

PASTOR'S DEVOTIONAL

“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” – Proverbs 31:8-9.

I am well-known for my voice, which is usually very strong and carries a great distance. So you might imagine how difficult it is for me when I lose my voice, which doesn't happen often but which can make my life extremely difficult. As I'm writing this article, I'm experiencing a period of voicelessness; the cold that I've been battling for the past week has finally taken hold of my voice, so I'm finding myself resorting to various methods of communication. While I can still reach people via email and texting, there's nothing like my own voice to communicate my thoughts and feelings to others.

As difficult as it is for me to not have the ability to speak, I know that my voicelessness is a temporary condition; but for many people, not having a voice through which they can express their needs and desires is a permanent malady. For some, it's a physical condition; but for far too many people, their inability to give voice to their concerns is a result of having been marginalized by those who seek to gain and hold on to power by taking away the voice of others. History is littered with authoritarian figures who seek to silence the voices of those who disagree with their methods, or who seek an equal voice in important decisions, or who seek to express themselves freely even if their opinions might be different. Sadly, such authoritarianism is spreading across the globe, and far too many people are in danger of losing their voices – not for a few days, put permanently.



As we enter into the Advent season, the voice of the Lord cries out for all people to prepare for the coming of our Lord. John the Baptist calls on those who gather along the banks of the Jordan River as *“the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’* (Luke 3:4). The birth of

Jesus is first announced to lowly shepherds, people who were often marginalized and denied their rightful voice, proclaiming that *“I am bringing good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”* (Luke 2:10-11). When Mary and Joseph present Jesus at the Jerusalem Temple forty days after his birth, Simeon praises God in song, saying, *“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”* (Luke 2:29-32).

The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed a word that proclaims *“tidings of comfort and joy”* for all people; but it is especially good news for those who may have lost all sense of what “good news” might be in lives that appear to be condemned to voicelessness, hopelessness, and despair. Our Lord and Saviour could have been born in a palace to people of wealth and status; instead, our Lord chose to be born in a humble manger to parents who were among the marginalized of their day. As we prepare to come to the manger to adore the Christ Child, we are reminded that in the birth of Jesus, God has fulfilled his promise to open the eyes of the blind, to open the ears of those who could not hear and give voice to those who could not speak. The voice of the angels that cried out *“upon the midnight clear”* especially proclaims a message of hope to *“you, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low, who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow; look now, for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing; oh, rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing!”* (“It Came Upon the Midnight Clear,” ELW Hymn 282).

The birth of Jesus is the message of good news that in the child of Mary is the fulfillment of God's promise of the coming of *Emmanuel*, “God is with us.” It is the message that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord, that God is with us always – especially those who feel abandoned, forgotten, and lost. It is a message of shining hope in the midst of profound darkness, the word of confidence that God has given voice to the voiceless so that they might know that even when their voices are not heard by others, God hears even their deepest sighs and promises to be a constant source of sure and certain hope, because in the birth of our Saviour we have the assurance that *“unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* (Isaiah 9:6).

- *“Who, then, but human beings should receive this child? The angels do not need him. The devils do not want him. But we need him, and for our sake he became human. Thus we should receive him joyfully, as here the angels say: ‘To you is born a Savior.’”*
– Martin Luther, Sermon for Christmas Day 1544.

For me, the good news is that my voice will return after a period of rest; but for those whose voices are silenced far too often, the good news is that in the birth of our Lord and Saviour they have a Lord who is with them always, who always hears their voices, and who gives voice on their behalf to those who continually seek to silence them for their own advantage. May all voices be raised on this Christmas Day as we share the good news which is *“joy to the world – the Lord is come!”*

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

VICAR'S DEVOTIONAL

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, ‘God with us.’”

– Matthew 1:23



December is a month filled with anticipation. Many young children excitedly anticipate the coming of Santa and the magical moment when they can finally open their gifts on Christmas morning. I assume that Santa also eagerly awaits the milk, cookies, and the rest that comes after the Christmas rush has ended. For families, December is often a month of anticipated togetherness when relatives, both from near and far, embrace one another in countless different ways. December of course, is also a month of sadness and fear for many people. There are those who eagerly wait for the season to pass because of the financial and social pressures that it brings and many who spend the holidays alone.

With both joy and sorrow, we spend much of December in waiting, but where is God in all of this? It is easy to lose sight of the true and traditional meaning of Christmas amidst the commercialized chaos of the season, but whether we recognize it or not, God is with us.

