

December
2019

Pastor's Ponderings



SUNDAY WORSHIP

9:00am

Sunday School
9:15am—10:00am
(during the school year)

Holy Communion
1st & 4th Sunday

PASTOR

Gail Sowell
Office Hours: 9am-1pm
Tuesday-Friday
(And by appointment)

SECRETARY'S HOURS

Monday-Friday
9:00-1:00

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Items for print **MUST** be submitted by the 20th of the preceding month.

Advent: a time for waking up to Christ's presence among us here and now. The great mystery of Advent is that we are waiting for what we already have. Advent is the season of "already-but not yet." We wait for a baby to be born in a humble manger (we know he will be!). But now, at the beginning of Advent, Mary and Joseph have *not yet* made that long journey to Bethlehem; the room at the inn has *not yet* been declared unavailable; the angels have *not yet* appeared to the shepherds; and the star has *not yet* come to rest over the manger. Still, with all these *not yet's* in our conscious minds, we spend these days and weeks waiting, living in faith that God will indeed provide what has been promised: Messiah, the long-awaited savior of God's people, will once again be born anew in our hearts.



So Advent is a season of *good news*. We're preparing to welcome Emmanu-el (with us-God), God-with-us always, *in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, through laughter and tears, through triumphs and challenges, through the best and the worst of what is to come.*

As we wait, we remember that Christ will be born for *us*, solid middle-class citizens of a country that has the potential to be truly great. Christ will also be born for millions of others who wait day and night for *us* to enact his coming presence in *their* lives: the oppressed; the brokenhearted; the captives and prisoners; the mourning, the desperate, the devastated; the voiceless; the outcasts—the last, the least, the little, the lonely, the lost.

The words of Christmas psalms and hymns speak to my heart and my faith. **Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory** (Psalm 24:7-10). My prayer, derived from that, is, "O Lord, lift up the gates of my heart, that you may enter and fill me with your Spirit and your holy presence. Amen."

My all-time favorite Christmas carol words are from verse 4 of *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. *O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.*

As you prepare your hearts and homes to receive God's greatest gift—*himself*—may all the blessings of Advent and Christmas be yours!

St. John Family News!



The **Thanksgiving Eve worship** was held at St. John this year. 25 people attended in spite of a recent significant snowfall. We enjoyed warm fellowship around pie and coffee after the service. Thanks to the Women of St. John (*and men*) for their planning, preparation, and warm hospitality for this community time of giving thanks!

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It was our JOY to welcome two new little ones to the family through the waters of Holy Baptism recently.

Mikayla Mae Pribbernow was born April 7, 2019 to Skyler Pribbernow & Courtney Socha, and was baptized at St. John on November 10th. *Her sponsors are Stephan & Sarah Klopotoski who were married at St. John on June 8th this year!*

Adalyn Elaine Decker, the daughter of Lukas & Jennifer Decker, was born on September 9, 2019. She was scheduled to be baptized at St. John on December 1, but due to a heavy snow fall (which caused **many** area worship services to be cancelled) was baptized on December 8th. Her sponsors are Brad & Ashley Leader.

God's blessings to these dear families as they continue to grow together in Christ. May you embrace the St. John faith family as a source of growth and encouragement in your journey!

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We enjoyed Donuts and Coffee with THRIVENT representative Steve Brinkman after the service on November 10th. We welcomed Steve and showed our appreciation for THRIVENT by wearing our THRIVENT T-shirts.

THRIVENT has strengthened St. John to do the work of God's ministry in the Edgar area in many ways. Equipping our Quilters with needed supplies, helping to sponsor Raffles, Brat Fries, Breakfast in the Park, and Potato Pancake Brunch, just to name a few.

The proceeds from these events go back into our community, sharing financial and other resources with those in need, and by enabling St. John to reach out and help those who have needs that are brought to our attention.

If you are aware of a special need that St. John could help to meet, please take your idea to one of our Council members. **It's our calling: God's work, our hands!**



Quilt Blessing



We asked God's blessing on these warm and beautiful works of art at a Quilt Blessing held during the service on Sunday, Nov. 17th. They were being prepared to go where they are needed most. Many thanks to our committed Quilters of St. John!

