



The Visitor

St. John United Church of Christ, Reading, OH

May 2024

From the Pastor

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One of the biggest “Hallmark” holidays in the month of May is Mother’s Day (2nd Sunday, this year May 12!) It is a day to celebrate mothers, and women everywhere as this holiday is not just limited to the United States. Hopefully we all had good mothers, and for those among us who are mothers, they are a good and loving parent!

But there is another “Mother” to us all, and that is our God. One of my favorite verses with this image comes from Jesus, in both Matthew and Luke’s gos-

pel, where he says: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” Not because Jesus is lamenting over Jerusalem, but because of the image of the mother hen gathering the chicks under her wing. Such a beautiful image of protection and love.

What follows is an interesting look at other holy “mothering” images in the Bible. I invite you to read them, and think about how God has mothered you throughout your life, and be moved to offer God your praise and thanksgiving on May 12 (and every day!)

-Rev. Torie

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From the Pastor

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What Motherly Images for God Are in the Bible?

by Amy E. Marga

The Bible offers a picture of God who mothers through the work of birthing, preserving, and nurturing God's children. But such imagery is not without some tension.

God's mothering work begins in childbirth, as most mothering work does. The sea leaps out of God's womb (Job 38:8), and the ice is brought forth from God's womb (Job 38:28-29). Creation thus is not just a spoken event, but a birthing event that comes from the whole being of God.

In other places, the language of birth and the female body is less clear, but ancient readers would have understood it as birthing language. Genesis 14:19 and 22 speak of God as the "maker" of the heavens and the earth. The word, "maker" is the same Hebrew word that Eve uses when she gives birth, or "produces" her son Cain in Genesis 4:1. God also births Wis-

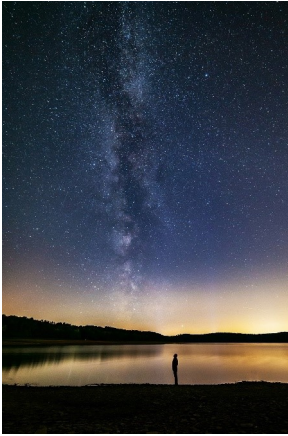
dom, as described in Proverbs 8:22-25.

Birthing language continues as a description of how creation experiences sin and its future. In Paul's famous imagery of female groaning in active labor, the creation groans as it labors towards redemption and new life in Romans 8:22. Such mothering language also underscores the nurturing vitality of God's creation.

Jesus Christ speaks of himself in terms of birthing a new humanity. Before his arrest and crucifixion, according to John 17:1, Jesus states that "the hour has come" — a phrase that was used frequently to refer to the moment when active labor starts for a woman in childbirth. Christ's use of mothering imagery in the throes of death point to the new humanity that he brings forth for the sake of the world.

Once mothers bring children into the world, they work to preserve and save their children from harm and death. Israel's

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From the Pastor

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cry to God, possibly recorded while in its Babylonian exile, offers imagery of how God as a mother preserves God's child, Israel (Deuteronomy 32:18, see this explanatory note on the Song of Moses). In Isaiah 49:13-15, God responds to the people's cry by reassuring them with the question, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?"

Preserving children also entails feeding them. God the mother feeds God's children in Isaiah 49:15. But in Numbers 11:12-13, God may have forgotten God's children were hungry! Moses complains that God gave birth to Israel, but God has now left it up to Moses to feed them.

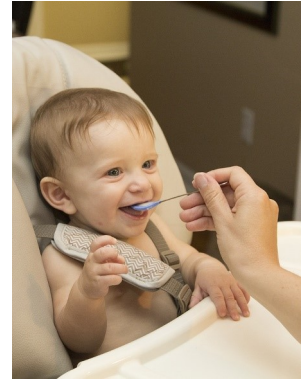
And we must not forget the birth narratives of Jesus Christ. Not only does God birth the world, God was born by a woman. Centuries of Christians have seen Mary's body and breast milk as a symbol and sign of God's motherly care for humanity.

Another aspect of "motherwork" in the Bible is the training and nurturing of disciples, as children are trained and nurtured by their mothers. The Gospel of John suggests that those "born of God" (John 1:12) and those "born in the Spirit" (John 3:6) are to imitate the caring acts of God. The apostle Paul imagines his own discipleship as the imitation of God's mothering work. In Galatians 4:19, Paul writes that he must "go through the pain of giving birth" to the Galatians "all over again until Christ is formed" in them. To the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8) he says that his devotion to them is "like a mother feeding and looking after her own children."

The maternal language for discipleship in the New Testament was so compelling that medieval monastic leaders such as Bernard of Clairvaux urged his fellow monks to be "mothers" to those in their care.

