

# The *Epistle* of St. Paul

December 2025

## St. Paul

United Methodist  
Church

244 Kurtz Road  
Marietta, Georgia  
30066  
770-422-1089

[www.stpaulumc.com](http://www.stpaulumc.com)  
[churchoffice@stpaulumc.com](mailto:churchoffice@stpaulumc.com)  
<https://onrealm.org/stpaulumc>

Rev. Shelia Preacher  
[sheliapreacher@comcast.net](mailto:sheliapreacher@comcast.net)  
678-925-0103

Children's Ministry  
Victoria Godfrey

Music Director  
Hope Field

Accompanist  
Dorothy McCracken

Administrative  
Assistant  
Louise Byrd

Financial Secretary  
Ed Jackson

Lead Nursery  
Morgan Field

Nursery Assistant  
Zahra Taylor

### Sunday Schedule

9:45 Sunday School  
11:00 Worship

## Love: The Heart of Advent

*Rev. Shelia Preacher*

One of my favorite parts of our Advent celebration at St. Paul is the lighting of the Advent wreath. Each week, the candle's glow radiates this amazing light both literally and figuratively, especially when times seem dark. And I began to think...if ...



**hope, peace, and joy** are the candles we light during Advent, then **love** is the flame that makes them burn. Love is the heart of this season because Advent is the story of a God who refuses to love us from a distance!

It is love that causes the Word to become flesh to dwell among us (John 1:14), all so that love might move more freely amid our fractured lives, hearts, and souls. Love looks at our exhaustion and says, "I am with you...in all of this." And it is through love that the Incarnation (God with us) becomes real.

Love motivates Jesus to step right into the middle of our real-life world, wading into the thick of things, unfazed by what he finds. You see, Advent love is not sentimental like a Hallmark movie. No, it is stubborn, gritty, embodied—it rolls up its sleeves, unwilling to leave us in our chaos, our hurt, our pain.

And Advent love doesn't stop there. It doesn't only shine the light of Christ *upon us*—it shines *through us*. And if you look closely, you'll see Christ's hands and heart in motion everywhere...not just at Christmas, but year-round. On Tuesday mornings, the parking lot fills with the aroma of coffee and the sound of blessings spoken over hurried commuters. On Wednesday nights, college

*(Continued on page 2)*

**Love: The Heart of Advent** *(Continued from page 1)*

students gather around tables, finding a place to ask questions and grow in faith, while on the floor above, neighbors grieve together and find hope through support groups that remind them they are not alone. On Thursday afternoons, strangers roll up their sleeves in the fellowship hall and offer the gift of life through a blood donation. On weekends, laughter rings out from the soccer field as little ones chase the ball.

Week after week, love shows up in classrooms providing mentors as well as new winter coats and Thanksgiving meals, in kitchens preparing dinner for the homeless, in quiet living rooms where a Stephen Minister listens and prays, and in joyful community events like Easter egg hunts, Messy Church, parking lot picnics and concerts, Story Time with Santa, and magnificent choir cantatas. The love of Christ weaves through it all—turning ordinary moments into extraordinary signs of grace—proof that God is among us.

This Advent, my prayer is that Christ's love takes on flesh through St. Paul—through our words, our work, our presence, our courage. And may our weary world see, through us, the radiant truth that God **is** here—still loving, still healing, still shining.



## December Mission Outreach—Wellroot

*Susan Short*

Merry Christmas!

Tom and I continue to be amazed at the good works of this little church. Your support for our monthly Mission Focus this year has been generous and kind. You have provided warmth and food, backpacks, and Easter eggs. You've supported the Helping Hands Fund and aided those in disaster relief through UMCOR. You've blessed Wesley Woods, MUST, and KSU Wesley. Beyond the financial contributions you've made to each mission, your prayers remain the most valued. In addition, the outreach beyond our "monthly focus" is just an example of such kindness! The lives touched in His name are immeasurable. Thank you so much for blessing so many!



This Advent, St. Paul UMC is dedicating our Christmas Eve Offering to Wellroot Family Services, a United Methodist ministry providing hope, stability, and Christ-centered care to children and families in Georgia.

Wellroot's mission is to ensure every child has a safe, loving place to grow. They support foster families, equip young adults transitioning out of foster care, and help stabilize families in crisis—offering practical help and compassionate guidance rooted in faith.