We also asked God's blessing on those who would be in the woods and fields enjoying the deer hunting season this year. Haven't heard all the results of the deer harvest, but we rejoice in God's protection over our dear (deer) hunters!



What's Ahead?!



*Ladies' Salad Luncheon
and
Bible Study Event
at St. Stephen Lutheran
Church Edgar,
on Tuesday, Dec. 10th
NOON—2:00PM*

LADIES you are invited! to a Special Christmas Salad Luncheon begins at NOON. Please bring a dish to share. BIBLE STUDY begins around 1pm (after lunch).

We usually share in a delightful time of singing our favorite Christmas Hymns/Carols/Songs before we part company.



JOIN US !

Of course, we're ALL looking forward to the **Sunday School Christmas program** which will be presented on **Sunday, December 22nd** during the service. They've already been practicing and want to encourage parents to make every effort to have their kiddos here for these last practices. *There will be special practices AFTER the services on Dec. 8th and Dec. 15th.*



The Women's Annual Cookie Walk and Bake Sale will follow the service on December 22nd. They invite ALL to bake/bring and buy for a delightful assortment of holiday treats to enjoy in your home. **Help would also be appreciated with setting up and overseeing this much anticipated annual event!** *Thanks!*



Christmas JOY !



The **Christmas Eve** services will be at
4:30pm—Candlelight Worship
at St. John

6:30pm—Musical Prelude
7:00pm—Candlelight Worship
At St. Stephen



Blessed CHRISTmas
JOY to ALL !



Christmas Day services will be at
9am at St. John (*Communion*)
10:30 at St. Stephen.

A NEW YEAR is right around the corner. The **Annual Meeting** is on January 19th .
Annual Reports from Ministry leaders will be **due** to the secretary on **January 8th**.

FYI—St. John Lutheran Church, ELCA is now part of **WAOW's automated CLOSINGS and DELAYS** information network. If there is a need to cancel worship services due to weather, keep your eyes on **channel 9** to receive confirmation of cancellation.



It is a delight to announce that we will be welcoming new members into St. John ELCA faith family on February 9th! If YOU or someone you know would like to be part of that special group, please let Pastor Gail or Rose know.



Women of the ELCA

Every woman that is a member of St John's is a member of the women's group. All are WELCOME and encouraged to participate in our activities. Each women of St John's is assigned to a funeral group. Each one's help is vital to help serve in the time of need.

Next combined Women's Bible Study: Tuesday, December 10th at ST Stephen's 1pm in the dining room.

Next General Meeting: March 1st, 2020 following the service

News from the last month:

The Quilting group will begin winding down for the season by the end of December. We are grateful for the many hours of work and the generosity of the quilters. A Quilt Blessing was held on Sunday Nov 17th for 55 quilts. Quilts are sent to Lutheran World Relief, Circle of Joy, Wausau Women's Shelter, Aspirus Hospice House, Homme Youth Home and Grain Train.

Thank you for the donation of pies for the Thanksgiving Eve fellowship hour following the service. Many happy smiles and full tummies.

Thank you for your donations for the **THANKSOFFERING** envelope – these are sent to the synod. - Thankofferings are a long-standing custom among Lutheran women. We give in thanksgiving for blessings received and we are so grateful. That's why we give Thankofferings. Your generous Thankofferings help support the ongoing ministries of the churchwide women's organization, including our triennial conventions, the work of your elected churchwide board, the annual conference of synodical presidents, our communications ministries, justice and advocacy work.

Operation Christmas is underway and supporting 2 local families and Homme House. The Christmas tree has ornaments and the listing is on the Bulletin Board.



Thank you for being a Christmas Angel

Upcoming opportunities:

Baked Goods and Cookie Walk scheduled for Dec 15th. Donate some favorite cookies and purchase a plate of new cookies to try. This annual fundraiser for the Women's group is a fun way to experience new yumminess. The word is that there might also be some awesome homemade bread this year!

Yearbooks will be available by mid-December. Please pick one up from the brochure rack in the narthex. An electronic copy will also be sent out. Apologies in advance for any errors! If noted, please email or call Shirley with corrections: srosien@charter.net or 715-574-3277.



Many Blessings to you this Christmas season.



