

# HILLTOPPER

United Methodist Church of Parsippany

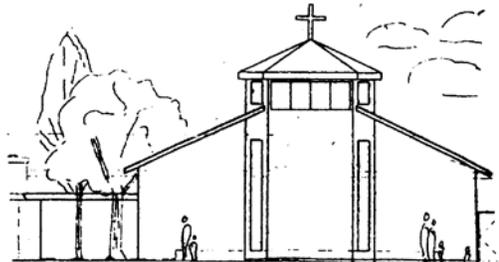
903 So. Beverwyck Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 (973) 887-4657

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*Sunday Worship Celebration: 10:30 a.m.*

*In a hostile, hurting world we reach out to share kindness and laughter. Our spirituality is based on Jesus and his love and compassion. We provide a community of support and healing where all are welcomed and valued regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, disability, gender, or economic status. In a world where people feel they can love only those who are like themselves, we seek to celebrate the uniqueness of every human being.*

**"Making Room in the Circle"**



## FEBRUARY, 2018



**A sermon preached on January 6, 2018 – Epiphany Sunday – based upon Matthew 2:1-12**

This very familiar story of the Magi following the star to Bethlehem has a unique capacity capture our imagination. Although the word doesn't occur in story its theme is the mystery of what we call the "soul." The soul is the capacity that is deep within each of us to truly love and experience joy -- the place where we are connected to God. In this sense, our souls are all alike, and yet in another sense each soul is unique, because each of us is gifted in ways that distinguish us regarding how we express love, and each of us has a different destiny that calls to us from our souls -- our own path to follow. Our souls are our truest self – the self God made us to be.

Apart from the baby Jesus, there are two basic characters in this story, one representing life lived out of a connection to the soul, and the other expressing life altogether cut off from soul.

Let's first consider the second character: Herod. To reference the saying of the grown up Jesus, Herod has "*gained the whole world*" in the sense that he has come to be the most politically powerful man in his region, but he has lost his soul. He carries the title of "king of Judea", but he is a fraudulent king, a puppet put in power by the emperor in Rome. He does not have the soul of a king and so his life is about play acting.

His is a joyless existence. In spite of his great worldly power, he is filled with insecurity, requiring others to defer to him – to tell him how great he is – to prop up his false sense of self. Since he is not rooted in his soul, the arrival of the Magi with news of the birth of a child destined to be king fills Herod with fear, throwing him into a tail spin.

This world that Herod is so attached to and which can be so seductive to us doesn't encourage "soulful" living.

Spending a few days home recently with a cold, I've watched more television than usual, and there is this reoccurring commercial that has really irritated me. Perhaps you've seen it. Two next door neighbors – clearly affluent women – encounter one another as one woman is unloading newly purchased containers from her car. To mark the New Year she is excited about her resolve to bring order and beauty to her home. The other woman condescendingly gestures



to her new possession to mark the New Year – a \$50,000 car – completely deflating the first woman. In a world where a person's value arises from the status projected by her luxury possessions, how can the other woman ever measure up? The commercial tempts me to throw something at the television.

The alternative example in the story is that of the Magi. They are not taking their cues from the world, from the approval of others. To their neighbors back in Persia, their notion of setting off on a long, arduous journey following some otherwise overlooked star made absolutely no sense. But they are confident in the truth that has arisen from their soul.

On the surface, they have far more reason to be afraid than Herod, leaving the familiar for unknown territory. But they aren't fearful because they know the path they have taken has been given to them by God. The journey leads them to a profound experience of joy: *"When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy."*

For the first time in 36 years of preaching a certain detail in the story caught my attention. Herod specifically asks the Magi for the specific time of the mysterious star's rising, but there is no indication Herod or for that matter anybody else ever saw the star. This is peculiar given the fact that a star capable of leading people to a specific house would certainly be one that would capture the attention of plenty of people.

The suggestion here is that the star is not a physical reality. It is specifically the star given to the Magi to guide them towards their particular destiny -- some sort of vision, arising from their souls. In this sense there is a unique star to follow for each of us.



