

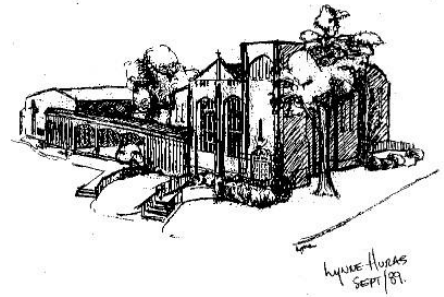
ZION NEWS

DECEMBER 2025

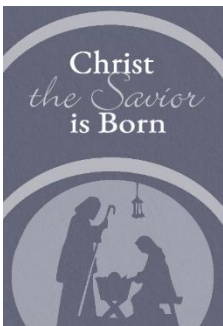
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PASTOR'S DEVOTIONAL



“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” – Isaiah 9:2

I thought I understood the meaning of darkness until I worked for a summer in a Boy Scout camp in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State. The darkness I had previously experienced in my suburban New Jersey neighborhood was lit by streetlights, porch lights, automobile headlights, and other sources of light that made the nighttime only partially dark. In the wilderness setting of the camp, however, the darkness was complete; there were no streetlights or automobiles or any other source of light. Once the sun set, the camp was plunged into total darkness that was only broken by a campfire or occasional flashlight. For both scouts and staff, this experience was both strange and terrifying, since none of us had ever experienced the totality of such darkness in which we could barely see the hand in from of our faces, much less any familiar sights or landmarks. It gave me a new understanding of the reality of darkness both physical and spiritual, darkness that shrouds the earth every night as well as darkness that descends upon a person's very being and can be both crippling and terrifying.

The darkness of which the prophet Isaiah speaks may be in both categories. People in the ancient Near East certainly would have been familiar with the reality of total darkness as a part of their daily lives; even in populated areas there was little light to illuminate the nighttime. The prophet also speaks of the darkness in which the people walked, a darkness

that was the result of the alienation in their relationships with both God and with one another, a reality that had led to depression and death among the people. But the good news that the prophet proclaims is that this darkness and despair was in their past: Isaiah proclaims that *“the people who **walked** in darkness have seen a great light; those who **lived** in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.”* (Isaiah 9:2). This message brings a message of hope that their days of walking in darkness and the shadow of death have passed because of the good news that *“a child has been born to us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* (9:6). As total and terrifying as darkness had been for God’s people, the prophet brings the good news that their sojourn through darkness was now in the past because the great light of God’s presence was shining in their presence.

The darkness that surrounded the little town of Bethlehem was also total and terrifying for the *“shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night”* (Luke 2:8). They were watching over their flocks to prevent predators leaping out of the darkness to threaten them, often laying down their lives to protect their sheep. The darkness that enshrouded them brought upon them uncertainty and fear every night when the sun set; but on one night, this darkness was broken when *“an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified”* (2:9). While the darkness brought with it the terror of being attacked by unseen adversaries, the sudden brightness and angelic appearance was a terror rooted in uncertainty. But sensing the fear in their hearts, the angel encourages them to *“not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”* (2:10-11). This lone angel is soon joined by *“a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’”* (2:13-14).

The angels soon disappear and the night returns to total darkness; only now that darkness does not provoke fear in the hearts of the shepherds. They know that even though darkness will remain a reality of their lives, there is a greater reality which shines the light of God’s love in their darkness so that they now know that darkness, despair, and death are no longer the fate of the people of God, because at the birth of Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of a great light that shatters the darkness and the good news that in the child born of Mary is the *“life [which] was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”* (John 1:4-5).

- “In the newly created order, life and light are ways in which the Word, God’s self-expression, is effective. John evokes the wonder of creation, the gift of life, the power of the Word, and celebrates the mystery of revelation that transcends

conventional limits of time and space. The resilience of the light that shines in the darkness is confirmation of the power of life available in the Word.” – Gail O’Day.

One does not need to live in the total physical darkness of the Judean wilderness or the Adirondack Mountains; even in places where electric lights cut through the darkness of night people continue to live in the darkness that comes from fear, depression, despair, loneliness, uncertainty, and hopelessness. But it was the light of the appearance of the angels shattering the darkness that surrounded the angels, so does their word of light and life shatter the darknesses that surround people and hold them in bondage. It is the good news we celebrate at Christmas in the birth of the child in the 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.”* It is the light that came upon that midnight clear that shines the light of hope to all who are living in “darkness and the shadow of death”:

- “And 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 angel sing!” – ELW Hymn 282.

I have never returned to the Adirondack Mountains, but the memory of the total darkness of those nights in camp has remained with me. Darkness may be a reality of our lives both physically and emotionally; but the good news of Christmas is that in the birth of Jesus there is a greater reality that shatters any darkness that seeks to enshroud us in fear or uncertainty; for the good news of this holy night is that to us a child is born, the one who is the light and life for all. May the light of this good news shine before us always: **Christ the Saviour is born!**

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NOVEMBER 19, 2025 CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING

The November 19, 2025 Congregational Council Meeting was held in-person in the Parlour.