Perhaps one of the most touching mothering images of God in

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His devotion to the Thessalonians is "like a mother feeding and looking after her own children."



From the Pastor*(Continued from page 3)*

the Bible comes in Hosea 11:4, where God is depicted as saying (about Ephraim): “I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.” This brief passage depicts the essence of mothering, namely, a woman’s relationship to the child she loves. Such imagery describes a God who has the capacity and the desire to bend down, to lift up and hold, to stroke, to cover, hug, feed, bathe, and to hold us.

Despite the Bible’s mother imagery for God, it must be acknowledged that among women who are mothers, there is ambivalence about images of divine mothering. Human mothers tell stories of exhaustion, irritation, anger, and helplessness — feelings that are less than divine. If maternal imagery for God deepens the pressure that is put on mothers today to be perfect or to be ideals of motherhood,

or if it suggests to mothers that their struggles are signs of failure, then such biblical imagery will only oppress and alienate human mothers.

The maternal imagery for God in the Bible must be seen as a way to describe God’s care for humanity within the domestic, micro-narratives of our lives — including care for mothers themselves! In this sense, the motherwork of God is work that can be done by men or women. It is a work of care that preserves and protects all humanity, especially mothers and their children.

-Amy E. Marga

Amy Marga has been a Professor of Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary since 2006. Marga is a trained racial justice facilitator through the Minneapolis YWCA. She enjoys speaking on feminism, gender, race, and the Christian tradition in local congregations.

Board of Deacons

BIG WEEKEND! Things are happening at St. John May 3 & 4! It’s Movie Night, Workshop day and a very local mission trip (right here).

It all begins Friday at 5 with supper, followed by some light work

and then enjoying the movie 9 to 5.

Come back Saturday for breakfast. some chores, some fun games and lunch. We hope to see you there.



Board of Christian Nurture

Thank you for your participation in the **M&M Fundraiser**. We will still accept your tubes if you have forgotten them!

Sunday, May 5, immediately following worship, we will have a **birthday party** for all in our Family of Faith who are in their 90s. Come celebrate our elders!

This year's **Rummage Sale** will be June 6-8, from 10 am - 2 pm each day. You can bring items in beginning May 5. We will be sorting and setting up after Memorial Day.

June **Lunch Bunch** is at Benson's Tavern, 419 W. Benson St., after worship June 9.

Sign up on the sign-up table for our next outing to **LaComedia Dinner Theatre!** We will attend *Church Basement Ladies - Plowin Thru* on Thursday June 13. Cost is \$55.00 and includes a meal.

Christian Nurture will begin hosting a once-a-month **Coffee Hour** in the near future! Watch this space for more details.

Celebrations in May

Birthdays

May 2 - Susie Koehler

May 3 - Bruce Read

May 5 - Cindy Fuchs

May 11 - Maddie Robinson

May 17 - Linda Burman

May 30 - Shirley Waddell

May 30 - Judi Montrose

Anniversaries

May 23 - Debbie & Rev. Steve Cummins

May 31 - Heidi & BJ Bothe

Grands & Family Camps at Templed Hills Camp & Retreat Center

This half-week session gives you and your grandchild/child some extra time to explore your faith in Christian community in the natural beauty of our camp.

Share your faith through Bible lessons, songs, games, easy nature explorations, swimming, and campfires. We discover God's power and wonder and our own unique place in God's creation. Ensure

that a passionate faith continues in your family for generations to come!

Grands & Family 1 - June 12-15

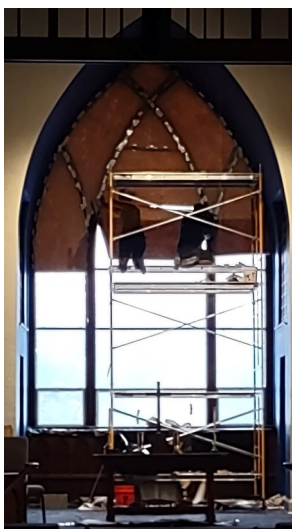
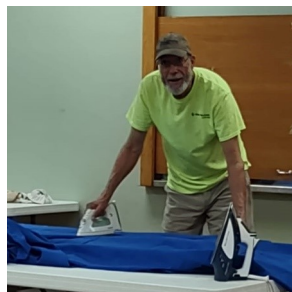
Grands & Family 2 - June 30 - July 3

Grands & Family 3 - July 14-16

Visit heartlanducc.org/templed-hills/ for more information or to register online!

