

A publication for the family of Zion Lutheran Church, 202 Erie St., Stratford, ON N5A 2M8

www.zionstratford.com

email: zionlc@golden.net

Phone: 519-271-8527

PASTOR'S DEVOTIONAL

"Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might and has become my salvation." – Isaiah 12:2.



If there has been anything that has been certain during these months of pandemic, it is that uncertainty has been a hallmark of our lives. What began as a virus that many thought would run its course in a matter of weeks has turned into an ongoing health crisis that has affected all aspects of our lives. We have gone from extreme lockdowns to tentative openings, which gave us hope at the time that life might return to normal – only to find out that rates of infection had increased, and the severe restrictions had returned. We are approaching a second Christmas in which we are uncertain as to how the virus will affect our family gatherings, our travel plans, and our worship celebrations of the birth of our Saviour. The church has been impacted by the virus; we live with the uncertainty of how we will be able to worship at Christmas and whether we will ever return to the worship traditions that were so dear to us before we knew anything about a virus known as COVID-19.

It is difficult to live with uncertainty; I must confess that there have been times when I have felt discouraged, where the weight of uncertainty has become an onerous burden, when I have wondered if I have the strength to continue on the path that the Lord has set before me in such strenuous times. It is at these moments of greatest uncertainty and deepest despair that we turn to our source of confident hope and certain faith: the Word of God that in all seasons is *"a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."* (Psalm 119:105). We turn to the Word of God that came among us in the birth of Jesus, who is proclaimed by the angels as *"Emmanuel, God is with us"* (Matthew 1:23). It is the confidence that is at the heart of the Christian faith, that *"neither death, nor life, nor*

angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39).

Our celebration of Christmas is preceded by the season of Advent, a season whose message to us is one of hope as we wait for the coming of our Lord. Yes, it is a season of preparation for our annual celebration of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem; but Advent reminds us that Christianity is not merely a religion that looks backward to its past, but one that looks forward to the future that our Lord has set before us. It is a future that we look toward with hope, knowing that as "*Christ has died [and] Christ is risen, Christ will come again.*" The words of Isaiah proclaim to us the certainty of our faith and hope; for "*surely God is my salvation; I will trust and will not be afraid.*" The prophet Jeremiah echoes this certain hope when he proclaims that "*the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.*" (Jeremiah 33:14). The voice of John the Baptist cries out in the wilderness of our uncertainty and despair, calling us to "*prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*" (Luke 3:4). We look with hope to the coming of Christ who is born of Mary in that little town of Bethlehem, where "*in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*"

I cannot imagine a more bleak and despair-filled place than the Nazi prison where Dietrich Bonhoeffer found himself incarcerated on Christmas 1943. It is a prison from which he would never escape or be released, as he was executed in April 1945 in the closing days of World War II. But while Bonhoeffer's suffering and death for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was very arduous and must have filled his soul with darkness and doubt, the words he shared in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* are filled with the sure and certain hope that is available to all people in life's most uncertain moments through the grace that is ours in Jesus Christ, the Word that became flesh and lives among us full of grace and hope. In a prayer he wrote for his fellow prisoners on that Christmas Day, Bonhoeffer prayed:

"O God, early in the morning I cry to you. Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you; I cannot do this alone. In me there is darkness, but with you there is light; I am lonely, but you do not leave me; I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help; I am restless, but with you there is peace. In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience; I do not understand your ways, but you know the way for me. O

heavenly Father, I praise and thank you for the peace of the night; I praise and thank you for this new day; I praise and thank you for all your goodness and faithfulness throughout my life.”

We can be certain that we will continue to live amid the uncertainty of these times that will challenge us, disappoint us, and even fill us with doubt and despair. But the blessed hope of Advent is that sure and certain word of confidence trust that our Lord is with us always, that in the manger in Bethlehem was born *Emmanuel*, the Incarnate Word of God that is always with us. May we be blessed with this sure and certain faith as “*we hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell; oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.*”

Yours in Advent hope,
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NOVEMBER 2021 CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING



The November 17, 2021 Congregational Council Meeting was held in-person in the Fellowship Hall and via Zoom conference.

After carefully considering the recent information that Pastor Jeff received from Dr. Miriam Klassen of the Huron Perth Public Health Unit, and following discussion, it was moved, seconded and carried that we maintain our current status including congregational singing but choir singing will be placed on hold until further clarification is obtained. Due to this decision, choir rehearsals will be suspended at this time.

Investigations are continuing regarding the possibility of providing livestreaming for the Sunday worship services. A note will be included in the December Newsletter to seek interest in volunteering to operate the system. Three volunteers are required at each service.

The Virtual Roundtable has been confirmed for December 1st. Twelve community members have accepted our invitation.

Due to problems being incurred with the existing aged phone system of late, quotes are being obtained to replace the system.

We continue to receive many requests from potential renters. The purpose of the rentals varies greatly. The present zoning does not permit us to rent to a business.

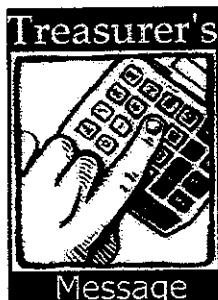
Donations/offerings, including donations to the Deficit Fund can continue to be completed via our Church website, including an option for E-Transfer, in addition to the PAR program, mailing cheques or dropping off donations either at the Church office weekday mornings or in the locked mailbox at your convenience.

