

An open Bible is shown from a top-down perspective, lying flat. The pages are yellowed with age. The text is overlaid in a dark red, stylized font. The word 'WELCOME' is underlined. The background is a textured, light-colored surface.

Bethlehem 101

WELCOME

Bethlehem First United Methodist Church
March 2010

Session One

•Prayer

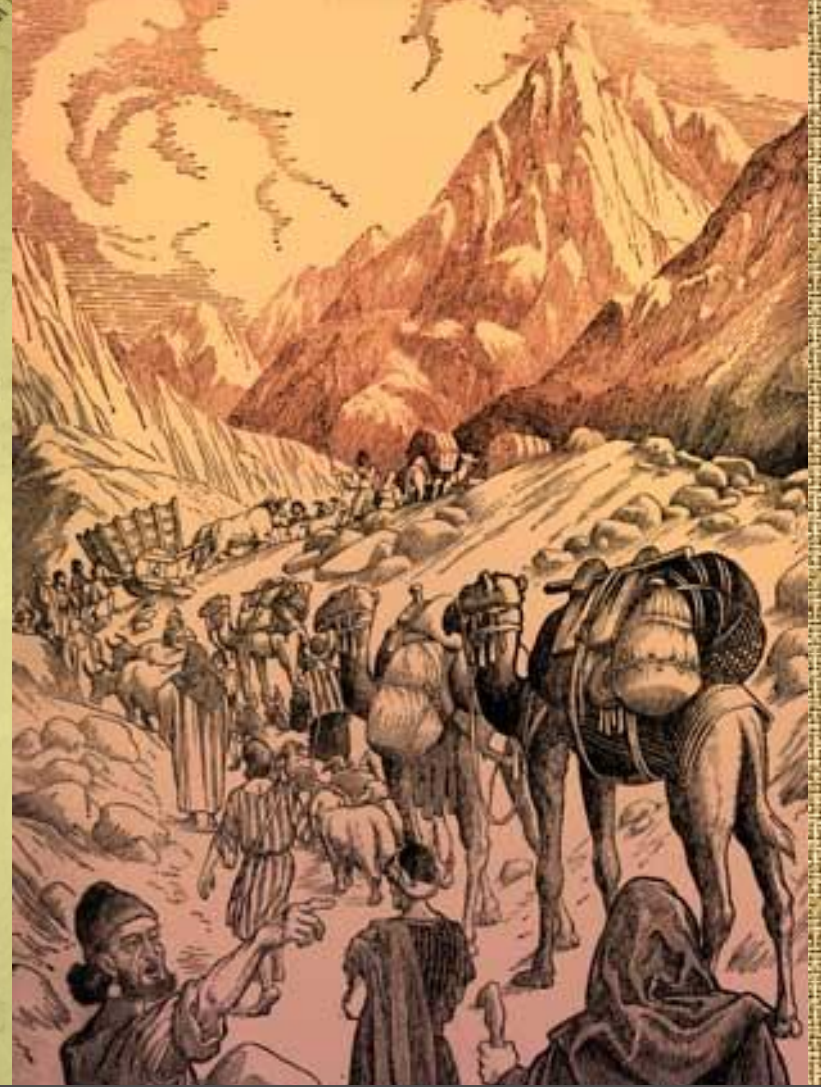
Los reinos
de Israel
y Judá

Introductions

• Name

• Two comments about you

• What do you want to get
from Bethlehem 101?





•Ground Rules

•Open frank discussions

•Sensitivity to others

•Confidentiality

•Agree to disagree

•Be loving and gracious

•PRAY for our Class



• Why **Bethlehem 101**....to answer questions such as...

• What kinds of people make up The United Methodist Church?

• Why the name “Methodist?” And are they really “United?”

• Who speaks on behalf of The United Methodist Church?

• Who gets to decide the official beliefs for The United Methodist Church?

• Can I disagree with the church on an issue like war or abortion?

• Why is The United Methodist Church involved in political issues?

• How do United Methodists view things like communion and baptism?

• **We'll look at...**

• History

• Theology and Beliefs

• Organization and Governance - Polity

• Present and Future Challenges of the church



•What do people look for in a church?

•A church that:

•Is very active in helping people in the community who are hurting and in need;

•Accepts everyone because it believes that God cares for everyone;

•Helps to strengthen families by ministering to children, teens, and parents;

•Has people who deeply care and support each other.

