

December 7, 2020

Dear St. Paul Church Family and Friends,

On this second week of Advent, we await the birth of Love in our midst.

Although our sanctuary is closed for in-person worship, we have lots of ways for you to celebrate the Advent/Christmas seasons:

1. On Sunday December 13 St. Paul's Discipleship Team and Living Music are hosting a Christmas Carol Sing at 2:00 p.m. at Crown Pavilion. We encourage participants to dress in festive holiday clothing. Masks will be required.
2. The Discipleship Team is soliciting volunteers to deliver Christmas cards and small gifts to St. Paul folk between now and Christmas. If you would like to assist, please contact Ann Kuhn via the church office. The plan is for each volunteer to deliver to only 4 households.
3. Pastor Dee and the Sunday School Team have put together Advent/Christmas craft activity packs for children and youth. You can pick up these packets during office hours or contact the office if you need them delivered.
4. Similarly, we have Advent Boxes at church for anyone who would like Advent candles and Christmas Eve candles. These can be picked up during office hours.
5. On December 21 at 7:00 p.m. St. Peter's Church will host the annual Community Blue Christmas Service. Besides in-person worship, the service will be livestreamed onto the St. Peter's Facebook page. If you would like your loved one named aloud at the service, please contact Pastor Becky
6. On Christmas Eve, the Candlelight/Communion worship livestream will be available on the St. Paul Facebook page beginning at noon. If you need Christmas Eve candles for your at home worship, please contact the church office.
7. On Christmas Eve from 4:00-6:00 p.m. we will host a Sanctuary Open House. During these hours, families and individuals can come to St. Paul Church, listen to the music of the season from our talented musicians, hear the Christmas story read, receive the Sacrament of Holy

Communion. Activities will also be provided for children. This is a come-and-go event open to all in the community.

We are seeking a volunteer with snow removal equipment who would be available for snow removal on weekdays on the west side of our property and on weekends for our parking lots. Please contact Jeff Quellhorst or Roland Dicke if you are interested.

We thank you for your ongoing generosity of prayers, volunteer service and financial resources to the many ministries and missions of St. Paul. Let's end 2020 on a strong note!

Grace and Peace,



Jeff Quellhorst Roland Dicke Becky Erb Strang Dee Schroer
Council President Council VP Senior Pastor Associate Pastor

Financial Information is unavailable due to staff vacation.

DECEMBER 13, 2020
THIRD SUNDAY
OF ADVENT



Jesus brings good news.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

These passages are related to the Lectionary texts for this Sunday.

Sunday	John 1:6-8, 19-28	John's witness to the light
Monday	Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11	Good news of deliverance
Tuesday	1 Thessalonians 5:16-24	A call to rejoice
Wednesday	Romans 10:14-17	Those who bring good news
Thursday	1 Thessalonians 3:6-13	Timothy's encouraging report
Friday	Genesis 18:1-18	A son for Abraham and Sarah
Saturday	Psalms 126	A people who dream
Sunday	Luke 1:26-38	The birth of Jesus foretold

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THIS WEEK

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners. Isaiah 61:1 (NRSV)

PRAYERS AND BLESSING

A Prayer for the Week:

God of power and might, help us to be aware of the needs of people and be prepared to bring joy and good news to people through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Mealtime Prayer:

May this gift of food fill our hearts with laughter and make us shout with joy. Amen.

A Blessing to Give:

May the God of peace make you holy in spirit and soul and body. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)



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DECEMBER 13, 2020

HYMN OF THE WEEK

Joy to the World



WEEKLY MILESTONES

Take a moment to tell or think about a recent mountain high and/or valley low in your life.

CARING CONVERSATIONS

Discuss in your home, small group, or use for personal reflections:

- Think or talk about a time when you felt sad or brokenhearted.
- When you feel discouraged, who do you talk to or what do you do to feel better?
- Jesus comes to change our lives. How does Jesus make a difference for your life and the lives of others?

DEVOTIONS

Read: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11.