LOOKING AT LIVESTREAMING



While we have been able to resume in-person worship on Sunday mornings, we are looking at ways to expand our online presence for those who are not able to join us in person. One option we are exploring is livestreaming, which would allow our services to be broadcast live while also recording them for viewing at other times. The Congregational Council is creating a task force to research livestreaming options and how we might bring this to Zion. We invite you to consider joining this task force, especially if you have experience with internet connectivity. If you are interested in serving on the task force or would like more information, you may contact Pastor Jeff at the church office or at laustsen311@gmail.com

MESSAGE FROM YOUR TREASURER



As you read this Message, we have entered the month of December. As the Treasurer of the church and on behalf of the Finance Committee along with the Congregational Council, I want to extend a sincere thank you to our members who have responded to-date to our recent request to reduce the deficit in our Current Fund, the account where our operating expenses are charged such as salaries, heat, hydro, insurance, and so forth.

A letter outlining our financial situation as of the end of September accompanied with a Contribution Statement as of October 31st, 2021 along with a Deficit Envelope was forwarded by mail to all our members a number of weeks ago. If you have not responded to the request as yet, we ask that you prayerfully consider your church in this time of need. Since, we are still in a deficit position as of the end of November, your response to our request will be greatly appreciated. Also, if any member wants to discuss the Current Fund deficit with myself or any member of the Finance Committee or Congregational Council, please feel free to get in contact with anyone of us. Please know that we are here to listen to your concerns.

As the member of our church who has accepted the responsibility to oversee the church finances through my Treasurer role, I conclude by adding "each and every member's offering, no matter how small or large, is needed, in order to improve our financial situation at this time."

Thank you for your continuing faithfulness to the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ here at Zion Lutheran Church.

Gerald Cook, Treasurer

On behalf of the Congregational Council and Finance Committee

**** YEAR END OFFERINGS ****

PLEASE NOTE: We will be accepting 2021 offerings at the office during the last week of December, namely December 27 to December 31, 2021 or they can be left in the locked mailbox. We will also be accepting offerings for 2021 on Sunday, January 2, 2022 as long as the member uses a 2021 offering envelope. If the offering is made via a cheque, it is must be dated with a December date.

MESSAGE FROM OUR EASTERN SYNOD TREASURER

An email was received on November 12, 2021 from Keith Myra, Treasurer, Eastern



Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; the contents of which we would like to share with you.

“What a very pleasant surprise it was to receive an additional \$25,000 gift from Zion, Stratford earlier this week, along with your usual monthly remittance! Our understanding is that this represents 10% of a bequest that Zion received. We are extremely grateful for this act of generosity and for your decision to share this portion of your gift with us. Please pass on my thanks, and that of Bishop Michael, to your council and congregation.

You may already be aware that the synod also has a policy, whereby we pass along 10% of any undesignated gift or bequest that we receive to the ELCIC national church or to another Canadian church-wide ministry beyond the synod. The ELCIC national church also has a similar policy that “pays forward” 10% from any undesignated gifts that it receives to church-wide ministries outside of Canada. As a result, of the \$25,000 that Zion received and the \$25,000 was allocated for the synod, we will forward \$2,500 to an ELCIC ministry and the ELCIC will subsequently share \$250 with an international church-wide ministry of their choosing. The bequest that keeps on giving and that will support four different levels of the church!

The 90% portion that the Eastern Synod will retain will be added to our Undesignated Gift and Bequest Fund. Income earned from this fund is used to supplement benevolence offerings in support of the synod’s operating budget/ministries. In addition, from time to time, portions of the principal from this fund are used for special, unbudgeted projects when these needs arise.

Thanks once again to Zion, for your generosity and for continuing to be a role model for other congregations in “second mile” giving!”

Regards,
Keith

CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SCHEDULE

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



4 PM & 7 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.”

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.

10 AM - Boxing Day December 26 Communion Service

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

NOVEMBER BAPTISM



We welcomed to our Zion Family through the Sacrament of Baptism:

OLIVIA CLAIRE WEST

*Daughter of
Joshua & Michelle West*

on

Saturday, November 27, 2021

CHRISTMAS FLOWERS



Donations are now being accepted so the Women of Faith 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!



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. 5	N/A	Volunteers Needed	Marilyn Wells	Brian Coe	Tim Iredale
Dec. 12	N/A	Volunteers Needed	Marg Lamont	David Doherty	Lois Lemon
Dec. 19	N/A	Volunteers Needed	Isabel Cook	Steve Lamont	Lois Lemon
Dec. 24 *4 P.M.*	N/A	Volunteers Needed	Volunteer Needed	Volunteer Needed	N/A
Dec. 24 *7 P.M.*	N/A	Volunteers Needed	Sister Jean Widmeyer	Volunteer Needed	N/A
Dec. 25	N/A	Volunteers Needed	Brian Wilker	Darrell Renecker	N/A
Dec. 26	N/A	Volunteers Needed	Stephen Fischer	Brian Coe	N/A