Soulful living doesn't mean a pain-free life, but it brings a clarity that is otherwise missing in our lives -- a sense of being fully present to the gift of our lives.

Rachel Naomi Remen is one of my favorite writers. She is a medical doctor now in her eighties who in the course of her early life dealt with life threatening illnesses. Midway through her life she shifted the focus of her work to the spiritual dimensions of healing often overlooked by the medical profession.

In one essay by Remen she takes note of the curious fact that many people in the midst of what would seem like extremely stressful life circumstances – for instance dealing with a life-threatening illness – often report feeling less stress and more joy because the crisis provides the opportunity to reconnect to their souls. She writes:

*In the midst of her treatment, a woman with breast cancer told me how surprised she was to notice this change in her stress level:*

*For the first time I am sailing my boat by my own star. My God, have I sailed it by everything else! And allowed everyone else to take a turn at the tiller. All of my life I've headed against myself, against my own direction. But now I have a deep sense of my way, and I am loyal to it. This is my boat and it was made to sail in this direction, by this star. You ask why I seem so much more peaceful now? Well, I am living all in one piece.*

*Each one of us has such a star. It is called the soul. Unfortunately it is often easier to see it and follow it after it has grown dark.*

The Magi received guidance in following their path by paying attention to their dreams, which speaks to the truth that our souls often express themselves through our dreams if we are willing to pay attention. Remen describes a woman who received similar guidance in connecting to her soul in the midst of chemotherapy for breast cancer:

*A self-made woman of considerable means, one night in the middle of her rigorous chemotherapy she dreamed that she was watching a woman build a mountain. Sweating and straining, the woman put rock on top of rock, climbing as she went, working night and day, until she had constructed a magnificent snow-capped peak and stood on its very top.*

*"A remarkable image," I commented.*

*"Yes," she replied, "and familiar. It was my life, my old life. Working, always working, building my beautiful homes, my corporation, my increasingly powerful role in the international business community. Watching her standing there at the top, I felt such a familiar thrill of pride. How competent she was! How disciplined and determined! How powerful!"*

*"Then, to my horror, I saw a great crack began to open in the mountain close to the base. From where I was standing, I could see it begin to collapse in on itself. Terrified, I tried to call*

*out a warning, but I had no voice and could only watch. Finally the top of the mountain itself began to give way. The woman stood frozen, paralyzed. And then, at the very last second, just as the whole thing crumbled beneath her, she found that she knew how to fly.*

To fly is to live out of one's soul, rather than from the dictates of this world. Sometimes in "losing the whole world" a person can rediscover their soul.

The story of the Magi and Herod invites us as we begin a new year to reflect on the question, "Am I living out of my soul? Am I on the path God has for me? Am I following my own star?"

In some cases the answer may be a clear no with the recognition that certain significant changes need to be made in one's life that involves risks similar to the risk embraced by the Magi. Negative, abusive relationships may need to be brought to an end if they can't be transformed. A job that is "soul-killing" may need to be left.

But sometimes reflection on these questions may lead to the conclusion, "Yes, for the most part I **am** following my star. I really **am** where I am intended to be." In this sense the heroic journey far from home of the Magi can be misleading. Sometimes living more fully from our souls simply means more fully embracing the life we are presently leading.

Remen describes a mystical experience of a neighbor she called "a down to earth and practical person" that awoke the woman to the reality of her soul in midst of the most mundane of activities:

*She had been cleaning her house, mopping and waxing a floor and thinking of nothing in particular, when suddenly it was as if her life were passing rapidly in front of her and she became aware of something she had not recognized before, that there was a coherence and direction that ran through it like a thread. The choices and events of her past, which at the time had seemed quite random, fit together seamlessly in an entirely new and purposeful way. Though she had never experienced this direction before, it was familiar to her. It was as if she had been following something unseen for many years and she had not known.*

The woman went on to describe her sense that there was a similar but vastly larger direction guiding all of life:

*Suddenly she knew that, despite external appearances, life could be trusted, and she began to weep with joy.*

*"You know," she said, "I tried to share this with several people, but it was very hard to talk about. Funny, when it's so real for me."*

*"Is it still real for you?" I asked. "Oh yes," she replied instantly.*

*"It's not as strong, but it's still there... It seems to me that I have own star to follow – you know, like the old sailors. Perhaps we all do." She smiled at me. "Makes no sense, does it? But I feel less stressed and alone."*

Sometimes the reality of the soul is witnessed indirectly by the quality of life lived out of contact with our souls. At such times life seems purposeless, lacking in joy and full an overwhelming feeling of stress.

