

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES

MILLERSBURG FIRST PRESBYTERIAN AND CLARK COMMUNITY

JANUARY 2017 NEWSLETTER



Pastor B's Corner: An Iconoclastic Christmas (and New Year)

Note: This was supposed to be my sermon for December 18th, the Fourth Sunday in Advent, so it does have a definite Advent flair. However, the message applies just as much to the New Year as it does to Christmas. So, start your newsletter reading, by taking out your Bible and reading Luke 1:26-56 before reading the sermon. May you be led to have an Iconoclastic New Year!

“An Iconoclastic Christmas:” A Sermon on Luke 1:26-56

Christmas is all about seeing things differently. It's about thinking outside the beautifully decorated boxes to see our lives and our God differently. It's about allowing God to help us to see what can be instead of what is. It is about letting God break into our world and in so doing leave it forever changed. Our passage today from Luke is filled with moments where God breaks in and turns things on their heads.

- Mary's visit to Elizabeth isn't just a meeting between two pregnant women gathering together to wonder at the miracle of life in which they are participating or to commiserate about their bouts of morning sickness and swollen ankles. It was the introduction of a Messiah named Jesus to the prophet who would go before him, named John.
- “The kick of an unborn child isn't simply a sign of fetal vitality. It's the muscle-flexing of John the Baptist, leaping for joy...”
- Mary's unplanned pregnancy is something for which society ostracizes her, but for her, her pregnancy “is a reason to rejoice in the great things God is doing...”
- And the child that Mary is carrying: He'll be a mighty king, but not a traditional one. Instead, he will be the Messiah God uses to bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly...” (Homiletics Online 2009).

“Christmas...blows away our understandings of what usually happens when two women gather to support each other. It helps us to see things differently---to see a hug between Mary and Elizabeth as a meeting between Jesus and John, a kick as a fist-bump of recognition, a song of praise as a celebration of God's ability to turn the world upside down.”

Christmas, if we were to truly celebrate it—if we were to truly allow God to break-into our lives as he broke into the lives of Mary and Elizabeth, turning their lives around—would turn us into iconoclasts like they were. The word *iconoclast* literally means “image breaker.”

To be an iconoclast is to be a person who attacks traditional images, ideas or institutions. We celebrate an iconoclastic Christmas when we accept that God ‘has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty... To celebrate an Iconoclastic Christmas [a Christmas that shatters what think Christmas means or Christmas should be] is to worship an Iconoclastic God [a God who shatters our assumptions about who God is, who God loves, and how God brings about a new creation out of an old world] (Homiletics Online 2009).

Though it may sound like it, image-breakers, iconoclasts, are not devoted to destruction. “In fact, the work they do is usually quite creative and constructive. According to the magazine *Fast Company* (October 2008), iconoclasts *do what tradition-minded people say cannot be done, and they do it by seeing things differently* (Homiletics Online 2009). Let me repeat that: **iconoclasts, image-breakers, do what tradition-minded people say cannot be done, and they do it by seeing things differently** (Homiletics Online 2009). Iconoclasts look see it not as it is, but as it could be. Let’s take a look at the two iconoclasts in our story today to better understand what it looks like when you decide to have an Iconoclastic Christmas.

[Elizabeth and Mary] see things not for what they are, but for what they might be. The conventional wisdom of the first century would trap these women in the box of second-class citizenship, with the extra constraint of shame placed upon Mary, an unwed mother. But what does Elizabeth say when Mary greets her and John gives her a kick in the womb? “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb,” she says, “And why has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?” With the help of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth sees that God is breaking tradition and doing things differently, by sending the Lord Jesus into the world through a young girl named Mary.

Then there’s Mary, who, because of her knowledge of biology, is a total Iconoclast when she believes the angel Gabriel about having a baby without a human father. That takes some thinking—or faith—that’s beyond the conventional. In our text, however, Mary responds iconoclastically. Breaking into song, she exclaims, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant...” She praises God for looking with favor on her, although she has done nothing to earn or deserve God’s attention. The gift of Jesus is pure gift—all she has to do is accept it in faith and trust God to continue to work for good in her life.