An American emailed his friend in Zimbabwe and asked if he was well. The response was "I am well if you are well." That response comes with a communal understanding of wellness. We can't be well on our own. Neither can we truly feel okay about ourselves if we feel safe and protected while our neighbor does not feel okay. Isaiah 61:1-2 brings good news for all, including—and especially—the oppressed, the brokenhearted, captives, prisoners, those who mourn and those who owe debts (The year of the Lord's favor was a time to forgive debts). God's work of justice and mercy that brings joy will be seen in all the nations (v. 11) and is for all, not just a select and privileged few. How do you see the wellbeing of others as important to your own wellbeing?

Pray: **God of justice, we give you thanks that your goodness and mercy is for us and for all the world through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Isaiah 61:11)**

SERVICE

There is a theme of joy in our readings this week. This joy includes God's promise to overcome pain, disappointment, and fear. Think of someone currently experiencing difficulties. How can you be the hands and voice of God's good news to that person this week?

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

Place the wise men further away from the nativity set for now. Wait to place Jesus in the manger until Christmas Eve. On your Advent wreath, light the first candle of hope, the second one of peace, and the third one of joy. Pause for a moment to sit in silence and look upon the nativity set and think about the good news and joy the coming of Jesus brings us.

Say this Bible verse: **Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.** (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Pray: **Lord God, thank you for being with us in times of sadness and times of joy. Give us hope, peace and joy as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Amen.**



In addition to *Taking Faith Home*, celebrate milestones in your daily life as an effective faith formation tool. Go to: www.milestonesministry.org



The Angel Gabriel Explaining to Mary how water droplets spread Covid19 (Unvirtuous Abbey)

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Rev. Becky Senior Pastor

Pastor Dee Associate Pastor

Jeff Quellhorst-Council President

Welcome to St. Paul UCC, we are glad you are here!!

Welcome! Your presence, increases our joy as we praise our loving Savior. May every blessing be yours.

December 13, 2020

Third Sunday of Advent: Joy

Worship Leaders

Ministers

Rev. Becky Erb Strang

Pastor Dee Schroer

Cheyenne Olt

Dick Hudson

The Congregation

Senior Pastor

Associate Pastor

Accompanist/Vocalist

Organist

GREETING AND LIGHTING OF CANDLES: The history of humanity is fraught with pain—especially the pain that is accompanied by fear and leads to oppression and violence of one group of people against another. This is the world into which Jesus was born and through which his teachings would challenge and call for transformation. Our opening words come from an anonymous Jewish poet: *I believe in the sun, even when the sun is not shining*, were scrawled on a wall during the Holocaust. These words have become part of our theme song for our season—calling us to examine our tendencies to annihilate fear by annihilating each other.

The entire poem goes like this:

*"I believe in the sun
even when it is not shining
And I believe in love,
even when there's no one there.
And I believe in God,
even when he is silent.*

*I believe through any trial,
there is always a way
But sometimes in this suffering
and hopeless despair
My heart cries for shelter,
to know someone's there
But a voice rises within me, saying hold on
my child, I'll give you strength,
I'll give you hope. Just stay a little while.*

*I believe in the sun
even when it is not shining
And I believe in love
even when there's no one there
But I believe in God
even when he is silent
I believe through any trial
there is always a way.*

*May there someday be sunshine
May there someday be happiness
May there someday be love
May there someday be peace....*

The power of story and music will call us this season to a different response: transformation and reconciliation through hope, love, joy and peace. This Advent and Christmas, let us fill our days and our nights with

music and light as we affirm and act upon the reasons we can still “believe, even when” we are discouraged.

As we light the altar and Christ candles, I invite those of you who are worshiping at home to light a candle or candles in preparation for today’s worship.

PRELUDE

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

THRESHOLD SONG

I Believe **I Believe**

Mark A. Miller

I _____ be-lieve in God, _____ I _____ be-lieve in

11 God, _____ e - ven when, _____ e - ven when God is si - lent. _____

19 _____

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD: This week, we turn to Luke’s writing, which is an account in two acts: the Gospel biography of Jesus and then the story of the early church: the Jesus Community. Whether you were a Jew or a Gentile in those days, deciding to become a part of this illegal early Christian movement could bring punishment for your allegiance. Surely the message in both Luke and Isaiah that the downcast, the lowly, and oppressed could rise up is a welcome and inspirational account. Like the Jewish people in exile in Babylon in Isaiah’s time and like the early Christians, we also sometimes wonder where God is in our suffering. We long to hear the promise that a reason for joyful praise is the good news on the way!