Council Highlights

The two commercial inclined platform lifts at the front entranceway to the church have been installed and all work completed. A Technical Standards & Safety Authority (TSSA) inspection is required before the lifts can be put into operation.

The former Youth Room is being revamped currently. The plan is that the two Girl Guide Groups will be accommodated in this room versus the Parlour and the Fellowship Hall starting in the New Year.

A coffee hour was held on Sunday, November 2. The next coffee hour is December 14 and will be hosted by the Sunday School

A fundraising concert is being organized for Sunday May 31, 2026.

Fifty-Seven people attended the Seniors' Luncheon on November 14. Sara-McIntyre-Roy from the Stratford Connection Centre shared information about the programs offered by the Centre. The next Seniors' Luncheon will be held on December 12, 2025.

Kyla-Cook-Montgomery has volunteered to make the nursery available to other parents as she is attending with her son. Announcements will be made to the members of this new service that is being provided.

Donations/offerings, can continue to be completed via our Church website, including additional options for QR Code and 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.

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS



December is a busy month for the Sunday School.

On Sunday December 7th, the Sunday School Children will be rehearsing for the Christmas Program. We would greatly appreciate if the congregation could please vacate the sanctuary as

soon as possible after service is finished. We would like to be able to have the children's attention and start the practice as soon as possible.

The Children's Christmas Program will be held on Sunday December 14th, during the 10 AM service. The children will be singing songs and readings. You won't want to miss it! There will be NO SUNDAY SCHOOL on December 21st, December 28th and January 4th, 2026. Sunday School will start back up on Sunday January 11th, 2026.

A reminder to all that we are a **nut-free Sunday School**. Please remember that Sunday School ends at 11:15 A.M. We ask that parents/grandparents wait until that time before coming for your child(ren).

Paula McNaughton,
Sunday School Coordinator

"SENIORS' LUNCHEON REPORT"



The "November" Seniors' Luncheon was attended by 57 people each enjoying a delicious meal of sausage, scalloped potatoes, baked beans, Caesar salad, buns and tarts for dessert.

Sara McIntyre-Roy from the Connection Centre enlightened us on what is happening at the Centre.

A big "THANK YOU" to our volunteers: Irene Ehgoetz who attended to the door; Dianne Mann and her kitchen helpers and servers: Sheila Wittig, Laurie Snow, Marie Ehgoetz, Wendy Hansen, and Marilyn Neumeister. Congratulations to all on another successful luncheon! A special "THANK YOU" to Dianne Mann for her lovely table centrepieces!

Below are a couple of pictures which affirms the good time that was had by all and the hard work in the kitchen.



Volunteers getting the tables ready for lunch.



Food has arrived, kitchen prep work will begin.



Prepping is
Hands-on
work
sometimes.



If you cook
it, they will
come and
enjoy!



Janet Ahrens
Introducing Sara
McIntyre-Roy
from the
Connection Centre



An interested audience!

PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY



December: the days are shorter, and the chill of evening comes quickly at days end.

Warm socks, mittens, caps, scarves, shawls, blankets and other knitted items continue to be crafted and dispersed to Zion members and throughout the community with the intention of expressing comfort and care.

The Prayer Shawl Ministry is appreciative to the anonymous benefactor for the yarn that arrived in the cupboard for our projects, as well as a number of lovely lap blankets that have been gifted to others. There are angels in our midst!

May the Light, Peace & Hope that is Christmas
be with You Now and in the Year to Come

The Knitters & Crocheters of the Prayer Shawl Ministry

WOMEN OF FAITH



A big "Thank You" to those ladies who helped pack more than 50 bags full of Christmas treats and delivered them to Zion's "Special Seniors" and "Shut-ins".

Twenty-one ladies shared a Christmas lunch together at Demetre's Restaurant on November 29th.

Under the guidance of Jan Bennewitz and Kathy Schellenberger, we continue to make sandwiches bi-weekly for the homeless at the Connection Centre. These people are so happy to receive our sandwiches.

We appreciate the donations from our Zion Congregation. Gift cards to Food Basics, Foodland or Walmart are much appreciated and are used to buy the items we need to make our sandwiches.

Also “Thanks” to Irene Ehgoetz (co-ordinator) and the ladies who help serve at our monthly Seniors’ Luncheon.

Marilyn Neumeister is doing a great job sending Birthday, Anniversary, Get Well and Sympathy cards to many members of Zion. She also buys "welcome gifts" for newly baptized members of Zion and sends them Birthday cards until they are 3 years old.

