

In the Loop

Centennial Christian Church
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Listening and Talking . . . by Rev. Tom Cici

Abundance is a spiritual matter. Scarcity is more about perception than fact. In the biblical story of Jesus Feeding the Five Thousand (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13), Jesus teaches his followers and us to see abundance.

My sister, Marie, has shared several times with me some of her most vivid memories of the Holy Land. Her tour bus stopped at Nazareth, the place where Jesus grew up. It lies in a fertile plane, where the wonderful breezes from the Mediterranean Sea still reach it. As her tour bus descended down, down, down, into the valley near the Sea of Galilee, elevated only a few feet higher than the lowest place on the earth, the Dead Sea, the temperature increased at least ten degrees. There is no longer a nice sea breeze from the Mediterranean. Her tour guide continually warned Marie to always carry a supply of food and water in this climate.

One of the places her tour bus stopped at was a large open field of grass north of the Sea of Galilee. In the middle of this field is a small building known as the Church of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes. As she shares the story, we couldn't help but wonder that perhaps in a climate where people should never be without food and water; there was an abundance that Jesus wanted all to notice, share, and experience for everyone. At any rate, Jesus gave thanks to God for abundance, and people's hearts were opened to experience it. Abundance is a spiritual matter. Scarcity is more about perception than fact.

I have been convinced for many years that the key to living into the abundance of God's grace (God's loving presence) is prayer – especially a certain kind of prayer – contemplative prayer. This has been called “silent” prayer, “centering” prayer, and meditation. There are many benefits of Contemplative Prayer. It helps to slow down reaction time so that one can more often choose a wise response instead of a costly blind reaction.



But, for Christians, it is primarily about the gift of receiving the experience of Oneness in God's Spirit. It is about unlearning our either/or thinking – good or evil, us or them, scarce or abundant – unlearning it and opening oneself to God's perspective of Oneness: Creation is good because the physical and the spiritual are as One. There is no them; there is only us. Grace, the gift of God's life and love, is abundant.

This specialized practice of silent prayer isn't typically written about in books because it is best taught by someone guiding you. Please contact me via cell phone (765) 541-0611 or email marian64tom57@gmail.com if you would like to learn the practices of Contemplative Prayer.

Keep going in God's continual Presence. God has us. And we are loved always.

A New Lenten Adult Study:

Adult Sunday School: February 1 thru March 15 . . . 9:00 AM

Wednesday Bible Study: February 4 thru March 18 . . . 10:30 AM

Pastor Tom will be facilitating a new study for adults using the book, Thriving Church: What We Can Learn from Faithful Congregations by Erin Cash and Kory Wilcoxson (2025, Chalice Press) in our Fellowship Hall. Rev. Dr. N. Alex Ruth, our Associate Regional minister recommends this book to our church as a bible study. I personally think our church is thriving at this time, but can receive encouragement and gain strength by acknowledging some insightful guidance. Our bible study will come from the series of Scriptures and discussion questions at the end of each chapter. You can learn more about this book by going to chalicepress.com/products.

The cost of **each book is \$16**. If you are unable to pay full price, CCC will find a way to supplement the cost. Please let Pastor Tom **know by Sunday, January 18** if you would like a book. Hope to see you in one of these adult Bible study classes.



"Thriving Church" with Erin Cash and Kory Wilcoxson

SAVE THE DATE!

The C.C.C. Men's Dinner will be at 6 PM

Thursday, January 22, 2026

At the Pizza Ranch,

1211 Holiday Lane, Bloomington.

We hope to see everyone there!

SAVE THE DATE!

The C.C.C. Lady's Luncheon will be at 11:00AM

Thursday, January 22, 2026

At Bandana's BBQ,

305 N Veterans Pkwy, Bloomington, IL 61704.

We hope to see everyone there!