Leader: I believe in God, I believe in God, even when, even when God is silent.

Soloist: I believe in God, I believe in God, even when, even when God is silent.

Leader: The loneliness of fear

Soloist: The loneliness of fear

Leader: The invisibility of the next step

Soloist: The invisibility of the next step

Leader: The yearning for presence

Soloist: The yearning for presence

Leader: Let us pray. Holy One, we thank you for the glimpses we catch of your gift of the depths of joy. Even in the midst of fear, of challenge, of coronavirus, of struggle—even when we are not sure of your presence, ignite the flame of joy within us...

People: That we might glow with its brilliance from the inside out.

Soloist: I believe in God, I believe in God, even when...even when...God is silent.

SILENCE

Leader: Help us face the silence of unknowing and embrace it as the pregnant pause before joyful new beginnings.

People: Amen

(You are invited to light the first three Advent candles at this time.)

OPENING HYMN

like a child

like a child

162

Unison Gm C Am Dm

1 like a child love would send to re - veal and to mend, like a
 2 like a child we will meet, rag - ged clothes, dirt - y feet, like a
 3 like a child born to pray and to show us the way, like a

Gm C F $\frac{F}{E\flat}$ D7

child and a friend, Je - sus comes like a
 child on the street, Je - sus comes like a
 child here to stay, Je - sus comes like a

Gm7 C Am Dm7

child we may find claim - ing heart soul and mind, like a
 child we once knew com - ing back in - to view, like a
 child we re - ceive all that love can con - ceive, like a

Gm7 $\frac{B\flat}{C}$ F

child strong and kind, Je - sus comes
 child born a - new, Je - sus comes
 child we be - lieve Je - sus comes

INVOCATION (in unison)

O God of Joy, help us to hear your voice this season. Touch us with your grace once again. Give us the courage to be your beloved. Give us the courage to choose joy. We need your presence in our lives this day. Be born in us again. Today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*RESPONSE

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (chorus)



Re - joice! Re - joice! Em - man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

The image shows a musical score for the chorus of 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel'. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The lyrics are written below the treble staff. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing chords. There are several fermatas (curved lines) over the notes for 'Em - man - u - el' and 'Is - ra - el'.

CHILDREN'S MOMENT: THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

The song This Little Light of Mine, is nearly 100 years old this year. No one knows exactly who wrote it, but during the 1950's and 1960's our African American brothers and sisters sang this song as a song of resistance: as a reminder that no matter the oppressive circumstances, no matter the darkness we experience, God's light within us shines through when we let it.

Each week during the Children's Moment we are going to add a verse to this song so that by the time Christmas comes, we will be ready to celebrate the birth of God's Light in our midst.

This Little Light of Mine

African-American spiritual

525

Matt. 5:14-16

1 This lit - tle light of mine, I'm gon-na let it shine,

The first system of musical notation for the song. It consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff, both in 4/4 time. The treble staff contains the melody with lyrics underneath. The bass staff contains a harmonic accompaniment. The lyrics for this system are "1 This lit - tle light of mine, I'm gon-na let it shine,".

this lit - tle light of mine, I'm gon-na let it shine,

The second system of musical notation. It continues the melody and accompaniment from the first system. The lyrics for this system are "this lit - tle light of mine, I'm gon-na let it shine,".

This lit - tle light of mine, I'm gon-na let it shine, let it

The third system of musical notation. It continues the melody and accompaniment. The lyrics for this system are "This lit - tle light of mine, I'm gon-na let it shine, let it".

shine, let it shine, let it shine. (let it shine.)

The fourth system of musical notation, which concludes the piece. The lyrics for this system are "shine, let it shine, let it shine. (let it shine.)".

2 Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine...
Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine.
Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine,
Let it shine...let it shine...let it shine.

3 All through the night, I'm gonna let it shine...
All through the night, I'm gonna let it shine.
All through the night, I'm gonna let it shine,
Let it shine...let it shine...let it shine.