•Many people feel at home in The United Methodist Church because it is where that they can be free to explore their [faith](#) without rigid, absolute conformity or narrow restrictions of belief.



•Who are the people called United Methodists?

According to The 2006 United Methodist Directory & Index of Resources, the denomination in the United States has 8.18 million members, including:

427,541	African Americans
77,875	Asian Americans
60,728	Hispanic Americans
28,710	Native Americans
12,410	Pacific Islanders
7,206,346	White Caucasian

•In fact, one United Methodist congregation may be very *evangelical* (stressing personal faith in Christ and sharing it with others), while another is more involved in meeting the needs of the congregation. Or a pastor and congregation may be *theologically conservative*, while another congregation is *theologically liberal*. (More discussion on this later in the course). Worship may include a praise band or it may have traditional organ music -- or both.



•The United Methodist Church at a glance

- The United Methodist Church affirms a triune (three-in-one) God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some United Methodists prefer less gender-specific language, so you may hear Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.
- The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ – in uncomplicated terms, to nurture followers of Christ who then reach out and teach others about the love of Jesus.
- The heart of United Methodism is a relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ and sharing the mission of God to redeem the world.
- The United Methodist Church has a Wesleyan heritage, and as such, places an emphasis on mind and heart (knowledge and vital piety) and putting faith and love into practice (life).

United Methodists strive to grow in their spiritual understanding by using what is called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture (writings in the Bible), tradition (what Christians have believed across the centuries), reason (critical thought), and experience (personal experience of faith). Each is applied to and interacts with the other.



•The United Methodist Church at a glance

- Both men and women can be **ordained** (become clergy members) in The United Methodist Church.
- There is no one leader who speaks for the church or who determines practices for members, though there are a number of structures and bodies that provide leadership.
- Bishops, staff and governing board members of church-wide agencies often speak publicly on issues and events and strive to reflect the official positions of the church.
- Just as there is no one person who speaks for the church, there is no one 'central office' for the denomination. The church has 13 general agencies that initiate and support ministry and conduct business of the church, such as work with missionaries, communications, disaster response, and so forth.
- The United Methodist Church has an official book of rules, organization and structure, beliefs, and official positions of the church, called *The Book of Discipline* and a book stating the denomination's stances on social justice issues, called *The Book of Resolutions*.



•The United Methodist Church at a glance

- Every four years, delegates from local churches around the world gather for two weeks at General Conference, where issues are voted on and legislation is passed. One result of these actions is changes to *The Book of Discipline*.
- An emphasis of The United Methodist Church is its “connectional” nature. Every United Methodist congregation is interconnected throughout the [denomination](#) and throughout the world.
- The “cross and flame” is the official insignia of The United Methodist Church, and can be found in just about every county in the United States, along with nations in Africa, Europe and the Philippines.
- There are 35,000 congregations spread across the United States and another 8,000 outside of the U.S.
- United Methodists consider dialogue and missional cooperation between United Methodists and other Christians as a valid witness to the unity of the body of Christ. In other words, we are [ecumenical](#)



• John Wesley, the founder of Methodism

- John Wesley is the founder of Methodism, along with his brother Charles. John and Charles were **ordained** clergymen in the Church of England, and sons of Anglican clergyman Samuel and Susanna Wesley. John and Charles were among 19 siblings in the Wesley family. Samuel and Susanna's religious beliefs and practices and their reverence of God greatly influenced the Wesley brothers.
- John Wesley's life encompassed most of the 18th century. He was born in 1703 and ordained as a priest into the Church of England in 1725. He died in 1791. Although he was the founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley remained for life a clergyman of the Church of England. The Methodist Church was not established in England until after his death.

• In 1727 while a student at Oxford University in Oxford, England, Charles started a society with fellow students and invited John to be a leader. At first they met weekly, then two evenings a week, then every day. Their disciplined activities included:

The study of the Bible in Hebrew and Greek

The study of the classics

Visits to prisoners, the poor and the sick

Religious instruction of poor children.

• Eventually, the name “Methodist” stuck, due to the methodical disciplines and practices shared by the members of the society, such as holding one another accountable to a disciplined spiritual journey.



•Trip to America, mixed results

•In October 1735, John and Charles set sail for their first and only trip to the American colonies, described by most historians as having mixed results. Charles went as secretary to General Oglethorpe in Georgia but within the year resigned and returned to England. John went as chaplain to the infant colony and missionary to the Indians. He organized colonists into small groups similar to the societies at Oxford. In some cases the required structure of these societies did not sit well with the colonists.