“His mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation,” she sings, going on to predict how God will turn the world upside down—scattering the proud, bringing down the powerful, lifting up the lowly and feeding the hungry...She knows God isn’t trapped by traditional ideas or institutions and that he will show favor to those who respect him—not to those who have the most earthly power or possessions.

That’s an image breaker, for sure. Back in the first century, it was assumed that material wealthy was a sign of God’s favor, while poverty signaled divine displeasure...But Mary questions this, saying God’s mercy is “for those who fear him”—not for those who have the biggest bank accounts.

Bringing her song to a big finish, Mary sings that this surprising work of God isn’t entirely unexpected. “He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy,” she belts out, “according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants forever” ...God *might* appear to be a true iconoclast, to a world accustomed to the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. But in fact, God’s desire to turn the world upside down is grounded in “remembrance of his mercy” and “according to the promises he made to our ancestors.” The icons God destroys are all earthly, not heavenly (Homiletics Online 2009).

Over the centuries, Mary’s iconoclastic song has so threatened the traditions and beliefs of the rich and powerful that at different times in history it’s reading and recitation have been banned. Mary’s song, called the Magnificent, was “not allowed to sung in the churches of Indian during the days of British colonization. In the 1980s, Guatemala’s government banned it for they recognized that it was stirring up a sense of injustice within the poor of that country. Similarly, after the Mothers of the Plaza De Mayo—whose children disappeared during the Dirty War [a time of state terrorism and military dictatorship in Argentina that took place from roughly 1974-1983, after these women] displayed its words on posters, the [Argentinian] military [government] banned any public display of the Mary’s song” (Spill the Beans Resource Team 2016-2017, 34).

After looking at the example of these two iconoclastic women, what would it mean for us to have an Iconoclastic Christmas?

Let’s get creative and constructive, seeing things not for what they are, but for what they might be. You know what we’ll *see* this Christmas: presents (both given and received), decorations (both understated and eye-popping), parties (both tasteful and over the top), visits from family

members and friends (both enjoyable and stressful). That's the way it is. But Mary invites us to see things differently and to find true joy in a new place—in the gift of God's favor.

God really loves you, and his affection for you has nothing to do with your education, your achievements, your job security, your bank account, or your marital status. In fact, the surprising insight of Mary's song is that God "has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant" ... She announces that God favors us in our lowliness, in our humility, in our simple willingness to lean on him.

[Mary's song reminds us that] "when the world around us doesn't seem to care, God favors us. When the future seems uncertain, God promises to do great things for us. Mary announces God's "mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation" and that he will never let his people down.

That's image-breaking, expectation-shattering, radically reassuring. And it also happens to be true.

But that's not all. According to Mary, an iconoclastic Christmas cannot be limited to new insights into our personal relationship with God. It also has to include participation in what God is doing in the world. This means signing up to work with Mary's son, Jesus, to bring down the powerful from their thrones, lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things...

Mary's words "are a declaration," writes Scott McKnight in *Christianity Today*, a declaration "from a voice at the bottom of society. It is a voice crying from the depths that God's Messiah was finally bringing justice for the poor." It is a voice proclaiming a new order—an order centered on Mary's son, the One who was coming to save his people from their sins.

So part of our [Iconoclastic Christmas] also has to involve taking our heads out of our holiday boxes and looking around. [It has to involve us looking at the world NOT as the world is—a place of violence, division, hate, and fear—but see it as it God wants it to be—a place of justice, love for all, and peace that transcends merely the end of fighting, but encompasses the wholeness of all things. Here's the thing] when the wrapping paper is cleaned up and the decorations are put away, we need to join Jesus in working for a better world, one in which the powerful are held accountable and the powerless are given support and opportunity. Each of us has a role to play...

Jesus wants us to know that, like Mary and Elizabeth, we are favored by God. But he also wants us to share that love and acceptance with others, by reshaping our communities along the lines of God's new order, with opportunity and justice for all (Homiletics Online 2009).