“Thank You” to Janet Ahrens for being our Flower Co-ordinator and keeping our altar looking beautiful.

“Thank You” to Dianne Mann, who changes our seasonal decor in the main Church sanctuary and makes amazing centre-pieces to decorate the tables at our Seniors’ Luncheon.

“Thanks” also to Irene Ehgoetz and her quilt-makers and Nancey Schaff’s knitters who meet weekly to use their skills to make much needed items to sell or donate to those in need.

Our coffee hour is in need of volunteers to make and serve coffee after Sunday church services. Even if you can help one Sunday a month, that would be great!

“Thanks” also to our care-takers, Sue and Ralph, for your help setting up tables and chairs for our special events.

Lastly a “Big Thank You” to Jane, our Parish Administrator, for the super job she does handling all the phone calls, paperwork, keeping everyone organized on her calendar and welcoming all who pop into her office just to chat and give her a hug. Our church bulletins are very well done and she adds pictures of events to share the good times with others. The monthly newsletters are a lot of work, but Jane needs another pat on the back for using her creativity to make these so interesting to read.

We likely missed a few volunteers, if so, we apologize.

We want to wish everyone a very
“Merry Christmas and Happy Holiday Season”

Darlene Illman and Wendy Hansen (Co-leaders).

SENIORS' LUNCHEON



The next Seniors' Luncheon will be held on **Friday, December 12th, 2025 from Noon until 2:00 PM.** The cost of the luncheon is \$20.00. Come celebrate the Season with a Christmas Carol singsong and a special visitor.

A reminder to enlighten you on how the process for the Seniors' Luncheon works.

Please remember that if you say that you will attend the luncheon, your name is added to the list of participants. On the Tuesday before the luncheon being held on the Friday, the number of participants is called in to the caterer to order that number of meals. It is at this time we are committed to pay for the number of meals we have ordered.

INVITATION

Members and Friends of Zion Lutheran Church Invite you to Zion's next

SENIORS' LUNCHEON

On FRIDAY, JANUARY 9TH 2026

Starting at 12:00 Noon

202 Erie Street – enter off Erie Street

519-271-8527

Wheelchair accessible

On the Queensland bus route

\$20.00

Entertainment: To Be Announced

Worship on Sundays is at 10:00 A.M.

Everyone Welcome!!!

STRATFORD CONNECTION CENTRE

PLEASE, as you are purchasing gifts for your loved ones and friends, it would be greatly appreciated if you could remember the Connection Centre by buying gift cards for Walmart and Food Basics. These gift cards can be dropped off at the Church office during office hours: Mondays 8:30 to 11:30 am; Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm or in the locked mailbox. Thank you!

The latest “**much needed**” items are listed below. Whatever help you can provide is greatly appreciated!



**Volunteers for
Tuesday, Thursday, Friday**

**Razors
Toothbrushes
Basic t-shirts (medium)**

**Ground coffee
Packaged grab & go snacks!
Deodorant**



Please Note: Due to limited space, Stratford Connection Centre is not able to accept donations of clothing. If you have clothing to donate, please take it to Goodwill as this is where Stratford Connection takes their homeless for clothing.

HOWEVER, donations of socks, underwear, hats, scarves and mittens (preferably water proof mittens) are needed and accepted at Stratford Connection. Thank you!

**Please drop off donations in the bins located at the
back of the Sanctuary
or inside the office entrance door.**

**The sandwich makers for the Connection Centre would greatly appreciate donations of food gift cards from Walmart or Food Basics. Any support you are able to provide is most welcome.
Thank You!**



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	Greeters	Readers	Usher Captains	Altar Guild	Counting Captains
December 7	Ellen Wolfe Carmen Beck	Carmen Beck	Jerry Terhaardt	Ellen Wolfe	Carmen Beck
December 14	Tom & Joanne Cosstick	Tom Waschkowski	Tom Cosstick	Carmen Beck	Jan Bennewitz
December 21	Gerald & Isabel Cook	Fritz Steigmeier	Darrell Reneckert	Sister Jean	Jan Bennewitz
December 24 4:00 PM 7:00 PM	VOLUNTEERS NEEDED VOLUNTEER NEEDED	VOLUNTEER NEEDED VOLUNTEER NEEDED	VOLUNTEER NEEDED VOLUNTEER NEEDED	Shirley Whittaker	NO COUNTERS
December 25	VOLUNTEER NEEDED	VOLUNTEER NEEDED	VOLUNTEER NEEDED	Ellen Wolfe	NO COUNTERS
December 28	Paul & Janet Jeffery	Aline Kouhi-Klemencic	Brian Coe		VOLUNTEER NEEDED

“THANK YOU” to our Volunteers for giving of your time!

Worship would not be the same without you!!



MERRY CHRISTMAS

AND

HAPPY NEW YEAR