It shall be said,

*“Build up, build up, prepare the way,
remove every obstruction from my people’s way.”*

*15 For thus says the high and lofty one
who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:*

*I dwell in the high and holy place,
and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the humble,
and to revive the heart of the contrite.*

*16 For I will not continually accuse,
nor will I always be angry;
for then the spirits would grow faint before me,
even the souls that I have made.*

*17 Because of their wicked covetousness I was angry;
I struck them, I hid and was angry;
but they kept turning back to their own ways.*

*18 I have seen their ways, but I will heal them;
I will lead them and repay them with comfort,
creating for their mourners the fruit of the lips.*

*19 Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the Lord;
and I will heal them.*

ANTHEM *Mary Did You Know*

(YouTube: mary did you know pentatonix lyrics)

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on
water?*

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and
daughters?*

*Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you*

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind
man?*

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy will calm the storm with his
hand?*

*Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God*

Mary, did you know? (Did you know?)

Mary, did you know?

Mary, did you know? (Mary, did you know?)

Mary, did you know? (Mary, did you know?)

Mary, did you know?

*The blind will see, the deaf will hear, the dead will live again
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak the praises of the lamb!*

Mary, did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the
nations?*

Did you know that your baby boy is Heaven's perfect Lamb?

That sleeping child you're holding is the great I am

Mary, did you know? (Mary, did you know?)

Mary, did you know? (Mary, did you know?)

Mary, did you know? (Mary, did you know?)

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON: Luke 1:1-4, 26-56 (The Message)

So many others have tried their hand at putting together a story of the wonderful harvest of Scripture and history that took place among us, using reports handed down by the original eyewitnesses who served this Word with their very lives. Since I have investigated all the reports in close detail, starting from the story's beginning, I decided to write it all out for you, most honorable Theophilus, so you can know beyond the shadow of a doubt the reliability of what you were taught.

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin's name, Mary. Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her:

Good morning!

You're beautiful with God's beauty,

Beautiful inside and out!

God be with you.

29-33 She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. But the angel assured her, “Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus.

He will be great,

be called ‘Son of the Highest.’

The Lord God will give him

the throne of his father David;

He will rule Jacob’s house forever—

no end, ever, to his kingdom.”

34 Mary said to the angel, “But how? I’ve never slept with a man.”

35 The angel answered,

The Holy Spirit will come upon you,

the power of the Highest hover over you;

Therefore, the child you bring to birth

will be called Holy, Son of God.

36-38 “And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months pregnant! Nothing, you see, is impossible with God.”

And Mary said,

Yes, I see it all now:

I’m the Lord’s maid, ready to serve.

Let it be with me

just as you say.

Then the angel left her.

39-45 Mary didn’t waste a minute. She got up and traveled to a town in Judah in the hill country, straight to Zachariah’s house, and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby in her womb leaped. She was filled with the Holy Spirit, and sang out exuberantly,

You’re so blessed among women,

and the babe in your womb, also blessed!

And why am I so blessed that

the mother of my Lord visits me?

The moment the sound of your

*greeting entered my ears,
The babe in my womb
skipped like a lamb for sheer joy.
Blessed woman, who believed what God said,
believed every word would come true!
46-55 And Mary said,
I'm bursting with God-news;
I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.
God took one good look at me, and look what happened—
I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!
What God has done for me will never be forgotten,
the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.
His mercy flows in wave after wave
on those who are in awe before him.
He bared his arm and showed his strength,
scattered the bluffing braggarts.
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,
pulled victims out of the mud.
The starving poor sat down to a banquet;
the callous rich were left out in the cold.
He embraced his chosen child, Israel;
he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.
It's exactly what he promised,
beginning with Abraham and right up to now.
56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months and then went back to
her own home.*

RESPONSE

Leader: The word of God for the people of God!

People: God is still speaking! Thanks be to God!

SERMON

Rev. Becky Erb Strang

The first time I preached this Advent passage from the Gospel of Luke was 29 years ago when I was pregnant with our oldest son. In that pregnancy, Jimmy had just begun to wiggle about in my womb. (And Oh! Was he so wiggly!) During the Children's Moment, I told the children how

the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy when Mary came to visit. I promised the children that if Jimmy ever got wiggly during a Children's Moment, I'd let them feel what it is like to have a baby leap inside.