Life seems superficial and shallow. We feel irritable because in taking our cues from the external world we become frustrated because we don't find the approval we have come to rely on.

When you become aware of yourself living in such a state of mind, try and turn your attention inward. Listen for the whisper of God's voice. Wait for the rising of your distinct star that shines in the darkness, and move towards the light.



In the kindness of Jesus,  
Pastor Jeff



**The Season of Lent – Forty Days of Renewal as Individuals and as a Church**

Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup>**, which we will mark with our **traditional service at 7 p.m.** Opportunity will be provided to come to the altar for imposition of ashes. The use of **ashes** as a sign of mortality and repentance has a long history in Jewish and Christian worship, and the Imposition of Ashes can be a powerful nonverbal and experiential way of participating in the call to repentance and reconciliation.

The season of Lent is an opportunity for deepening our spiritual life – our walk with God. Now is the time to begin thinking about how God is calling you to change your life in the 40 days of the season. Every member and friend of the church is encouraged to consider being a part of a small group for spiritual renewal.

Betsy Adams is excited about the book reading group for women she will be leading on Tuesdays at 7 p.m. at the church on "Women at Easter". Pastor Jeff is in the process of setting up other small group options that would meet at other times with the goal of including as many members and friends of our congregation as possible. In the Fall he put forth a model of a short term small group of about six or eight people in which the leadership would be shared by the members of the group. Trust would be intentionally established with clear guidelines for sharing (*\*see below*) that would offer participants opportunities to share their stories with one another. Bible passages with questions for reflection and sharing would be provided. Pastor Jeff is in the process of setting up groups with suggestions of possible participants. If this interests you, please let him know soon.

There are other possible ways that small groups could be set up to meet during Lent, and Pastor Jeff would also be interested in hearing from folks about themes they would be interested in exploring during Lent.

\* The guidelines for groups to create a safe space for sharing would be the following:

- 1) Anything shared is assumed to be confidential – not spoken of elsewhere – unless explicit permission is granted.
- 2) Members are to be mindful not to dominate the conversation in such a way that others don't get ample opportunity to speak.
- 3) Members are not to be pressured to share more than they are comfortable sharing, and if in a given meeting, a member should choose to participate by primarily listening, he or she would be free to do so.
- 4) If a member should choose to share a problem, the first responsibility of group members would be to listen, understand and empathize. Advice regarding how to deal with the problem would be offered only if invited by the member.
- 5) It is understood that such a group would be about members' personal experiences and not a time to argue opinions.

One of the strengths of our church is we give each other permission to be vulnerable. We make a point of saying on Sunday mornings that tears are welcome here -- that if at a given moment one of us needs to shed some tears, or for that matter a personal joy, this is a place where it is safe to do so. We seek to be a community that lives out of the mercy and grace revealed in Jesus – to be a place where we can readily acknowledge our hopes and dreams, frailties and failings, with no fear of being shamed or judged. These small groups would be an opportunity to deepen the sense of connection to one another and to God.

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Our youth will once again **be making and selling subs** as a fundraiser with half of the money going to a local missions project. They will be selling the subs to order the two Sundays before **Super Bowl Sunday, February 4th**. Please see any youth group member or contact Pastor Jeff if you would like to place an order and won't be at church.



United Methodist  
Women

Looking back... There was no meeting in January.  
And next ...