My brothers and sisters, Christmas is God breaking into the world—challenging our assumptions of what a Messiah looks like (not a king on horseback bringing terror upon our enemies, but a baby born into poverty); challenging our assumptions of what it means to be favored by God—to be loved by God; challenging our assumptions of who is the most valuable person in our community. Our God is an iconoclastic God—breaking human traditions and turning our worlds upside down. Our God is an iconoclastic God shattering our expectations of who God should be and who God should love. Our God is an iconoclastic God who sees in this world not the mess that it is, but the good creation he made it to be and that it will be again. Our God, who came as Jesus, to lead and teach us, calls us to be like him—to be iconoclasts. He calls us to look at this world—at the images from Aleppo, at the news reports, at the mess and the hurt—and NOT what it is, but what it can be—WHAT IT WILL BE when we work with God to bring about his kingdom. Jesus came and said the Kingdom of God is at hand. It will be those of us who embrace our call to be iconoclasts who will work with him to bring this kingdom to earth because we are the ones who will see with him the vision of what will be in the midst of what is. My sisters and brothers, have an Iconoclastic Christmas and New Year. Let God break-in. Let Christmas change your world view and live that changed life in the New Year. Let the kingdom come in Christ living and breathing in you—Iconoclastic you.

Works Cited

Homiletics Online. "An Iconoclastic Christmas." *Homiletics Online*. Edited by Timothy Merrill. December 20, 2009. www.homileticsonline.com (accessed December 13, 2016).

Spill the Beans Resource Team. "The Magnificent: A Revolutionary Advent Hymn." *spill the beans: worship and learning resources for all ages*, November-February 2016-2017: 34.

Millersburg First Presbyterian News



Mark Your Calendar

January 15: Reports due for Annual Meeting

January 18 @ 6:30: Session Meeting

January 22 (after worship): Annual Meeting
and Church Potluck

January 29: Worship at 9:30 AM

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CONGREGATION ON JANUARY 22: The Annual Meeting of the Congregation and church potluck will be held on January 22 immediately following worship. Please make all effort to attend.

WORSHIP TIMES SWITCHED ON JANUARY 29: On January 29th worship times for Clark and Millersburg will be switched. Millersburg will worship at 9:30 AM, and Clark will worship at 11 AM.

Millersburg Participants for January

January	Liturgist	Nursery	Ushers
1	Tim Fair	Ruth & Kevin Vaughn	Vicki Wile, Sam Steimel
8	Carole Norman	Vicki Wile	Tom Vaughn, Jr. Vaughn
15	Sam Steimel	Tom & Laurie Vaughn	Garrett Roach, Tim Allison
22	Elaine Hand	Ruth & Kevin Vaughn	Kate & Dave Findley
29	John Estill	Vicki Wile	Tim Fair, Jim Wilson