I love that the reading from Luke shows both Mary and Elizabeth singing out their joy to God. In this Advent season, in this season of coronavirus, we have had little to sing about. And yet, this year, in particular, Christians throughout the world decorated their homes for Christmas early: some as early as September or October. Why? Because the Advent and Christmas seasons tend to be joyous—despite the news, the state of our nation, the worldwide death counts. Decorating for Christmas is a tangible theological reminder that no matter what, God comes to us and God comes to us as a tiny Baby.

I'm pretty sure you've heard me say this before: that no matter how my day, my week is going—even in the toughest of situations—if I can tap into joy, I know I am on the right track. Joy is not necessarily happiness, but a deep and profound emotion (and way of life) that can celebrate, sing and laugh even in the grimmest of circumstances.

Music has a way of anchoring us to the Advent and Christmas seasons. The music of the season allows us to experience joy despite all that is happening around us. So I ask you now: What is your favorite Christmas carol? Why is this carol special to you?

I think one of my favorite carols is Go Tell It on the Mountain—an African American spiritual that first made it into print in 1865. This is why I love that song so much. When I served as Associate Pastor at David's Church, each springtime, we would host a Gospel Concert with black gospel choirs from all over the Dayton area as guests. The concert would begin with all of these choir members (from a variety of different choirs), entering the sanctuary and singing "Go Tell It on the Mountain"—serving as a reminder that Christmas is not the only time of the year to celebrate Christ's birth and to tell of his love, grace and peace.

Songs of Joy. Elizabeth and Mary sang songs of joy. Our Christmas carols are songs of joy. Today I want to talk about yet another song of joy: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony that includes the familiar Ode to Joy. You would recognize the tune:

*Joyful, joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love,
Hearts unfold like flowers before thee, opening to the sun above.*

*Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day*

But the words of Beethoven's are slightly different. Here are the last two stanzas:

*Gladly, as His suns fly
through the heavens' grand plan
Go on, brothers, your way,
Joyful, like a hero to victory.*

*Be embraced, Millions!
This kiss to all the world!
Brothers, above the starry canopy
There must dwell a loving Father.
Are you collapsing, millions?
Do you sense the creator, world?
Seek him above the starry canopy!
Above stars must He dwell.*

This is what you need to know about Beethoven's Ninth—it is a symphony of joy written in 1824, near the end of his life. The symphony itself serves as a beacon of joy and beauty in the midst of suffering and deep disappointment. And here is what is cool. This symphony is one of the most well known pieces of music in the world. What's more, it has served as an anthem of resistance against oppression, as an anthem of joy against death and suffering. The symphony has become an anthem of liberation and hope around the world.

At Tiananmen Square in 1989, students played the Ninth over loudspeakers as the army came in to crush their struggle for freedom. In Chile, women living under the Pinochet dictatorship sang the Ninth outside of torture prisons, where men inside took hope when they heard their voices. As the Berlin Wall came down in December 1989, it collapsed to the sound of Leonard Bernstein conducting Beethoven's Ninth as an "Ode to Freedom." In Japan every December, the Ninth Symphony is performed hundreds of times—often with 10,000 people in the chorus.

That these moments of political upheaval and liberation would be punctuated with a song of joy should come as no surprise. Even Mary's song in today's reading, known as the Magnificat, speaks of liberation of the oppressed through God's actions here on earth. In today's reading we hear this: that God knocks tyrants off their high horses, pulls victims out of the mud and the starving poor are invited to sit down at the banquet. Mary—filled with both the Holy Spirit (and the Baby Jesus) knew instinctively that the birth of this Child would upend the status quo.

And that, my dear ones, is what Christmas is all about. Through the birth of Jesus, the world is set on a path of liberation, justice, and peace. But hear me well: we cannot, must not, sit back at Christmas (or any season, for that matter) and wait for God to break the chains of injustice, to feed the hungry, to set prisoners free. That is OUR job—our lifelong calling—to work toward God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

We start this journey with joy. Yes: disease and viruses and accidents loom large. Families and individuals in our own villages are hungry each day. Many of the jobs available do not pay a living wage. We must address these issues. We must set about making a difference. But we can do it while we are dancing, while we are singing, while we are laughing—inviting all of God's children to the Christmas feast.

Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her King!
Amen.

PASTORAL JOYS AND CONCERNS OF THE PEOPLE

Joys:

Concerns: We are continuing to pray for Diane Paul, Ellen Topp (The James), Bob Eilerman (Joint Township) Drew Wray (Miami Valley), Macie Barlage (Mercy Hospital NICU-St. Louis), Deb Lear, Jan Dammeyer, and Pastor Dee Schroer.

PRAYERS IN THE STILLNESS

Leader: I invite you to get in comfortable position of rest. I invite you to get as quiet and still as you can. I invite you to take a deep breath and a deep listening posture—perhaps close your eyes or focus on a candle—as we prepare for our time of prayer.

Soloist:

In The Stillness

In the Stillness

Mark Miller

The gen-tle pull of God is of-ten lost a-midst the
rush of all the ob-li-ga-tions which lay a claim on us. Yet, just be-yond the fran-tic
pace our rest-less feet have trod, lie deep still pools of qui-et-ness, the
dwell-ing place of God. Meet me in the still-ness, Lord, be the air I
breathe, meet me in the still-ness, Lord, free me to re-ceive. Meet me
in the still-ness, Lord, be the air I breathe, meet me in the still-ness, Lord,
free me to re-ceive. O take me to that se-cret place where lost in
won-der and in awe, that mo-ment comes, and I re-joice to be, and be with
God! Meet me in the still-ness, Lord, be the air I breathe, meet me
in the still-ness, Lord, free me to re-ceive, to re-ceive.
Meet me in the still-ness, Lord, free me to re-ceive, to re-ceive.

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PASTORAL PRAYER AND SILENT PRAYER

O God, our joy, we rejoice that you became flesh and made your dwelling among us, even as we long for your return.

As we wait, our hearts overflow with gratitude:

For the beauty of creation...

For your work in the world...

For signs of peace and reconciliation...

For our community and its leaders...

For your work accomplished through your church...

For all these reasons and so much more we give you praise.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of your Son as a helpless child, we also yearn for his return, for the day in which there will be no more sorrow, pain, or death.

Today, we remember in prayer:

The nations of the world...

Those in positions of authority...

The needs of our community...

The cries of the poor, the hungry, the hurting...

St. Paul Church as we live into your call to see Jesus in others...

Hear us now as we lift up to you the prayers of our hearts. SILENCE

We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our source of joy. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (sung to the tune of *Away in a Manger*)

Creator in heaven, all praise to your name!

Your kingdom among us, your will done the same.

By mortals and angels, come, Lord, reign alone!

O hear us and bless us from heaven's high throne.

The bread that we yearn for, provide it each day

As we forgive others, our sins take away.

In times of temptation, to lead us be near.

From evil deliver your children most dear.

For yours is the kingdom; o'er all things you reign;

And yours is the glory, all things you maintain

To you be the glory, resounding again

From all of creation, forever! Amen!

OFFERING OUR GIFTS AND OUR HEARTS TO JESUS

Offertory Sentences: In this season of gift giving and gift receiving, let us offer our gifts, our lives, and our hearts to Jesus through the ministries of St. Paul Church

DOXOLOGY/CAROL

In the Bleak Midwinter

F $\frac{F}{A}$ F Dsus Dm $\frac{Gm7}{Bb}$ $\frac{Dm7}{A}$ Gm7 C7
 What can I off - er poor as I am?
 F $\frac{F}{A}$ F Dsus Dm $\frac{Gm7}{Bb}$ C7 F
 If I were a shep - herd, I would bring a lamb;
 $\frac{Bb}{D}$ F $\frac{Bb}{D}$ $\frac{F7}{C}$ Bb Dm $\frac{F}{A}$ Am $\frac{Gm}{Bb}$ Bbmaj7 C
 if I were a wise man, I would do my part;
 F $\frac{F}{A}$ F Dsus Dm $\frac{Gm7}{Bb}$ C7 F
 yet what can I off - er: all of my heart.