For Christian churches who follow the liturgical calendar and intentionally preserve the meaning of Christmas, December is also a month of waiting that is prompted by the question “God, where are you?”

As we celebrate the season of Advent and anticipate the coming of the promised Messiah – we eagerly await the birth of Christ and linger in a period of waiting, of not knowing, of wondering

when the promised Emmanuel will finally appear on the scene. Of course, having the gift of historical hindsight means that for us, the waiting is partially symbolic because we know that Christ has already been born, died, and resurrected. Yet, for me at least, the season of Advent holds additional significance. In my place of here and now, the season of Advent reminds me of the countless times that I have wrestled with the question: “God, where are you?”

As we celebrate Advent, I remember the birth of Christ and await his second coming, but I also take some time in this season to reflect upon the challenging moments of the previous year – the moments when I wondered “God, where are you?”

As the birth of Christ is celebrated, we rejoice in the assurance of Emmanuel – in the assurance that God is with us. In this assurance, I often find a Christmas miracle of healing as I let go of the trying circumstances that made me wonder “God, where are you?” and cling to the hope that Emmanuel is in fact here. And so, in addition to remembering and celebrating, Advent becomes a special reflective time for me, a time in which both my hope and fear are met with the presence of the promised Savior.

As the liturgical year comes to both a beginning and an end, Advent joins the wrestling of: “God, where are you?” with the hope and assurance that we receive through the gift of Jesus Christ. As the carol composer Phillips Brooks suggests: “the hope and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”

I hope that as December progresses and as we embark upon the journey of Advent together, that you too might find hope and restoration in the reassurance that Christ, our beloved Emmanuel, walks with us, both now and forevermore.

What a blessed reason we have to celebrate, for we know that God is with us!

Vicar Jonah

CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SCHEDULE

“For a child has been born to us, a son given to us” – Isaiah 9:6



6 PM – CHRISTMAS EVE GERMAN SERVICE: An opportunity for the German speaking members of our community of faith and their families and friends to gather for worship in their native language. In addition to

celebrating the good news of the birth of our Saviour, we will be blessed by the music of the Teutonia Choir. The sermon (in English) will be shared by Pastor Jeff.

8 PM – Christmas Eve Carol Service: We gather as a family of faith in our beautiful sanctuary to sing the traditional carols of Christmas and to share the Christmas story with our children. There will be an opportunity for children to gather around our Christmas trees as we hear the angels declare the good news of our Saviour’s birth.

10 PM – CHRISTMAS EVE COMMUNION SERVICE: Amid the stillness of this holy night, we gather together to celebrate the Nativity of our Lord as we share in his Holy Supper. One of the most solemn and cherished worship services of the year as we rejoice in the “silent night, holy night” in which the Christ Child “sleeps in heavenly peace.”

CHRISTMAS DAY, DECEMBER 25

10 AM – CHRISTMAS DAY HOLY COMMUNION: On the morning of this most holy day, we gather together around Word and Sacrament to celebrate the birth of our Saviour.

“O come, let us behold him – Christ the Lord!”

MINISTRY OF MUSIC

From the Desk of Mr. Paul



It is that time of the year! I encourage you to consider inviting friends and strangers to come and worship and celebrate at Zion through the Advent/Christmas season. The Sunday School Choir, the Adult choirs have been passionately exploring and preparing music to enrich each Sunday Service at 10am at Zion.

Special music is being explored: Vocal & piano duets, Solos, organ/piano Duos, 2 pianos/eight hands for Christmas eve and of course you, as the church family will be invited to join in on the interactive celebration of Soon and Very Soon!

Give yourself permission to take time to come out and join us all at Zion.

You will and can make a difference.

Breathe In-Breathe Out
SMILE
You are Alive!
Thank You for Being YOU!
Merry Christmas and All the Best in 2019!



SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

The Children’s Christmas Concert will be held on **Sunday, December 16 at 6:30 PM.** We will be sending home the songs that your child’s class will be singing in the concert. Please help them learn the words. If you have any questions, please speak to either their teacher or Paula. Sunday School will take a break following the Christmas Concert. Sunday School will start back up on Sunday, January 13, 2019.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL



COUNCIL UPDATES

Bridgebuilder Program Up-date – It was decided that the Action Plan Report which includes progress to-date on the items contained in the Action Plan be attached with the Minutes from our November Meeting. In this way, the members are made aware of what actions have taken place to-date and which items still need to be addressed.