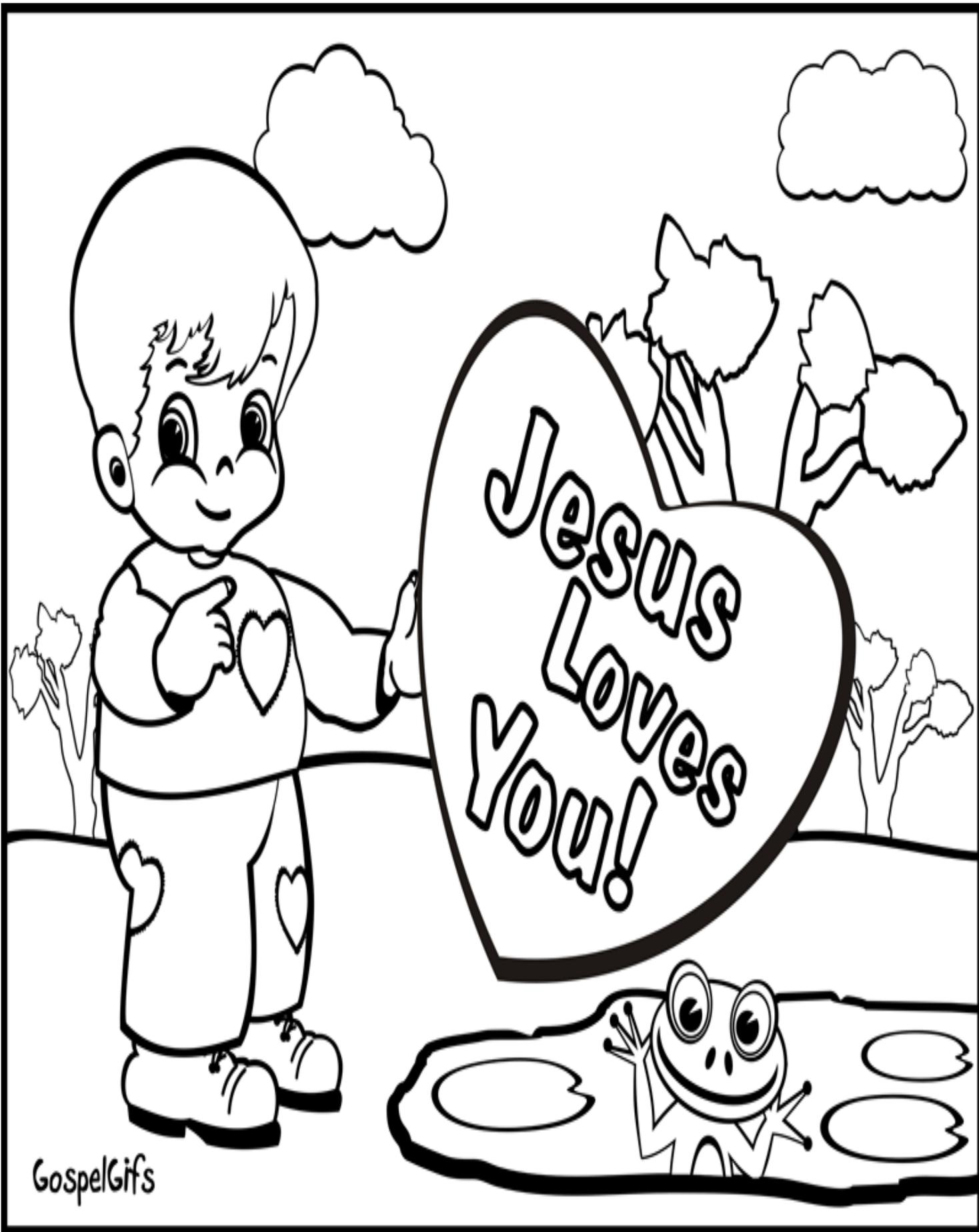
Millersburg January Birthdays

- 7 Gary Buzzard
- 10 Teresa Stoner
- 13 Susan Estill Culler
- 18 Orrie Gerber
- 18 Elise Findley
- 20 Mark Baird
- 23 John Estill
- 25 Helen Neal
- 25 Barton Welsh
- 26 Lisa Sayre
- 27 Presley James McConnell
- 30 David Gerber
- 31 Ruth Steimel





Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 WORSHIP CLARK 9:30 AM MILLERSBURG 11:00	2	3 C- SESSION 7 P Al-Anon 7:30 p	4 C- QUILTERS 8-11 C- CHOIR 7 P	5 M - CARD FELLOWHIP M—Bible Study	6 M - AA 7:00 p.	7
8 WORSHIP CLARK 9:30 AM MILLERSBURG 11:00	9	10 Al-Anon 7:30 p C- SESSION 7 P	11 C-QUILTERS 8-11 C- CHOIR 7 P	12 M - CARD FELLOWHIP M—Bible Study	13 M - AA 7:00 p.	14
15 WORSHIP CLARK 9:30 AM MILLERSBURG 11:00	16	17 Al-Anon 7:30 p	18 C-QUILTERS 8-11 C- CHOIR 7 P M - SESSION 6:30	19 M - CARD FELLOWHIP M—Bible Study THURSDAY NIGHT LITE” 5:30	20 M - AA 7:00 p.	21
22 WORSHIP CLARK 9:30 MILLERSBURG 11:00 MILLERSBURG – ANNUAL MEETING	23	24 Al-Anon 7:30 p	25 C-QUILTERS 8-11 C- CHOIR 7 P	26 M - CARD FELLOWHIP M—Bible Study	27 M - AA 7:00 p.	28
29 WORSHIP MILLERSBURG 9:30 A CLARK 11:00 CLARK – ANNUAL MEETING	30	31 Al-Anon 7:30 p				