By giving to this year's offering, you are helping:

- 🔔 Place children in safe and nurturing foster homes
- 🔔 Provide housing and life-skills support for young adults
- 🔔 Keep families together through prevention and stabilization programs

As we celebrate the birth of Christ—the One who brings light into every darkness—may our generosity reflect His love. **Please mark gifts "Wellroot."**

Together, let us shine hope into the lives of children and families who need it most.

Once again, thank you for your love and kindness.

May the peace of Christ be with you all!

---

## The Meaning of the Christmas Season

Mike McMillin

As Thanksgiving leftovers are finished and our company leaves, we notice that the lights begin to twinkle and familiar carols fill the air; our hearts turn once again toward the beautiful mystery of Christmas. It is a season rich with words that guide our spiritual imagination—**Advent, Love, Hope, Peace, Joy, Giving, Receiving, Bread of Heaven, Christ Is Born, Santa Claus, Jesus' Birthday**—each one offering a facet of the story that shapes our faith.



During **Advent**, we wait. Not a passive waiting, but a holy anticipation that stirs the soul. Advent invites us to slow down, breathe deeply, and look for God's presence breaking into our world in unexpected ways. It reminds us that Hope is not wishful thinking—it is confidence that God keeps His promises.

And so we speak of **Hope**—the Hope that God is still writing redemption into our lives. We speak of **Peace**—not simply the absence of conflict, but the deep and steady calm that comes when Christ dwells within us. We speak of **Joy**—a joy that runs deeper than festive celebrations, a joy rooted in knowing that God is with us.

As we ponder these gifts, we also think of **Love**, the very heartbeat of the Christmas story. Love led God to take on flesh and dwell among us. Love led Mary to say yes, Joseph to trust, shepherds to run toward the light, and wise men to offer their treasures. Love leads us, too—to give, to serve, to forgive, to receive grace we could never earn.

Christmas is also a season of **giving and receiving**. We exchange presents not simply to follow tradition but to mirror the generosity of God, who gave us Jesus, the **Bread of Heaven**—the One who nourishes our souls and fills our deepest hunger for belonging, meaning, and mercy.

Of course, we also enjoy the lighter, joyful traditions: the sparkle of trees, children's laughter, and yes, even **Santa Claus**—a symbol of cheerful generosity and simple delight. These things, too, can be reminders that joy is meant to be shared.

But at the center of it all is the miracle we remember each year: **Christ is Born**. Christmas is, at its heart, **Jesus' Birthday**—the moment when eternity stepped into time, when heaven touched earth, and when God's Love became visible in a manger.

*(Continued on page 5)*



## Peace and Love Are All Around

*Hope Field*

Christina Rossetti's words remind us that Christmas is, at its heart, a season not built on glitter or shopping lists, but on Love Himself stepping into the world. "Love came down at Christmas," not as an idea or a tradition, but as a person. In Jesus, we see love that is steady, self-giving, and tender enough to transform even the weary corners of our lives.

Yet the Christmas season can often feel crowded, with expectations, with memories, with responsibilities, with noise. Peace may seem like something just beyond reach. But Rossetti's poem quietly invites us to return to the simple center of the story: Love as our token, Love as our grounding place, Love as our sign of God at work.

## *Love Came Down at Christmas*

*Christina Rossetti*

Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, Love Divine,  
Love was born at Christmas,  
Star and Angels gave the sign.  
Worship we the Godhead,  
Love Incarnate, Love Divine,  
Worship we our Jesus,  
But wherewith for sacred sign?  
Love shall be our token,  
Love be yours and love be mine,  
Love to God and all men,  
Love for plea and gift and sign

The choir's cantata this year is entitled *Love*, and references the above poem. As Advent begins and the commercial and busy-ness of the season begin to overtake all of us, let us look for the peace and love that are all around. I invite you to worship with us on December 14th as the choir presents *Love*. May you find love and peace this Advent season.

*(Continued from page 4)*

As we journey through this season, may our hearts be open to wonder. May we carry the Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love of Christ into our homes, our community, and our world. And may the miracle of His birth shape us into people who shine His light every day. Amen



## Christmas Traditions

*Bob Trengove*

Don't you love this time of year? I am not worried about the weather or the temperature outside; I am just thinking of all the activities surrounding Christmas. This year, our choir will be performing the cantata titled Love. "Love came down at Christmas," says it all. Jesus, the manger, the animals, the star in the east on Christmas morn, the three kings that followed the star, and the angels. Oh, what a glorious time of year to think about the good news that Jesus Christ is born.