Adventures of the Church Mice

It's Advent! That means Christmas is coming! (Well, it *really* means we're *waiting* for Christmas, and Jesus, to come.) So from each of us Church Mice at both congregations, "we wish you a Merry Christmas!"

Tully: This is my 6th Christmas at St. John, and I'm so very mously blessed to be a Church Mouse here. I wish everyone a lovely blessed Christmas!

Merry Twinkle: This is my 3rd Christmas at St. John, and I feel a little bit sad this year, because Ed Kralcik turned me into a Church Mouse and he's with Jesus in heaven now. But I am very very happy to be a St John Church Mouse, and I wish all of you a VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS !

Timothy: I don't know what I'm supposed to say, I've only been a church—oops, a Church Mouse since February. I feel very safe here, I am very happy to be at St John, and I wish everyone especially the children a very Merry Christmas!

Belladama: Golly gosh, most of you haven't even met me yet, but I'm the newest Church Mouse at St John and I'm so glad to be here! My name came from Brady (B), and Landon (L) and his 2 friends who started with D and M. I was given to Pastor Gail by her friend Jean, she's the one who donates a lot to St John. My wish is for all of you to be as generous as Jean and help take care of mice, and Church Mice, and children who need help! Merry Christmas!

Miri: We're so glad to be Church Mice at St Stephen! And I wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. And I wish that Pastor Gail would let me play in the pews and window sills the way she used to. Please, everybody tell her to do that!

Frederick: Merry Christmas everyone. I wish to not be laughed at because I'm so big and clumsy. Maybe there's a child who will hold me and love me?

Cleo and Patrick: We wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas, and a happy New Year!

Merry Christmas!





Reflections from Rose



One of my favorite things about our Christmas celebration is the Christmas LIGHTS! Candles glowing, twinkle lights twinkling, it all makes my heart dance. I've noticed that the lights look more outstanding, more brilliant when the setting they're in is darker.

Jesus called himself "the light of the world" in John 8:12, so it's very fitting that lights should be part of how we celebrate His coming to earth. God also says that once we put our faith in Jesus, he comes to dwell IN us. So we then become bearers of HIS light. Philippians 2: 15-16a *"so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life..."*.

This world we live in seems to be becoming darker and darker at times. But as children of God, that should make us, our stories of faith-walking with Jesus, stand out more and MORE!

Jesus instructs in Matthew 5: 14-16 *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

Someone has compared ADVENT to 2 bookends. The first one is when Jesus came to earth as a baby to be an example for us and to ultimately sacrifice his life to be our Savior. The second bookend is when He will come again in glory. The in-between time is to be filled with HISTORY of what He is doing on this earth and in our lives. I really like that illustration!

So Blessed Christmas to ALL, and keep on TWINKLING dear sisters & brothers in Christ!



Operation Christmas Giving Tree



For God so loved the world HE GAVE his only Son . . .

It is our blessed opportunity to do likewise and GIVE as we celebrate God sending his most precious gift to meet our greatest need.

Wish lists are posted on the bulletin board, as well as printed on the Operation Christmas Giving Tree ornaments for 2 area families, and Homme House. Gifts need to be at St. John by Dec. 8 for the families and the 15th for Homme House.

S.S. Good Gifts Giving Tree



The Good Gifts Giving Tree has ornaments with the needed items pictured on them as well as the gift amount needed to provide that item. Many thanks to Pam Stahel and Bonnie Bargender for leading the way in these outreaches, and for YOUR generous support!



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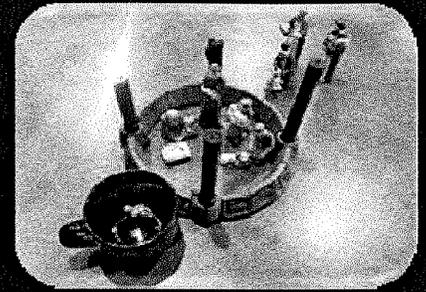
St. John's ADVENT WINDOWS are beginning to appear in all their finery. Many thanks to those who have shared their creativity and precious Christmas décor.

What a blessing to help increase our joy and shine the spotlight on our Savior!