GospelGifs

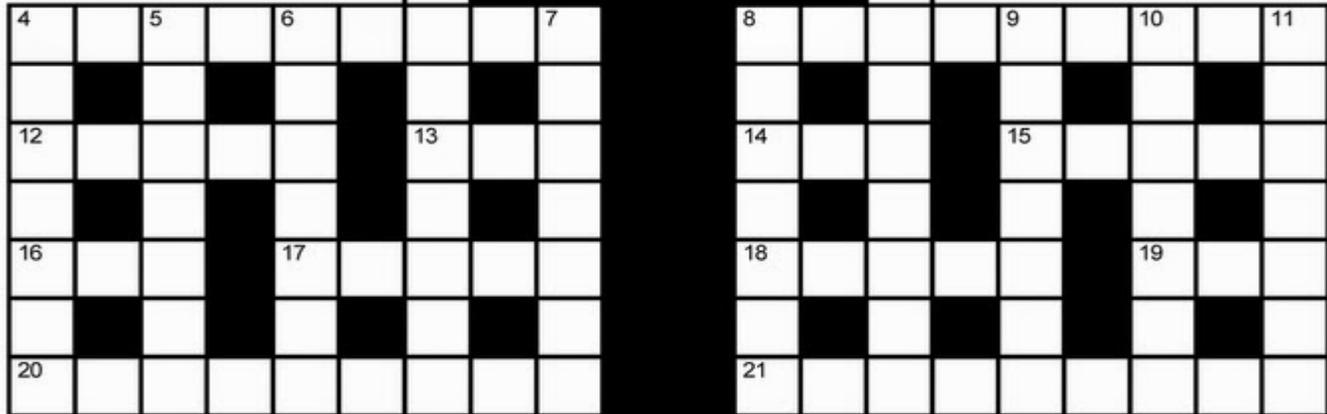
Bible Crossword X

Across

- 1 Donkey (3)
- 2 Jesus' Father (3)
- 4 One of the twelve (9)

Down

- 1 One of God's messengers (5,2,3,4)
- 3 1940s archaeological find (4,3,7)



- 8 Didn't believe in resurrection (9)
- 12 One of David's warriors (5)
- 13 First word of the Lord's Prayer (3)
- 14 New Testament name for Noah (3)
- 15 Wish harm upon (5)
- 16 Hole in the ground (3)
- 17 Adversary (5)
- 18 Savour (5)
- 19 First woman (3)
- 20 Mother of John the Baptist (9)
- 21 Family of priests (9)
- 22 Third son of Jacob (4)
- 23 Hates (8)
- 26 Assurances (8)
- 30 Endured pain (8)
- 31 Return from the dead (4)
- 32 Intercessor (8)
- 35 Decorating (8)
- 39 Old Testament book of the Bible (4)
- 40 The prince of Rosh, Mesech and Tubal (3)
- 42 A wise insect (3)
- 44 Dwelling place of kings (6)
- 45 Make bigger (8)

- 4 Tread down (7)
- 5 Father of Jonah (7)
- 6 Very salty water bordering Israel (4,3)
- 7 Defensive structures (11)
- 8 Refuges (11)
- 9 Dirty (7)
- 10 Devout (7)
- 11 Pieces of money (7)
- 24 Used to listen (3)
- 25 Used to see (3)
- 26 Positions (5)
- 27 Made available (7)
- 28 Snake (7)
- 29 Destroyed along with Gomorrah (5)
- 33 Finish (3)
- 34 Possess (3)
- 35 King of the Amalekites (4)
- 36 Last letter of the Greek alphabet (5)
- 37 Almost sacrificed by Abraham (5)
- 38 Present (4)
- 41 Unfasten (4)
- 43 Fish traps (4)

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Website: millersburgfirst.org
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Clark January Liturgists

- 7 Becky Baker**
- 8 Gary Wagers**
- 15 Sandy Wagers**
- 22 Ann Stotler**
- 29**

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CLARK COMMUNITY PRESBYTERIAN NEWS



Mark Your Calendar

- January 10 @ 7 PM: Session Meeting**
- January 22: Reports for Annual Meeting Due**
- January 29: Worship at 11 AM followed by Annual Meeting and Church Potluck**

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Clark January Birthdays

- 1 Brian Bailey**
- 1 Harold Mullet**
- 11 Robert Starker**
- 19 Helen Morris**
- 20 Steven Mullet**
- 23 Joyce Patterson**
- 27 Rodney Miller**
- 31 Virginia Creskey**