When I was young, we didn't have imitation trees. Before Christmas, my Dad took my brother and me to the Christmas tree lot in town to pick out a Christmas tree. The lot sold \$3.00 and \$5.00 trees. We always picked the \$3 tree. We put up the tree in our living room, but did not decorate it. On Christmas morning, when my brother and I would come out early to see if Santa had come, the tree would be all decorated: an Angel on top of the tree, presents wrapped under the tree, and stockings filled in the hallway.

Unbeknownst to us, our parents were up 'til four in the morning preparing for us to view this wondrous event. Basically, they did not get any sleep. What a Joy it was to have my parents prepare for this morning in this way.





My grandmother was born on Christmas Day and would come for the meal that we served later that day. What a great day it was to celebrate two birthdays. As I said, Love came down at Christmas, and I will always remember how special it was and all that my parents made it to be for all who came to our home that day.

*Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the memories of the past. Thank you to all those who love us, bring joy to our lives, and give us peace. Thank you for your son, JESUS, who changed our lives in so many ways. Thank you for all the blessings you give us all the days of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

*(Continued on page 7)*

**Building and Grounds** *(Continued from page 6)*

The Building and Grounds Team is still performing many activities at St. Paul. The following are a few of the tasks completed or in progress.

-  **Handrails:** Tom has installed new handrails at the top of the steps from lower parking lot to the sanctuary. Thanks, Tom.
-  **Computers:** Mike has received and they are set up the new Dell computers. Thanks, Mike.
-  **Thermostats:** Winter programming is set and working well. Remote adjustments can be made via iPhone. Contact Tom Preacher for changes.
-  **Dead Trees:** Cobb EMC cut down four trees, Tom and Shelia hired Atlanta ECO Tree to remove four additional trees, and all is done.

## *Story Time with Santa— A St. Paul Tradition of Joy!*

*Saturday, December 6 • 3:30–5:00 pm*

The holiday season can move at a breathtaking pace—but at St. Paul, we believe in carving out moments that slow us down, bring us together, and remind us why this season shines so brightly. That's why we love to host our annual Story Time with Santa, where families can step out of the holiday whirlwind and into an afternoon filled with laughter, warmth, and wonder.

Children and parents are invited to join us for hands-on arts and crafts, cookie decorating, and a relaxing opportunity to simply enjoy being together. We'll share pizza and holiday cheer while welcoming our very special guests—Santa and Rudolph—who will read the Christmas story and help us remember the heart of the season.

One of the favorite parts of this event each year is our free book giveaway. Every child gets to select a couple of books to take home—a small but meaningful way we encourage a love of reading that lasts well beyond December.

And of course, no holiday gathering would be complete without that magical one-on-one moment with Santa. Bring your cameras, bring your Christmas lists, and bring your smiles! Invite your friends, neighbors, and grandkids. This is a beautiful opportunity to slow down, reconnect, and celebrate the joy and wonder of Christmas!









## A Season of Generosity and Gratitude

*Maureen Fleming*

The Christmas season is a time filled with joy, celebration, and reflection. As we gather with family and friends to celebrate the birth of Christ, we are reminded of the greatest gift ever given—God's gift of His Son to the world.

In response to this divine generosity, many find this season to be the perfect time to give back—not just to loved ones, but to our Church and to the work of God's Kingdom.





Christmas is about generosity. God gave us Jesus—the ultimate expression of love and grace. When we give to our Church, we are responding to that gift, participating in God's ongoing work in the world.

For many churches, December giving is crucial to meeting annual budget goals. Your year-end gift can help close financial gaps and prepare the church to start the new year on solid ground.

Christmas offerings often support outreach, benevolence, and missions—both locally and globally. Your giving helps feed the hungry, clothe the needy, and share the gospel with those who have never heard it.

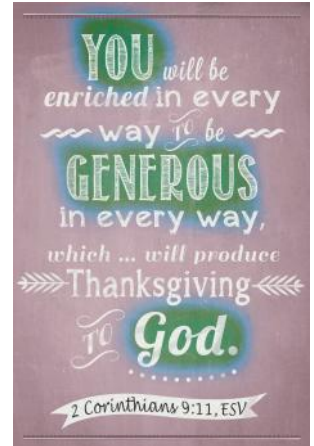
Giving at Christmas is a powerful way to teach children that the season is not just about receiving but about sharing and serving. Families can make giving part of their holiday traditions by praying together over what to give or choosing a specific ministry to support.

### Ways to Give

-  **One-Time Year-End Gift:** Consider a special donation above your regular giving to help the church finish strong this year.
-  **Designated Giving:** Support a specific project, outreach event, or missionary partner.
-  **Online Giving:** St. Paul offers secure digital ways to make giving simple and accessible, even while traveling.
-  **In Memory or Honor of Someone:** Give in honor of a loved one as a meaningful way to celebrate their legacy or influence in your life.