**No meeting in February**  
**Next Meeting – Wednesday, March 7, 7:00 p.m.**

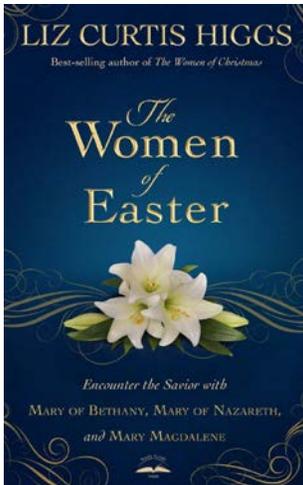
Feb. 2 – Groundhog Day	Feb. 14 <sup>th</sup> – Ash Wednesday
Feb. 13 – Women’s Lenten Bible Study	Feb. 14 <sup>th</sup> – Valentine’s Day
	Feb. 19 <sup>th</sup> – President’s Day

Get well wishes to those of you who are ill, and  
HAPPY BIRTHDAY to those of you celebrating this month with Denise White and Grace  
Agre.

God Bless,  
Betsy Adams

**Prov. 17:17 “A friend loves at all times.”**

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A new Women's Bible Study for Lent will begin  
Tuesday February 13 at 7:00 til 8:15 pm where we will be  
reading **The Women of Easter**.

We are going to meet three women named Mary, each  
of whom has a life-changing encounter with Jesus. Mary of  
Bethany prepares the way for the Lord's burial when she  
anoints His feet and fills the air with her perfume. His mother,  
Mary of Nazareth, remains by His side from His first breath to  
His last, her loyalty unwavering. Mary Magdalene, delivered of  
seven demons, bravely supports her Teacher through His  
darkest hours and then proclaims the glorious news of His  
resurrection.

A sign up sheet will be available in the church narthex.  
Please contact Betsy Adams at [betsyadams@live.com](mailto:betsyadams@live.com) with  
any questions or if you would like to attend.

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**Our church website** has recently been updated by Pastor Jeff and Justin  
Cogan. Check it out at [ParsippanyUMC.com](http://ParsippanyUMC.com). There you can find all of  
Pastor Jeff's sermons and eulogies, as well as the sermons of Bob Keller.  
You can also find all the newsletters, as well as a calendar that gives the  
times of events held at the church. You can also find a little church  
history, a listing of all the plays we've produced at the church, and a  
summary of the various church fellowship and mission groups.

If you aren't presently on **Facebook**, consider joining with a secret identity so you can be a member of the Parsippany United Methodist Church Congregation Group and received day by day prayer concerns and announcements and other postings regarding the life of our church.

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On the second Thursday of every other month our church provides a meal for the people living temporarily at **Homeless Solutions**. If you would like to volunteer as a server, please speak to Laurie Wilken or Connie Wallace. If you would like to help cook speak Tom or Justin. **Our next opportunity to serve is Thursday, February 8<sup>th</sup>.**

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**CHURCH CALENDAR and SCHEDULING EVENTS**

The church calendar on our website [www.parsippanyumc.com](http://www.parsippanyumc.com) has been updated. If you want to schedule an event, you need to look at the website calendar to see if the date is available. All requests for use of the church facilities need to be approved by the trustees, Connie Keller or Amy Gripp.

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**Interfaith Furnishings** - Once every three months our church provides volunteers to assist **Interfaith Furnishings** in transporting donated furniture to people living in Morris County who would not be able to otherwise furnish their homes. **Our next Saturday to serve is on Saturday, February 17<sup>th</sup>.** Please speak to Bruce Letsch or Pastor Jeff if you would like to volunteer

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On the **third Thursday of every month** Pastor Jeff leads a **worship service at Troy Hills Center at 10:30 a.m.** If you would like to share in this ministry to the people living in a nursing home, please join us. Speak to Pastor Jeff, Pat Winz or Andee Mihalko if you would like more information. Our next service is **Thursday, February 15<sup>th</sup>.**



Anyone aware of a **Prayer Concern** is invited to contact Doris Bradley at 973-887-3219 who will put the **Prayer Chain** into action. If Doris cannot be reached, please contact Pastor Jeff. If you would like to add your name to the people who receive the prayer chain, please speak to Betty Polen.

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**A day time men's discussion group** with Pastor Jeff that meets on **Fridays at 1 p.m.** We discuss short readings or videos during the 90 minute sessions. Any men available in the day time are invited to join us.