The Mission Statement and Guiding Principles documents were formally approved by the Council members. The documents will be presented at the Annual Meeting for formal approval by the members of the congregation.

The document on Addressing Issues and Concerns of the Congregation is in the process of being revised and it is hoped that the revised document will be formally approved at the December Meeting. The main reason for the revision is adding details in which members have the opportunity to discuss a concern with a Council member and the procedure to follow if this option is chosen by a member.

Congregational Life Committee – In order to plan future outings, the members of the Committee welcome any ideas for a potential trip. Please contact either Liz Bomasuit, Judy

Stanley, Lois Lemon or Stephanie Sousa.

Property Committee – Progress is being made with obtaining the three quotes to replace the existing main church roof. Minor repairs to the roof on the south side of the main church (wind damage) have been completed by Belliveau Construction, in order to avoid any leakage during the winter months. Presently, five heaters are being attended to for both electrical and plumbing concerns. It was approved to extend the agreement we have with Superior Sealers which includes the annual grading of our gravel parking lot, painting, etc. to also include snow clearance for a period of one year. We have received a favourable recommendation from Avondale United Church as to their reliability and pricing as it relates to snow clearance. They have done the snow clearance for both the former Central United Church and St. John's United Church for a number of years.

Proposed Christian Education Committee – This new Committee is a work in progress and a committee is presently being established. The Council members were supplied with the purpose and responsibilities of the committee members.

ZION TABLE FOR SENIORS



Our December Zion Table For Seniors and program is early this month. Mark your calendars for Tuesday, December 11. Lunch cost is only \$12. **Last call to sign up is this Monday, December 3 at 12 Noon.** Come for a very interesting, uplifting program, with Christmas music by Stratford musicians Shane and Angela Wiebe. Hope to see you there!

WOMEN OF FAITH



Saturday, December 8 at 9 AM: We will be packing shut-in baskets. List for cookie donations is on the table at the back of the church.

Sunday, December 9 at 5 PM: Our Christmas Dinner at Demetres. Cost \$25. Fellowship at 5 PM; Dinner at 6 PM. Please call Joanne Young 519-271-3225 by December 6 for a ticket.

Reformation Service & Lunch: Thank you to all the members of WOF who took part during the service; greeters, readers, communion assistants, ushers and children's story. We were pleased to serve 115 lunches. Thank you to all the ladies and husbands who helped set up, serve and clean up. Great job. Thank you to the members of Zion who were able to help support our special event.

WOF are pleased that Ellen Wolfe will take over the position as President and Joanne Cosstick as Treasurer for 2019. Thank you to all the WOF for your support and working together the past 3 years and it's encouraging to know our group is continuing with strength.

CHRISTMAS FLOWERS



Donations are now being accepted so the Women of Faith group can purchase flowers to decorate our church for our Christmas celebrations. Please put Christmas Flowers and your name on a separate envelope and place it on the offering plate or bring it to the church office. Donations will be accepted from now until mid-December. Thank you for your gift!

FRIENDSHIP MEAL



Because of the additional opportunities provided for community meals in Stratford in December we do not offer one. January 25 is our next meal. **Community Meal** Your participation is welcome in this part of Zion's ministry. For information, please speak to Sister Jean Widmeyer 519-273-6810. May God's blessing rest on all who eat and all who serve.

DECEMBER VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers assist with our Sunday morning worship services. Listed below are those who serve in December as a reminder and as a thank you for serving.

Date	Communion Assistants	Greeters	Readers	Usher Captains	Counting Captains
Dec 2	Stephen Fischer & Ed Illman	Al & Lorraine Skowby	Dr. Jo Knackstedt	Jerry Terhaerd	Paul Hansen
Dec 9	N/A	Declan Bessey	Marg Lamont	Jerry Terhaerd	Paul Hansen
Dec 16	Linda Springer & Barb Higgins	Jim & Judy Stanley	Marilyn Wells	Tom Cosstick	Kevin Tuer
Dec 23	N/A	Fritz Steigmeier	Nancy Schaff	Tom Cosstick	N/A
Dec 24	Volunteer Needed	8 PM: Wayne & Linda Faulhafer 10 PM: Volunteer Needed	8 PM: Linda Faulhafer 10 PM: Volunteer Needed	Volunteers Needed	N/A
Dec 25	Stephen Fischer	10 AM Volunteer Needed	Brian Wilker	Volunteers Needed	N/A
Dec 30	N/A	David & Sheila Wittig	Anne Cooper	Darrell Renecker	N/A