WORDS: Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)
 MUSIC: Gustav T. Holst (1874-1934)

CRANHAM
 Irregular

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (unison)

Accept these offerings, O God, for you are the giver of every good and perfect gift. Grant that these offerings may be symbols of our love and of ourselves now offered more fully to you. Amen

SONG OF JOY

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

verses 1 & 4

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee 59

1 Joy - ful, joy - ful, we a - dore thee, God of glo - ry, Lord of love;
 2 All thy works with joy sur - round thee, earth and heaven re - flect thy rays,
 3 Thou art giv - ing and for - giv - ing, ev - er bless - ing, ev - er blest,
 4 Mor - tals, join the hap - py cho - rus which the morn - ing stars be - gan;

hearts un - fold like flowers be - fore thee, open - ing to the sun a - bove.
 stars and an - gels sing a - round thee, cen - ter of un - bro - ken praise.
 well - spring of the joy of liv - ing, o - cean depth of hap - py rest!
 love di - vine is reign - ing o'er us, join - ing all with - in its span.

Melt the clouds of sin and sad - ness, drive the dark of doubt a - way;
 Field and for - est, vale and moun - tain, flow - ery mead - ow, flash - ing sea,
 Thou our Fa - ther, Christ our Broth - er— all who live in love are thine;
 Ev - er sing - ing, march we on - ward, vic - tors in the midst of strife;

giv - er of im - mor - tal glad - ness, fill us with the light of day!
 chant - ing bird and flow - ing foun - tain call us to re - joice in thee.
 teach us how to love each oth - er, lift us to the joy di - vine.
 joy - ful mu - sic leads us sun - ward in the tri - umph song of life.

BENEDICTION: We wait for justice, but we do not wait to work for change;
We wait for restored health, but we do not wait to work toward healing;

We wait for wholeness, but we do not wait to work at binding brokenness;

We wait for peace, but we do not wait to work to eliminate hatred, prejudice and violence.

And so, my friends, like bells ringing out the news that the sun still shines even on cloudy days, fill the night left by sadness with messages of hope. Go into your week humming the tunes that keep hope alive in you and that spur you on in your work of justice and reconciliation.

Leader: Raise your voices and repeat after me: Do not be afraid!

People: Do not be afraid! Amen!

PASSING THE PEACE OF CHRIST
POSTLUDE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Altar Flowers are given in loving memory of George Voress Sr. by Judy, George & Karen, John & Ginny Voress.

Attendance-Online- 136 Daily Devotions Avg.-96, November 29-Sunday
Worship Online-320

Daily Devotions-Please join Rev Becky or Pastor Dee Monday-Friday at 11:30am, online via Facebook Live. These will air on our Facebook page St. Paul United Church of Christ-New Bremen, OH.

Sunday's in December-Sunday School will be via Facebook Live beginning at 9:00am. **Worship-**we will be worshipping via Facebook Live at 10:15am.

2021 Altar Flower Chart has been posted in the Narthex. To sign up for the date(s) you would like. Please call the church office Monday-Friday to sign up. Thank you.

Mailbox-There is a mailbox outside of the East Educational Building door for any correspondence you may have for the church and would like to

drop off. Please lift the flap and drop through the slot on the top. The box is locked and will be checked often. Thank you!

Blessing Pantry-is located in the North Hallway and accessible by the North door during these hours - **Tuesdays 5:30pm-7:30pm, Wednesdays and Thursdays 1:00pm-3:00pm**. The Pantry will be closed Mondays and Fridays. **All Donations Welcome – Blessing Pantry Needs**-Toilet Paper, Paper Towels, Kleenex, Laundry Detergent, Shaving Cream, Toothpaste, Deodorant, Diapers (size 2, 3, 4 & 6), Baby Wipes, Baby Shampoo, Hand & Body Lotion, Tampons, Cleaning Supplies, Storage Bags and Garbage Bags. Food Items-Fruit, Eggs, Milk-**Thank you!** There is a metal can outside the East Educational Building door for donations.