To make it easier for the Congregation to keep up with their financial pledges to the Church, a **PayPal link has been added to the PUMC Homepage**. If you've never used PayPal before, it's an easy and secure way to send a payment over the Internet. You can use your bank account or a credit card to make your payment, and PayPal takes a small transaction fee. For more information or a quick demonstration on how to use this new tool, please speak with Justin Cogan

A **small gathering of men** from our church meet together **every Tuesday at 7:30 a.m. at the Empire Diner** with Pastor Jeff for breakfast, conversation, and a concluding prayer. All men are welcome.

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**Parsippany Emergency Food Pantry** - Wes Sitgreaves has called to our attention the ongoing need of the Emergency Food Pantry in Parsippany in these difficult economic times. There are more and more families turning to the food pantry for help. You can bring your donations of non-perishable food items to the church any Sunday. Wes takes the food over as the bin gets filled up. Supermarket gift cards are also welcome - buy them from Betty Polen and raise money for the church at the same time!!! This is a very easy way to give back to the less-fortunate in our own township.

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**FLOWERS FOR THE ALTAR ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS** – If you want to remember or honor a special occasion in your life by putting flowers on the altar, please get in touch with Connie Keller. You are certainly welcome at any time to place flowers on the altar. If you want an announcement in the bulletin, please call Connie Keller or send her an email with the dedication. Contact information: Connie's cell: 973-568-5404; home: 973-887-4384; email: [connie@mhmlender.com](mailto:connie@mhmlender.com)

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**Consider becoming a part of one or more of our Musical Groups here at church:**

**Bell Choir** – rehearses Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. If you are interested in joining us, please speak to Barb Bradley or Aimee Letsch - or just show up on Thursday and see what happens!

**Choir** – rehearses Thursdays at 7:45 p.m. We always have an "open robe" for anyone who loves to sing. We sing in 4-part harmony, so if you've sung in your high school chorus or any other equivalent, you have a great start! Speak to any choir member or Barb Bradley if you're interested.

**SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR JANUARY**

Feb. 4	Feb. 11	Feb. 18	Feb. 25
Isaiah 40:21-31	2 Kings 2:1-12	Genesis 9:8-17	Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
1 Corinth 9:16-23	2 Corinth 4:3-6	1 Peter 3:18-22	Romans 4:13-25
Mark 1:29-39	Mark 9:2-9	Mark 1:9-15	Mark 8:31-38



<b>FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS</b>			
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Mia Savarin	11 <sup>th</sup>	Julianne Karr
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Denise White	11 <sup>th</sup>	Ryan Wink
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Justin Cogan	19 <sup>th</sup>	Charlotte Romeo
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Diane Morgan	22 <sup>nd</sup>	Elizabeth Vance
4 <sup>th</sup>	Susan Valcoff	22 <sup>nd</sup>	Kylie Collins
5 <sup>th</sup>	Barbara Munnely	23 <sup>rd</sup>	Krista Kempiski
7 <sup>th</sup>	Charlotte Vance	24 <sup>th</sup>	Tracy Krisa Shawgo
7 <sup>th</sup>	Likitha Dasari	25 <sup>th</sup>	Sarah Edwards
8 <sup>th</sup>	Andrew Schnetzer	25 <sup>th</sup>	Keith Hawkins, Jr.
10 <sup>th</sup>	Mark Dierbach	28 <sup>th</sup>	Grace Agre
10 <sup>th</sup>	TJ Cogan	29 <sup>th</sup>	Coleen O'Grady
11 <sup>th</sup>	Valia Hawkins	29 <sup>th</sup>	Kelly O'Grady

<b>FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES</b>	
19 <sup>th</sup>	June & Russ Schnetzer

# Lent

W Q K P G N I T S A F P K V K F L  
 P O A S H W E D N E S D A Y C Z R  
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almsgiving  
ashes  
ash wednesday  
cross  
crucifixion  
easter  
fasting  
forgiveness  
holy week

lent  
meditation  
penance  
prayer  
prepare  
reconciliation  
sacrifice  
sorrow  
spring

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## February 2018

### United Methodist Church of Parsippany

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																																		
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