At Christmas, our giving is not just about meeting needs—it's an act of worship. When we give with joy, gratitude, and faith, we become part of God's redemptive story.

*(Continued on page 11)*



*(Continued from page 10)*

As you prepare your heart for Christmas, consider how God might be calling you to give. Whether your gift is large or small, know that your generosity makes a difference--not just financially, but spiritually, as we together proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

May your Christmas be filled with hope, peace, joy, love and the deep satisfaction that comes from giving in Jesus' name. May God Bless each one of you.

**Ways to give:**

Place offering in basket

[www.stpaulumc.com/donate](http://www.stpaulumc.com/donate):



◀ Scan the QR Code

Text SPUMC244 + amount to 73256

Download the App on our website.

## *Serving Dinner at Hope House: A Christmas Invitation*

On Tuesday, December 23, the day before Christmas Eve, St. Paul will serve dinner at the MUST Ministries Hope House homeless shelter. This monthly outreach always matters—but serving on this particular night invites us to see Christ's story with fresh eyes.

From the moment he was laid in a manger because there was no room for him, Jesus entered the world acquainted with homelessness and vulnerability. Later, he would say, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Jesus understood, in his own life, the struggle of those without shelter or security.

So, when Jesus teaches in Matthew 25 that "I was hungry and you gave me food... as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me," he is speaking as one who truly stands with the poor and the displaced.

As we approach Christmas Eve, serving at Hope House becomes a meaningful way to honor Christ's humble birth and embody the compassion he calls us to share. If you would like to volunteer, please call the church office or sign up in the narthex.



**Tuesday, December 23**

**@ 4:00 p.m.**

Call the Church Office  
or Sign up in Narthex

## Spotlight on: Susan McMillin

### A Heart of Service and Gratitude

*Kathy Lim Sang*

This Advent season, we are incredibly grateful for members like Susan McMillin, who embodies the spirit of service and deep community involvement at St. Paul. Susan and her husband, Mike, have been a vibrant part of our congregation for 27 years, joining the church around 1998.



*St. Paul*  
Member Spotlight

**Susan McMillin**



Susan was raised in the Sandy Springs, Georgia, area. She and Mike met while they were students at Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana, and married on July 24, 1982, after Mike followed her to Metro Atlanta. They have two sons – David and Bobby. Bobby has four sons of his own: Charlie, Jack, and the twins, Luke and Hepp.

Both Susan and Mike were raised Catholic. Mike had also attended Methodist activities; they ultimately joined Powers Ferry Methodist Church in Marietta before finding their home here at St. Paul. They were drawn to St. Paul after finding both the adult classes and Don Underwood's sermons to be a great fit.

Susan's God-given talents embody a dedication of patience and giving service to others. This is evident in her passion for helping people, especially seniors and the mentally challenged. Her professional career reflects this focus; she earned her M.Ed. in Therapeutic Recreation, specializing in senior adults and the mentally handicapped. Her experience includes working as an Activity Director in a nursing home and holding a unique position as a senior adult coordinator in Parks and Recreation. She was also an Instructor and Principal for the mentally challenged and worked for the American Red Cross, teaching community safety and later training employees in Atlanta companies.

Susan is a driving force behind keeping our congregation informed, organizing activities for the Forever Young group. Drawing on her extensive experience with senior adults, she coordinates this vital group, arranging presentations by expert speakers on topics ranging from Medicare updates to home decluttering. We are truly thankful for Susan's commitment to providing valuable information and stimulation for our members!

If you are looking for a way to connect and get involved, perhaps you can join Susan in her mission of service! Would you like to learn more about the Forever Young group's upcoming presentations? Touch base with Susan and she will get you connected.

---



## Advent in the Everyday Moments

*Victoria Godfrey*

As we enter the Advent season, our church fills with familiar symbols—candles glowing softly in the stained-glass windows, the manger scenes hung behind our choir, and children wide-eyed with anticipation. But Advent is more than counting down the days until Christmas morning. It is a season that invites us, and especially our kids, to practice four gifts that shape our everyday lives: hope, peace, love, and joy.

In our Children's Ministry, we see these themes come alive in wonderfully simple ways. **Hope** appears when a child prays boldly for something only God can do—trusting, without hesitation, that He hears them. It's in the way they expect God to be good, even when circumstances around us feel uncertain. Their hope encourages us to look forward with the same trust.

