



# What Child Is This?

An Advent Arts Project  
of Village Chapel Presbyterian Church

December 6, 2018 – January 6, 2019

Village Chapel Presbyterian Church

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# *What Child Is This?*

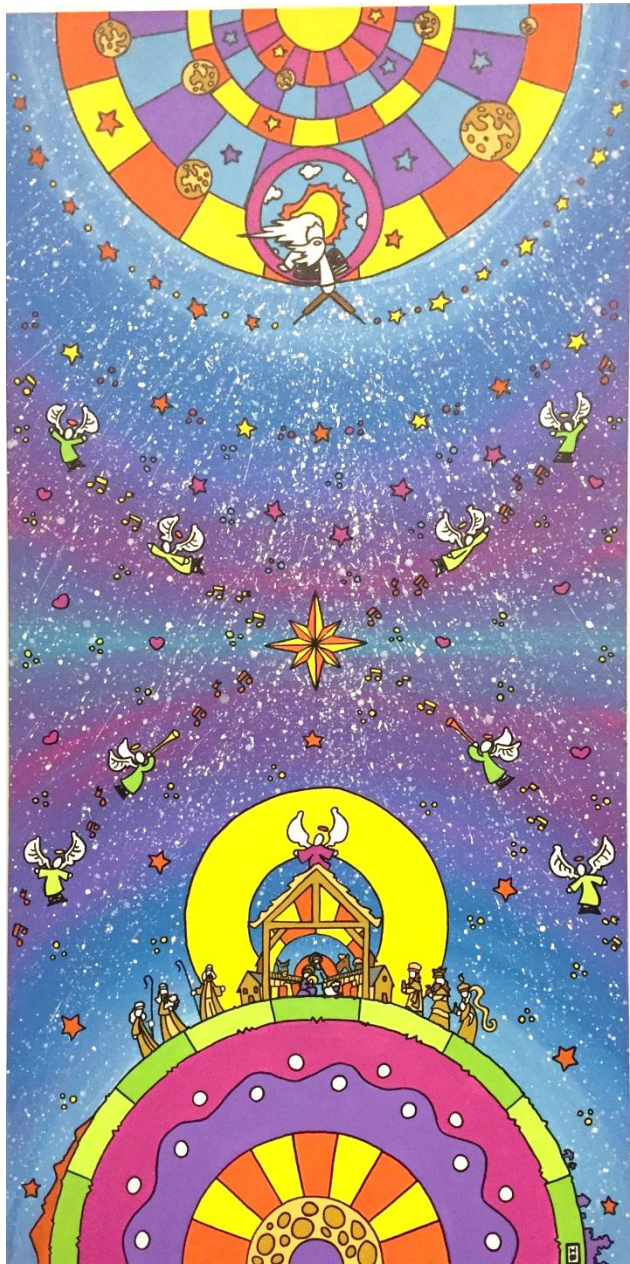
As a Presbyterian church in the Reformed tradition, we've had more experience with the spoken and printed word, which in its best forms is rich with images. However, we are learning that the visual arts can also have a powerful spiritual impact on us – moving us to worship, to grow spiritually, to serve others, and bringing us closer together in shared experiences. Theological depth can be found in visual arts as it is in music, poetry, dance, or drama. For visually oriented thinkers, having an image on which to focus can increase engagement and understanding as well as memory. At Village Chapel we seek to be open to hearing God speak to us through the arts as well as through scripture and preaching.

This Advent Art Project was conceived by our pastor, Todd Wright, developed by him and Amy Parker (Minister of Education and the Arts) with the guidance of the Worship Ministry Team, and approved by the Session. It was made possible by an anonymous financial gift which allowed us to commission three local artists to produce original work. We are grateful to David Pushkin, Staci Leech-Cornell, and Ian Bode for their willingness to work with us, often guiding and advising us through this new venture.

The theme, “What Child Is This?” developed out of suggestions from the Worship Ministry Team. Of all the options, we focused on the familiar carols, and the inquisitive nature of this title seemed to present the most opportunity for the artists to explore the theme in creative and non-traditional ways. In turn, the theme provided us definite parameters for the selection of recipients for the proceeds from the auction at the end of the exhibit. Looking to give to organizations working with children locally and internationally, we first selected Lily's Place of Huntington, WV, which cares for infants born addicted to opioids – the first facility of its kind, and now a national model of care that meets an unfortunately growing need. Looking beyond West Virginia, we chose to support the on-going work of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance with immigrant children separated from their families at our southern border.