The Visitor

Board of Property and Finance



Just in case you haven't noticed, the sanctuary has a new look to it...the beautiful stained glass window has left the building! It has been carefully removed by the restoration group. From their scaffolding they were able to remove all 20 or so stained glass panels. They were carefully loaded onto their trailer and hauled to their shop in Piqua, Ohio. The outside protective plastic panels remain in place to protect us from the elements. Large pieces of brown paper were then taped to the upper sections of the window to block much of the bright incoming light. Blue curtain fabric was purchased and a loop was sewn along the upper edge. The curtains were ironed and then hung on a rod and mounted over the lower part of the window. All the choir risers and chairs had to be moved out of their way for them to work, and were then set up again once they were finished. Restoration work is expected to last up to 8 weeks. Meanwhile, we get to look at the paper and fabric art work and anxiously

and prayerfully await the return of our beautiful window.

If anyone is interested, it might be possible to visit the restoration shop and see the artisans working on our window. Please let me know if you might be interested and we can hopefully get a group together and plan a trip to see the restoration process.

At our upcoming meeting we will be discussing how best to handle undesignated funds: those gifts that come to us without any indication for what they are intended to be used. Hopefully we will arrive at a solution that best serves all our mission, building and financial needs of the church.

Next Workship Day is Saturday, May 4th. It will be combined with an At-Church-Mission-Trip that begins Friday evening, May 3rd. There will be food, fellowship and a movie on Friday. Saturday morning will be a work day along with more food, fun and fellowship. Sure hope you

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Board of Property and Finance

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can come and enjoy either or both days.

Administrative Professionals Day was April 24th, and we showered gifts and praise upon our wonderful secretary, Jane...

and you, too, can do that whenever you see her. We are truly blessed and thankful that she is with us. Thanks, Jane!!!

Happy Mother's Day to all.

-Gary Kurtz



News From the Choir Room

On May 12, 2024 the handbell choir will play the prelude. Guest organist, Bart Choate, will be playing for the Mother's Day service.

On June 2, 2024, Christy Kim and Grace Kim will be playing their violin and flute in worship.



Lectionary

Scripture	Bible Study	Sermon Date
Acts 10:44-48 Psalm 98 1 John 5:1-6 John 15:9-17	April 30	May 5
Acts 1:1-11 Psalm 47 Ephesians 1:15-23 Luke 24:44-53	May 7	May 12
Acts 2:1-21 Psalm 104:24-34, 35b Romans 8:22-27 John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15	May 14	May 19
<i>No Bible study this week—Rev. Torie away</i>		May 26

