

A publication for the family of Zion Lutheran Church, 202 Erie St., Stratford, ON N5A 2M8
www.zionstratford.com
Phone: 271-8527

email: zionlc@golden.net

Fax: 271-8536



PASTOR'S DEVOTIONAL

“While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.” – Luke 2:6.

While the Gospel According to Luke tells us the story of the birth of our Saviour at Christmas, it does not give us the date of Jesus' birth. Various scholars have placed the date either in late spring or early autumn; but no one believes that Christ was born on December 25, the date when we celebrate his nativity. There are two reasons why the celebration of Christmas was placed on this date in late December: it is near the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere; and it occurs around the Roman festival of Saturnalia, which concluded on this date. For the early church that existed as a minority community within a culture radically opposed to the message of the Gospel, it was a way in which these Christians could witness to the light of Christ that came to shine in the midst of the darkness of the world in which they lived.

Times have changed radically from the circumstances which led our ancestors in faith to place the celebration of the birth of our Saviour in the midst of the challenges of their age; but as we prepare for this year's celebration of Christmas on its traditional date, we are also challenged with proclaiming the good news of the coming of Christ in the midst of the darkness of our current age. The terrorist attacks in Paris are but the latest example of forces of evil and darkness that are working to destroy the light and life that are God's Will for all humanity. It is a reminder to us that in the dark streets of that little town of Bethlehem shone *“the everlasting light; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”* As the light of the Christmas message shines in a world shrouded in darkness that comes both from nature and from the depths of human depravity, our hope comes in this season of darkness in the assurance that *“in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”* (John 1:4-5).

Frederick Buechner, a Presbyterian pastor who is one of the great preachers of our age, invites us to enter into our celebration of Christmas on December 25 in trust and hope that as Christ was born amidst the darkness of his age, his coming into our midst is the source of assurance in the midst of darkness that enshrouds us in the shortness of days and in the fear that ensnares us:

- “The child is born in the night – the mother's exhausted flesh, the father's face clenched like a fist – and nothing is ever the same again. Nothing is ever the same again for those who believe in God ... what they feel in their hearts as they wave – maybe only with one hand, a little wave, not very certain, but with his name on their lips – is the stirring of new life, new courage, new gladness seeking to be born in them even as he is born, if only they too, we too, the wide world too, will stretch out our arms to those arms and raise our empty faces [as we pray] 'Lord Jesus Christ, thou Son of the Most High, Prince of Peace, be born again into our world. Wherever there is war in this world, wherever there is pain, wherever there is loneliness, wherever there is no hope, come, thou long-expected one, with healing in thy wings.'” – *Secrets in the Dark*.

Celebrating the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ on December 25 may not be historically accurate, but it is most appropriate for us to hail the coming of the light of our Saviour that continues to shine through the darkness that grips our world with fear and uncertainty. The message that came upon that midnight clear continues to speak to all who *“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!”* (ELW Hymn 282).

The light of Christ shines in the darkness this Christmas – and this darkness will not overcome us, for *“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) – the child born so that God's light and life will shine on eternally!

Yours in Christmas light and hope,
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

VICAR'S REPORT

"The Black Paintings Of Ad Reinhardt"

I have a painting in my home office that I painted a few years ago. If you were to glance at it, it may appear to be a canvas painted completely black; however, if you were to pause, look steadily at the canvas, and wait patiently an image emerges. What you would begin to see is not a fully black canvas but rather very faint gradations of black-green, black-blue, black-red pigments – all forming the shape of a cross.

I painted this painting inspired by the work of the abstract New York artist Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967) who for the last 15 years of his life focused almost exclusively on what he called these *black* paintings. The image of a cross painted at the centre of each painting could only barely be discerned at a glance, but rather needed focused attention and almost meditative observation for the full image to reveal itself. He likened these paintings to an icon:

A free, unmanipulated, unmanipulatable, useless, unmarketable, irreducible, unphotographable, unreproducible, inexplicable icon. (Guggenheim, online)

He would even mix his paints with turpentine before using them to tease out the binding agents in order for light not to be reflected off the image. (NOTE: If you are interested in seeing this technique in more detail then have a look at the following YouTube video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSGGHmTXA3o>

The resultant paintings were flat black and rich in texture and insight for any who would take the time to wait for the image of the cross to emerge.

Reinhardt's friend, and the reason I came to know him, was Thomas Merton who requested and received a black painting from Reinhardt in the late 1950's. In a journal entry of November 17, 1957 Merton described the painting:

An almost invisible cross on a black background. As though immersed in darkness and trying to emerge from it...I should say a very 'holy' picture – helps prayer – an 'image' without features to accustom the mind at once to the night of prayer – and to help one set aside trivial images that wander into prayer and spoil it. (A Search for Solitude, 1996)

I mixed my paints and created my painting in the same manner as Reinhardt did. For me this

painting has become my reminder that although life can be extremely busy, full, and difficult, there are times when we need to slow down, pause, and wait for the work of the Holy Spirit to emerge.