# Jan Bode

was born and raised in Charleston, WV. After leaving WV in his late teens and traveling around the country, he returned to become a self-taught, full-time artist. His work is displayed in galleries, public buildings, and private collections across the country. He also collaborates with other visual artists and graphic designers on commercial projects. He has individually and collaboratively made several 2D and 3D public art projects. He is known for his unique style, featuring a graphically narrative, cartoon-oriented world filled with his black and white faceless characters collectively called “The Passenger.” He was recently named WV Artist of the Year 2018 by WV Living magazine and his work is available at The Art Emporium and The Bluegrass Kitchen in downtown Charleston.



# *Heaven and Earth* *( ...and Everything In Between)*

**Ian Bode**

Acrylic on Canvas

“The Passenger,” Bode’s familiar faceless character, plays all the roles in this “traditional with a twist” nativity scene. The viewer is invited into the cosmic moment of Incarnation from multiple perspectives – from that of earthbound Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and animals, the magi and their camels, to the heavenly host, where a classic image of the Divine – complete with white beard and hair – bends low with caliper in hand, measuring the re-created order, now redeemed through the coming of the Child. In between stars shine and angels dance to the music of the spheres. The Great star of Bethlehem centers all things – pointing vertically to the Creator in Heaven and to Christ on Earth, horizontally as the all-encompassing presence of the comforting Spirit, and diagonally with the angels forming a great Chi (X), the monogram of Christ. Bode’s characteristically brilliant colors and stained-glass-mimicking-style create an abundantly joyful and lively work.

*Staci M. Leech-Cornell* was born and raised in Greenbrier Co.



She graduated from Marshall University's Masters of Arts program with an emphasis in sculpture in 2007. Today she creates illustrations and other paper-works from her studio Still Maybe Studios located behind her home in Nitro, WV. Staci exhibits work nationally having participated in shows in Ohio, South Carolina, Florida, Kentucky, and California. She is also a member of the Best of WV: Tamarack artist located in Beckley WV. She writes:

“Growing up in rural West Virginia provided many opportunities to be surrounded by nature and the creatures that call it home. The living rooms and kitchens of family members were the homes of vast collections of ceramic birds and bits of nature. These ceramic menageries are ever present in my memories and I chose to invite them onto the drawn pages of my sketchbooks and portfolio.”

(untitled)

## Staci Leech-Cornell

Mixed Media Collage

A profound theological message reverberates through this work, undergirding its simplicity with thought-provoking meaning. Inspired by the carol, “What Child Is This?” and consistent with her artistic style, Leech-Cornell shifts focus from the humans present at the manger to one of their animal companions. The young donkey is a delightful image of innocence, but also resonates with purpose. A donkey is a work animal – particularly, a bearer of burdens. Just as grown-up Jesus chose a donkey to make his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (celebrated on Palm Sunday), so this humble beast underscores the contrast between earthly power and true spiritual authority. Jesus comes not to glorify himself, but to serve and to bear the burden of sin for us all. The golden crown and the brilliant yet faint star complete the trinity of christological images: Christ the Servant, Christ the King, and Christ the Light of the World.



## David Pushkin

A diverse visual artist, David's professional practice includes drawing, painting, printmaking and experimental film. His academic credentials include Design Foundation at Rhode Island School of Design, a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the San Francisco Art Institute, a Master of Fine Arts degree from Columbia University and post-graduate research at Anglia Ruskin University. He has taught at Columbia University, American University, Shepherd University and Hofstra University, and was Artist in Residence at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC.

A native of Charleston, David returned in 2012 to teach at Mountaineer Montessori. He is currently teaching art at Sherman High School in Seth, WV.



# *The Visitors*

**David Pushkin**

Oil on Panel

This work brings us to a contemporary setting, familiar yet intriguing. As snow falls on wooded hills, warm yellow light illuminates the center space, pouring onto trees, human figures, animals, and buildings. Yet in a small lean-to attached to a home, rosy light glows on a woman holding an infant as animals huddle in for warmth or curiosity. Outside, one man looks in on the cozy scene while others seem to be headed in other directions or gathered around a campfire at the edge of the woods. The scene invites viewers to ponder various questions: Why are mother and child outside on such a cold night? Who are the visitors – those inside the lean-to, those outside, the animals? Where do I, the viewer, find myself in this scene – attentive to mother and child, on the outside looking in, or heading away from them altogether, seeking warmth elsewhere? Ultimately, we are left with the thematic question, “What child is this?” – is this a child that has been born to a homeless mother, perhaps addicted to opioids? Is it a member of an immigrant family fleeing violence? Could this be God’s holy and beloved child – or rather, isn’t this God’s holy and beloved child?