“Don’t Lose the Baby”

An Advent Message from Bishop Laurie



On the First Sunday of Advent, every year, our family unpacks the wreath. Our tradition is to put an incomplete nativity scene in the center. We use the ceramic figures my mom made for us the first year we were married. The magi are put up on a high shelf until they make their appearance on Epiphany. Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, a few sheep, and an empty manger go in the center to wait.

One of our children would hide the tiny figure of the baby Jesus in a cup in nearby cabinet. Every year I’d worry a little and give a warning, “Remember where you put him, we don’t want to lose baby Jesus.” They were careful, but I would still worry that we might lose the baby Jesus. Before supper we’d light the blue candles on the Advent wreath and pray “Come, Lord Jesus be our guest.” Advent was about waiting to put the baby in the manger. On Christmas Eve, we retrieve the hidden baby Jesus, give a sigh of relief that we haven’t lost him, put him in the manger and light the Christ candle.

It’s possible to lose baby Jesus in the craziness of Advent. As Christians, surrounded by the most commercialized and secularized holiday of all, we are always in danger of losing Jesus. Not the ceramic Jesus figurine from our nativity set, but losing our way in Advent and never finding the holy in the midst of the hectic; never experiencing the expectant purposeful waiting that brings us to the awe and wonder of Jesus Christ, the baby born in Bethlehem.

Every year I want to issue some motherly WARNING: Don’t lose the baby! If you lose the baby, Christmas doesn’t make any sense at all. Without the baby, Christmas is a beautifully wrapped box with nothing inside. It is empty of meaning, but most of all it is empty of hope.

I want to issue a motherly CAUTION: Don’t lose the baby. If you lose the baby, Christmas doesn’t work. It is broken and like a cracked snow globe, the hope leaks out. The world needs Jesus this Christmas more than ever. There are so many broken things in our personal lives, the pain leaks out over grief, loss, and disappointment. There is so much systemic brokenness in our communities and in our country that it leaks out as violence. We need the hope and healing that only Jesus can bring.

Theologically, we don’t need to worry about losing Jesus because Jesus is with us. First in Luke 2 **“She gave birth to her first born son and laid him in the manger;”** then the incarnation of John 1, **“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”** The incarnation Jesus hasn’t been lost. In Matthew 28 Jesus promises to be with us **“always to the end of the age.”**

Perhaps a more accurate warning is this: DANGER: Don’t lose **sight** of the baby. That baby, that Word made flesh is the light of the world. In these dark days of winter we need the light of the world to shine in us and through us.

Now a little ENCOURAGEMENT for this Advent and Christmas: **PRACTICE INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY.** That means just show up and be Jesus for others. Go and be Jesus for those who may have lost sight of him. Go and be the Church, show your neighbors, your community the love of Jesus. Go to the dark places and bring Jesus. Go sit with those who are sad and be Christmas. Go and speak the truth into the cracks of the broken places in our society. Go, just show up and be the hands, feet, the voice, the love of Jesus. Go and let your light so shine before others, go be the light of Christ, the light no darkness can overcome.

May God bless you, your family and congregation, and may the peace of God made real to us in a baby born in Bethlehem fill your hearts this Advent and Christmas Season.

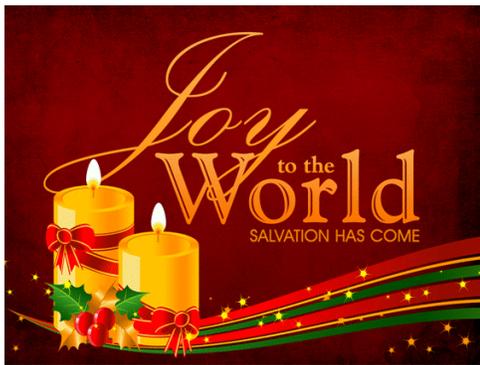
Rev. Laurie Shon. Olszewski

GOOD NEWS

St. John Lutheran Church ELCA
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Edgar, WI 54426

We're on the Web
www.stjohnelcaedgar.org

December 2019



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Deadline for Jan. 2020 News



December 27th

Joint Mission Statement of St. John/St. Stephen Lutheran Parish, ELCA:

*"Saints united to be the body of Christ in the world, freed by grace
to live faithfully, witness boldly, and serve joyfully."*