This notion is perhaps especially important now with Advent upon us and a time of *anticipation* and reflection on *waiting* its emphasis, although there is also revelation. *We wait for the ever-returning Christ*, the Christ who is born each day anew in each of our lives as our risen Saviour – compelling us into a relationship with each other, persuading us to look beyond ourselves, and challenging us to create a community ready to welcome Christ when he returns.

It is my hope and prayer that this Advent season will be a sacred journey for us to share as a people of God called to love and serve.

Vicar Albert Romkema



CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SCHEDULE

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

CHRISTMAS EVE: DECEMBER 24

6 PM – 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."

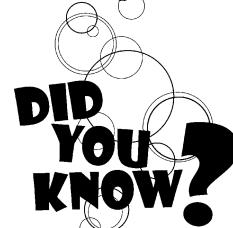
CHRISTMAS DAY, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25

10 AM – SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS: On the morning of this most holy day, we gather together to hear the Word of God that proclaims our Saviour's birth and sing the traditional carols of the Christmas season.

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

ENDOWMENT FUND 101

The Endowment Fund Committee will be submitting Endowment Fund information in upcoming newsletters. The reason is to help educate us all in understanding the purpose of Endowment Funds.



What exactly is an Endowment Fund? Basically, an Endowment Fund is money set aside to earn revenue to fund charitable activity. In a sense, it is like a Trust Fund, with a charitable organization as the beneficiary, instead of a person. Endowment Funds are left to the church with a very specific purpose. A gift to a Church Endowment Fund is a reflection of one's faith and Christian love over and above regular donations in support of the ongoing ministry and mission of the church.

In future submissions, we will share information that specifically relates to our own Endowment Fund here at Zion Church.



SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

How quickly the time passes...the Christmas season is upon us and with it comes the Sunday School Pageant. This year the pageant will be held on **Sunday, December 20 at 6:30 PM**, which is also our last day of Sunday School until January 10. We invite everyone to join us after the pageant for coffee, juice and cookies in celebration.



ZION TABLE FOR SENIORS

Zion Table For Seniors, a beloved ministry at Zion promoting fun, food, and friendship, will be held on Tuesday, December 15 at 12 noon. Please let Doris Bartlett (519-271-9622) or Beryl Horst (519-276-3501) know by **Tuesday, December 8** if you can attend. Lunch cost is only \$12. A deal by any name! Program: "ALL ABOUT CHRISTMAS!"

ZION WOMEN OF FAITH

Meetings for December:

Saturday, December 5: The WOF will be putting together the Christmas baskets on Saturday, December 5. Anyone wishing to donate two dozen cookies are welcome to bring them to the church by 8:30 AM Saturday morning at the latest.



Sunday, December 6: The annual WOF Christmas dinner for members and friends of Zion takes place on Sunday, December 6. For your ticket call Linda Springer at 519-273-2093 or come to the church office any morning.

Please note: There are no meetings in January or February.

As this is my last time doing the newsletter, I would like to thank all the ladies on the executive for all their support during my term as President. It was my pleasure serving the WOF ladies in this way. I ask God that he continue to guide you in your decisions in doing his work here at Zion.

Wishing everyone a blessed Christmas this holiday season.
Linda Springer, WOF President

CPR COURSE



On Saturday, February 6, 2016 from 9 AM to 3 PM, the Congregational Life Committee will be holding a CPR course - Level C. Everyone is welcome - family, friends, neighbours and co-workers.

The cost is \$70 per person (tax included) and if 10 or more people register a \$10 refund will be given to each person attending. Pre-registration and payment prior to the day of the course.

Please call Liz Bomasuit at 519-272-0254 for additional information and to register.



CHRISTMAS FLOWERS

Donations are now being accepted so the Women of Faith group can purchase flowers to decorate the 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!

January 2016						
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31						

FRIENDSHIP MEAL

Because of the additional opportunities provided for community meals in Stratford in December we do not offer one. January 29 is our next 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.

+ WEDDING +

Donald Furtney & Linda Ruby

+ FUNERALS +

Irene Yundt, on October 21

Edna Heinbuch, on October 29

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 6	Sister Jean Widmeyer & Wayne Young	Bruce & Beth Sippel	Sister Jean Widmeyer	Wayne Yundt	Kurt Gough
Dec 13	N/A	Allan & Lorraine Skowby	Brian Wilker	Wayne Yundt	Linda Weitzel
Dec 20	Barb Higgins & Ed Illman	Klaus & Linda Springer	Lynette McLeod	Jerry Terhaerdt	Linda Weitzel
Dec 25	N/A	Gerald & Isabel Cook	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dec 27	N/A	Jim & Judy Stanley	Isabel Cook	Jerry Terhaerdt	N/A