•With nothing seemingly going as hoped, John left America to return to England in December 1737.

•As John approached the shores of his homeland, he wrote in his journal that he, “who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God.”



•History

•Moravian influence

- Part of John's feeling of not being "converted to God" was made even keener by his association with Moravians, a Protestant group founded in northern Germany by emigrants from Moravia.
- During the 57-day trip from England to Georgia, John became acquainted with a group of Moravians. He was impressed with them because they stressed **faith** in Christ in terms of *personal trust in God, commitment, and love*. In contrast, the teachings of the Anglican Church stressed *duty*. This difference showed itself during a storm at sea during the cross-Atlantic voyage. While most of the passengers feared greatly for their lives during the storm, the Moravians spent the time praying and singing, confident that God was with them whatever happened.
- Although John often attended their meetings in America and later in Europe, the Moravians did not allow him to have an intimate relationship with the group because they sensed he still needed a deeper **faith**. Yet, the Moravians offered him opportunities to look at his personal faith in new ways. Long after he returned to England from America, he was still left inspired by the importance they placed on **personal transformation** by the individual giving his or her heart to God.



•History

•A heart 'strangely warmed'

•Upon his return from Georgia, John Wesley had a life-changing experience, which he recorded in his diary May 24, 1738:

•“In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society on Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through **faith** in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for **salvation**; and an assurance was given to me that He had taken away MY sins, even MINE, and saved ME from the law of sin and death.”

•John was thus transformed by a new awareness of the biblical truth of God’s grace (God’s loving action in human existence) and salvation (being restored to God) by *faith in Christ alone*. This is known as *justification by faith* and was of tremendous importance to the early Methodist movement. John and Charles Wesley and their friend George Whitefield all received an outpouring of the **Holy Spirit** in 1738 and became new men with new messages.

•They began to preach with new power and confidence. This often offended the clergy of the Church of England, who would not let them preach in their churches. They therefore took the gospel into the open air and, said John, he considered the world his **parish**, a concept that continues at the heart of the church’s outreach today.



•History

•Transformation, emphasis of movement

•After the Aldersgate experience, Wesley taught and preached with new zeal that came from “a heart strangely warmed.” This new zeal in preaching was to impart that same transformation to others – a transformation that occurred by the divine force entering a person’s life and producing new results in their character and experiences

•The Methodist movement grew in England and it spread to the colonies in America as Methodists made the voyage to the New World. Organized Methodism in America began as a lay movement by leaders in Maryland, Virginia, New York and Philadelphia.

•Seeing the need for strengthening Methodist work in America, Wesley sent two of his lay preachers in 1769. The Methodist societies grew. Two years later he sent two more men to help – Richard Wright and Francis Asbury. Asbury became the most important figure in early American Methodism as the guiding hand for the growth and development of the Methodist Church



•The Circuit Rider

•In the first half of the 19th century, Protestants in America experienced a great awakening. Through revivals and camp meetings, sinners were brought to an experience of **conversion**. This fit well with the beliefs of the Methodists.

•Preachers and lay pastors knit these new converts into a connection by riding from place to place. Circuit riders (pastors on horseback) traveled first among the colonies and then westward with the frontier, preaching free grace and individual responsibility and the need for conversion and **regeneration**. Local societies and classes could spring up wherever a few women and men gathered with a class leader, and the circuit preacher visited them regularly. He would administer the sacraments. In due course, the classes and societies became local congregations.



•Summary

•Early Methodists brought a new message of hope and redemption to the common people in the midst of a political and economical turmoil. Some historians note that if it had not been for the Methodist movement working among the poor, 18th-century England might have experienced a revolution much like that in France.

•So, the spirit of Methodism spread rapidly from England to Ireland and then America, where Wesley sent emissaries to take charge of the growing church in the colonies.

•And that's how a man (John Wesley) gathered a following ("Methodists") that became a movement ("Wesleyan") and grew into a major [denomination](#) (The United Methodist Church).

•Today, the people of The United Methodist Church still seek to reach out in sharing and growing in a message of hope, made available to the common people, and open to all.

•Inspired by our rich heritage, we press onward.





•Comments/Questions/Beliefs

- What questions came up during this study?
- Has it impacted your preceptions/beliefs?

•Information packets

•Prayer needs

•Closing Prayer