**Peace** is visible in moments when children slow down their busy little bodies. It's the way classmates learn to solve conflicts with grace (and a little guidance) or how a deep breath before prayer helps a child in need of a moment to reset. Advent reminds us that peace isn't the absence of noise, but the presence of Jesus in the middle of it.

**Love** just might be the easiest to spot. Children love freely and generously. Their actions teach us that love isn't just a warm feeling. It's something we choose to give, again and again, just as God chose to love us through the gift of His Son.

And **Joy**, well, joy is everywhere. It bursts through giggles during crafts, shines through wide smiles during worship songs, and settles deeply in hearts that know they are loved by God. Advent's joy isn't tied to presents or holiday treats but rooted in the good news that Jesus came for each and every one of us.

This Advent may we learn from our children. As we light the candles each week, let's also look for hope, peace, love, and joy woven into the everyday moments God places before us. May our hearts be as open and expectant as theirs.





This little girl was so overjoyed with her new coat, she came dancing into school!

Dear Congregation of St Paul UMC~  
Thank you once again for your very gracious winter coat drive. So many families have benefitted from your generosity over the years. You are a church doing God's work! Thank you and bless each of you!

Sincerely,

Bells Ferry

Lorna Parker & Stephanie Dockery

Good morning Rev. Shelia,  
Thank you so much for all the Thanksgiving meals for our families in need, I am so grateful for all your generosity and great heart evident in everything this church does.

Have a blessed day,

Ana Smith

Sawyer Road Elementary School



# DECEMBER

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4 6p Stephen Ministry	5	6 3:30p Story Time 
7 9:45a SS 11a Worship 3p Staff	8 10:30a Monday Servants 12:15p Chair Yoga	9	10	11	12	13
14 9:45a SS 11a Worship— Cantata	15 10:30a Monday Servants 12:15p Chair Yoga	16	17	18	19	20
21 9:45a SS 11a Worship	22 10:30a Monday Servants 12:15p Chair Yoga	23 4p Hope House	24 5:30p Christmas Eve Service 	25 OFFICE CLOSED Christmas Day 	26	27
28 9:45a SS 11a Worship	29 10:30a Monday Servants 12:15p Chair Yoga	30	31	Jan 1 OFFICE CLOSED New Year's Day 		

# Serving This Month



## December Servants

**Worship Leader**—Kathy Lim Sang

**Open/Close Facilities**—Mike McMillin

### Monday Servants:

12/01 Darrell Morgan & Marj Rhodes  
 12/08 Tom Short & Ruth Castellaw  
 12/15 Darrell Morgan & Marj Rhodes  
 12/22 Tom Short & Ruth Castellaw  
 12/29 Darrell Morgan & Marj Rhodes

**Media Team**—Mike McMillin

**Easy Worship**—Terry Palmer, Tom Preacher

**Audio/Video**—Robbie Littlefield, Jyo Vanapalli

**Could it be YOU? Join Us!**

3 Sylvia Ye

14 Jyotsna Vanapalli

16 Susan Woodward

18 Mary Lou Flenner

26 Carol Hiers

30 Daryl Wright

1 Robert Simpson

3 Robbie Littlefield

4 WeiJie Li

7 Maureen Fleming

18 Mike McMillin

18 Mary Helen Setser

23 Terry Palmer

31 Victoria Godfrey

### Our Faithfulness

*"I will be loyal to St. Paul United Methodist Church  
 and support her with my prayers,  
 my presence, my gifts, my service and my witness."*

OCTOBER 2025

#### Our Presence

Average weekly Sunday School attendance ..... 22  
 Average weekly 11:00 worship attendance ..... 38  
 Average weekly online attendance ..... 50

#### Our Gifts—General Fund

#### OCTOBER 2025 INCOME

Contributions ..... \$ 17,396.52  
 Processing Gifts ..... \$ 113.50  
 Total Contributions ..... \$ 17,509.75  
 Rental Property ..... \$ 1,695.00  
 Soccer Rental ..... N/A  
**Total Revenue ..... \$ 19,204.75**  
 YTD 2025 Income ..... \$169,388.65  
 Total Expenses for OCTOBER ..... \$ 19,119.01  
**TOTAL 2025 Expenses ..... \$191,602.10**

### Altar Flowers

**Cost: \$50.00**

12/07: Available

12/14: Ed Jackson

12/21: Marj Rhodes

12/28: Available

**Sign up on  
Bulletin Board**



**December 17**

**Suggested word count: 350-400**