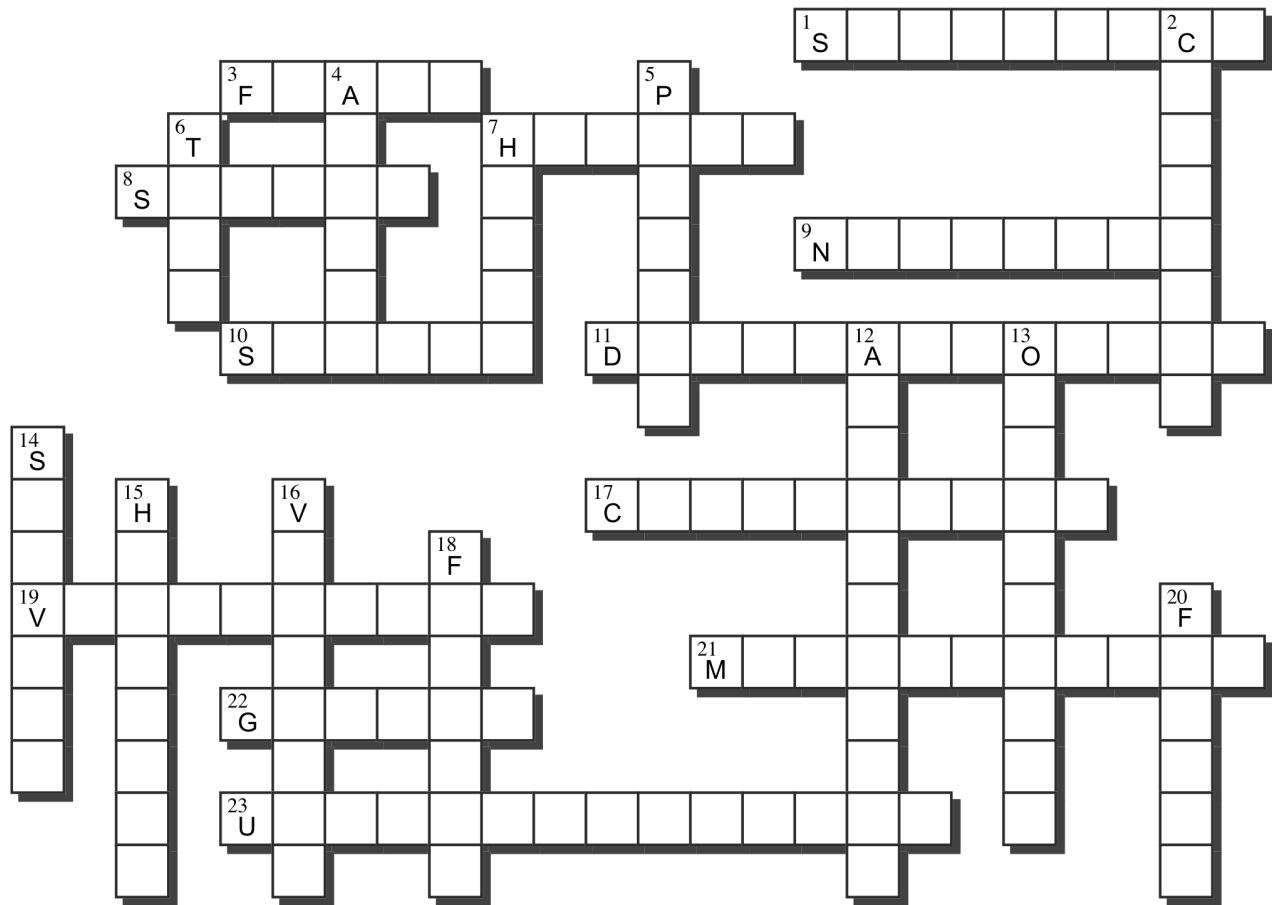
St. John UCC Regularly Scheduled Events

Weekly			
Event	Day	Time	Location
Handbell Choir	Sunday	9 am	Sanctuary
Worship	Sunday	10 am	Sanctuary
Bible Study (Afternoon)	Tuesday	1 pm	Bible Study Room
Bible Study (Evening)	Tuesday	6:30 pm	Mt. View Terrace
Chancel Choir	Wednesday	6:15 pm	Choir Room
Feed My Sheep	Thursday	4:30 pm	Fellowship Hall

Monthly			
Event	Day	Time	Location
Communion	1st Sunday	10 am	Sanctuary
Deacons	Last Thursday	2:30 pm	Cozy Corner
Lunch Bunch	2nd Sunday	After Worship	Various
Men's Group	Various Sundays	11 am	Various
Missionary Sewing	1st Wednesday	10 am	Fellowship Hall
Property & Finance	2nd Tuesday	5 pm	Bible Study Room
Christian Nurture	1st Tuesday	4:30 pm	Bible Study Room
Elders	2nd Thursday	2:30 pm	Bible Study Room
Euchre	Last Thursday	6 pm	Reads' home
Church Council	3rd Thursday	6 pm	Bible Study Room
Work-ship Day	Last Saturday	8 am	Church

Memorial Day - Anagram

Instructions: Unscramble each anagram clue to find the answers



Across Clues

- 1) FCIRSEAC
- 3) LAGSF
- 7) HERSOE
- 8) TUALSE
- 9) LTNIAOAN
- 10) ESMRUM
- 11) RYEADCODIANTO
- 17) MEECIERSTE
- 19) VSTEERONLU
- 21) EMDALMIOYRA
- 22) VARSGE
- 23) NSENLRIOONUWDK

Down Clues

- 2) ACRIVIWL
- 4) HNTEMA
- 5) SPEIPPO
- 6) TASP
- 7) RNHOO
- 12) RFESAMDOERC
- 13) ENBVOSRECA
- 14) RSEIEVC
- 15) SALFMTAH
- 16) TARSNEEV
- 18) REFOMED
- 20) AFLNEL

WORDLIST

ANTHEM
DECORATIONDAY
GRAVES
MEMORIALDAY
SACRIFICE
TAPS

ARMEDFORCES
FALLEN
HALFMAST
NATIONAL
SALUTE
UNKNOWN SOLDIER

CEMETERIES
FLAGS
HEROES
OBSERVANCE
SERVICE
VETERANS

CIVILWAR
FREEDOM
HONOR
POPPIES
SUMMER
VOLUNTEERS



United in Christ's love, we seek justice for all.

**St. John United
Church of Christ**

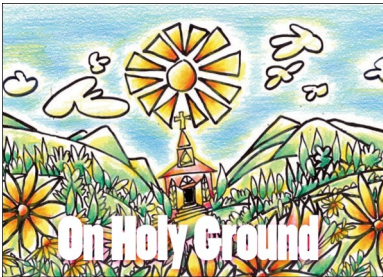
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Strengthen the Church Offering Sunday is May 19! The funds raised support leadership development, new churches, youth ministry, and innovation in existing congregations. Visit ucc.org/stc to learn more.

**MAY 5 IS
HOLY HUMOR
SUNDAY**

*Join us to celebrate God's love
with silliness and jokes!*

Theme: "Church Bloopers"