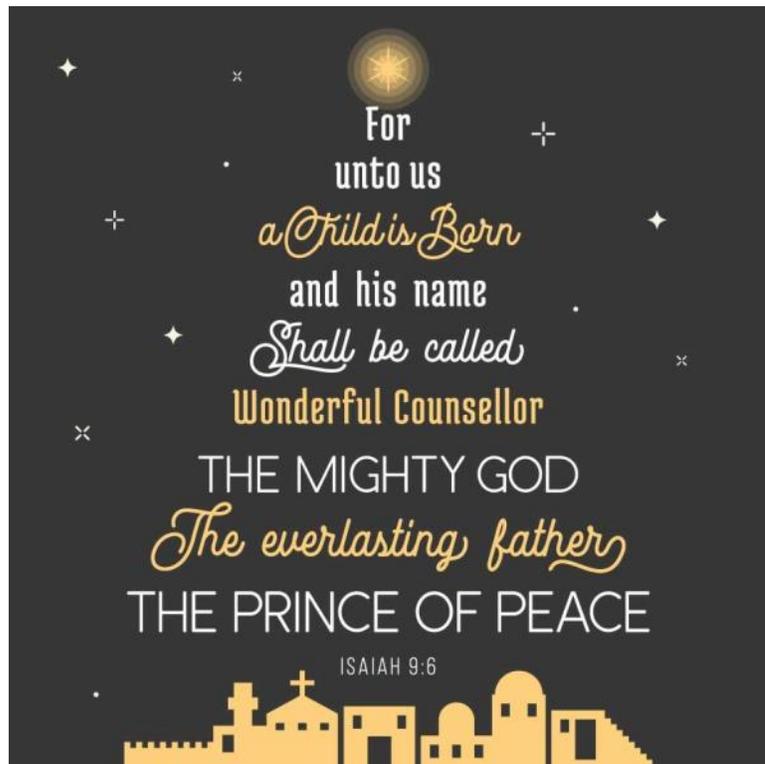
**Busy Bags:** These bags are provided to any child coming into the shelter to welcome them! We try and give kids something that can help them feel safe and adjust to their new environment. These are helpful for mom's if they have young children who need to be distracted while they get everyone settled. For older kids it can give them something to do when they are feeling stressed or need a break. Items in these bags are similar to those of the quiet boxes, however, we are in need of preteen and teen activities! If you have any questions please let us know!

**DONATE to Kid's Club Snacks:** Each week we offer a small snack for kids to enjoy while we check in and get ready for our activity. Examples of these snacks include: juice boxes, crackers and cheese, fruit, granola bars, cheese sticks, trail mix, popcorn, etc. Supplies: Supplies are limited and we are always in need of things to make activities possible. Things that are always needed are: paper, scissors, coloring supplies, stickers, large project paper, old magazines, or anything that you feel would be fun!

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## MISSION STATEMENT

*The Lyons-Muir Church is called to be God's healing and hope-filled congregation, and to make followers of Jesus Christ for the positive transformation of our community through lives of prayer, love, forgiveness, honesty, acceptance, and trust.*



November Finance Report

Thank you for your ongoing support!!

Revenue \$4,4763.44

Disbursements -\$4,890.37

Year to Date Surplus (Defecit) (**\$439.57**)

## Needs for RAVE continued

### Food Items

Pasta/Sauces	Rice/Noodles	Canned potatoes/fruit
Milk/Eggs/Butter	"Hamburger Helper"	Tuna Fish
Pudding/Jell-O	Peanut Butter	Box Cereal Sugar
Canned Soups	Applesauce	Juice/Kool-Aid

### Non-Food Items

Lined paper/copy paper	Batteries (9V, D,C, AA)	Light Bulbs
Small Notebooks/Day Planners/Journals	<b>New</b> Dish Towels/cloths	
"Ziploc" sealable containers, all sizes	Freezer bags	Feminine Products
Baby gates		

### Ongoing-Immediate Needs Paper Products:

Toilet Paper	Paper Towel	Kleenex	Liquid Hand Soap	Laundry Soap
<b>New</b> underwear/socks for women and children			<b>New</b> Towels/washcloths	
Over the counter medications/ <b>new &amp; sealed</b>			Trash Bags	Coffee
<b>New</b> pajamas	Cleaning Products		Vacuums/Mops/Brooms	
Large Diapers/Wipes				