Worship Themes for Epiphany 2026

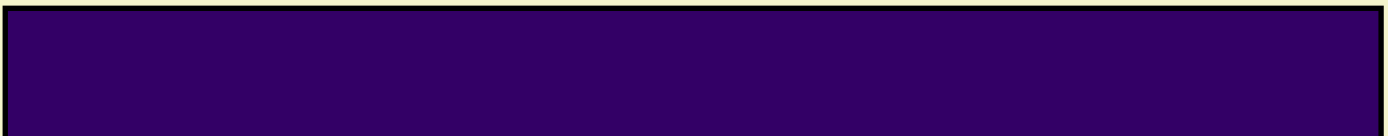


<u>Dates:</u>	<u>Scriptures:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
January 04, 2026	Matthew 2:1 – 12	Celebrating Epiphany
January 11, 2026	Matthew 3:13 – 17	The Baptism of Jesus
January 18, 2026	John 1:34 – 43	Seeing the Lamb of God
January 25, 2026	Mark 1:14 – 21	Jesus Calls the First Disciples
February 01, 2026	Matthew 5:1-12	The 8 Beatitudes
February 08, 2026	1 Corinthians 2:1-12	Holy Spirit as True Wisdom

Our overall theme throughout Epiphany in 2026 is “Wonder and Awe Allows Us to Marvel at the Miracles Around Us.” During the six weeks of the Epiphany season, we will examine how our everyday experiences seem to interconnect with God’s presence in the created world.

Jesus came to teach us the way of wisdom. He brought us a message that offers to liberate us from both the lies of the world and the lies lodged in ourselves. The words of the Gospels create an alternative consciousness, solid ground on which we can really stand, free from every social order, and from every ideology. Jesus called this new foundation the reign of God, and he invites us to participate in it by allowing God’s love and mercy to flow through us and all creation. This is where faith comes in.

We need to always trust God’s calling to assist others and depend on God – not in the systems and -isms of this world – but standing at the place where we offer our bit of salt, leaven, and light. Even then, we have no security that we’re really right. But God wants us to grant dignity and show reverence to others, especially those in pain, excluded or disabled in any way. You can begin today by simply asking God to bring to mind someone for whom you can ease 1/60 of their pain.



Christmas Caroling 2025



January 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				8 TOPS: 5:15P-Isaiah Board Meeting : 6P-FH	9	10
11 2nd Sunday food pantry: 10A Worship Service: 10:15A	12 Trustees: 11A - FH	13 CWF: 9:30A-FH	14 Choir: 6:30P	15 Monthly Prayer Service: 4:30P-FH TOPS: 5:15P-Isaiah Book Club: 6:30P	16	17
18 Bible Study Book Order Deadline Worship Service: 10:15A	19 Worship Cmte Meeting: 10:30A-FH PRC: 12P-FH	20	21 Choir: 6:30P	22 Lady's Luncheon Bandanas: 11A TOPS: 5:15P-Isaiah Men's Dinner: 6P Pizza Ranch (1211 Holiday Dr, Bloomington IL , 61704)	23	24
25 Worship Service 10:15A Loose Change Offering: 10:30A	26	27 Elder: 6:30P-FH	28 Choir: 6:30P	29 TOPS: 5:15P-Isaiah	30	31

FH-Fellowship Hall GH-Great Hall



OUR VISION STATEMENT

**Spreading the message of God's Love,
in our church and in our community,
through caring for each other.**



Continuing Prayers

Tracy Hallakan, Peggy Wade, Mile McReynolds, JoAnne Pritchard, Michelle Stevens, Nikki McCreary, Peg Hayden, Maddi and Eric Bell, Joe Taylor, Janet Keefe, Celestia Jones, David Smith, Daryl Burmaster, Tiffany Ward, Nancy Jones, Jake and Jacklyn, Amber Newell, Janis Calhoon, Kris Carius, Leonard Bates, Greg Firkus and Pat Murphy, Jackie Steinhilber, Mannie Martinez, Ann Burmaster, Scott Griffith, Linda and Pete Rasmusen, Fern Scaggs

At Home/Assisted Living

At home-Doris Miller, Frieda Foland, Frank and Barb Leach

Nursing Home

The Arc-Rev. Barbara Short, Don Short; Pat Iliff; Pontiac-Goldwater -Ron Geske

Military

Mark Brienem, Keyla Folsom, Troy Guyan, Benjamin Horn, Michael Iverson, John Thomas, Darrell Walton, Glen Whitecotton, Christopher Wilson-Poston

January Birthday and Anniversaries	
Esther Sengpiel	01/12
Kay Davis	01/15
Ruth Valentine	01/19
Nikki McCreary	01/20
Laurel Poshard	01/27
Rpm Geske	01/29

**Our challenge for the week –
Pray this prayer every day –**

Loving and merciful God, thank you for delighting in me. I am pleased you created me to belong to You. I want to follow Jesus in being compassionate, merciful, and sharing God’s goodness.

[Wait and listen.]