Zoom Bible Study- Thursday's at 6:30 p.m. Join Zoom Meeting by clicking on or logging onto:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88567175194?pwd=K2FBaGYzRUpaRElwTjc4Q1Y4b3UrUT09> Once you are logged on, you will need the following:

Meeting ID: 885 6717 5194 Passcode: 229014

*If you would like an email version of this to make logging on easier, simply email Pastor Becky: berbstrang@stpaulnb.org

January/February Upper Rooms-have arrived! They are available at the East entrance to the education building. Or please call the church office if you would like one and we will gladly mail one to you.

Blue Christmas/Longest Night Christmas On Monday night, December 21st at 7 pm will be a Longest Night, Blue Christmas Vigil and service. The service will be broadcast via Facebook (Church St Peter) and Youtube (St Peter's Church in New Bremen). During the service we will be reading names of those sent to us at stpeterschurchnb@gmail.com and lighting a candle for those names. You may include other information if you desire. You are invited to attend in person and light candles as we celebrate the lives of one's we miss during these holy days. This is a community event and all are invited to participate. Masks will be suggested for this community event.

Senior Food Boxes: Coming to New Bremen is a new program for our area, Western Ohio Food Bank offers, a food box, for Seniors over 60 years of age, who meet Federal Guidelines. It is a monthly program, which serves as a supplement to your food supply. Your taxes have paid for this food for others, now it is your turn to receive. If interested, please contact Larry Kuhn to explore this option. Consider this as a free gift from your Government.

E-Giving @ St. Paul
3 Different Ways to Give

Online – Make a donation on our website: stpaulnb.org

Give+ App – Search “Give Plus Church” in your App store and find St. Paul to Get Started!

Text – Make a donation to our Number: 833-308-0048
St. Paul New “Text to Give” #(# changed as of 10/9/19)

**How To Give by Text (Example - my amount for the example is \$25
(minimum amount is \$5.00))**

- For general fund giving: Send 25 space gl (hit send)
- For building & property fund giving: Send 25 space bp (hit send)
- For Blessing Pantry: Send 25 space pantry (hit send)
- For project of the year giving: Send 25 space poy (hit send)

Once a text amount is sent:

Registration Link- Sent via text the first time a donation is made.
Thank you! Please visit (link) to register.

Donation Confirm- Sent via text each time a donation is made.
Thank you for donating \$ (amount)! Text repeat to make this recurring
or refund to cancel this donation.



“For Such a Time as This.”

Esther 4:14

Each year, the Pension Boards receives many notes and letters of thanks from recipients of assistance made possible by your gifts to the Christmas Fund.

These letters come from both retired and active UCC pastors or their surviving spouses. Here are excerpts from just two of the letters received by the Pension Boards letting us know what a difference your generosity has made in their lives and the lives of their families. Here are excerpts from two notes received last year:

“My/our gratitude goes beyond words! With this gift I was able to pay the outstanding propane bill and have the propane tank refilled. It was depleted to 10% of capacity, and we have been having some very cold nights this winter. My husband’s illness has precluded him from doing any work for the last 6 months, and we have fallen way behind in our living expenses...”

“My church, although solvent, was unable to give me a raise this year and is experiencing a shortfall in pledges. Thank you again for your faithful and compassionate gift which has enabled us to keep warm!”

“This note is a heartfelt thank you for the very generous emergency grant that the Board provided us to help offset costs associated with my kidney transplant and follow-up medical procedures and appointments. Not surprisingly, our family prayed a lot in the months leading up to my transplant in great anticipation of what was coming, and in the time since, having received the gift of a ‘second chance’ at life...”

“We are grateful for modern medicine, excellent medical providers, and the support of our local and wider church families and friends, including the United Church of Christ Pension Boards...”

“We never lost faith, trusting in Christ’s promise that we would not - and will not - have to walk alone. Thank you for meeting us along our path and for extending your outstretched hand to help us financially.”

In 2019, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Monthly pension supplementation for 350 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,347,419)
- Health premium supplementation for 144 retired clergy and lay employees (\$374,577)
- Emergency grants for 69 individuals and families (\$123,727)
- Christmas “Thank You” gift checks to 521 retired clergy and lay employees (\$260,500)

THE CHRISTMAS FUND
For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund