

St. James United Church of Christ

9008 Meisner Road, Casco, MI 48064 / www.ourstjameschurch.org/

Newsletter
December 2023
Volume 9, Issue 11

News from Pastor Ken



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I realize that it sounds odd hearing these well wishes in this order but that is how it goes in the church world.

Happy New Year and Merry Christmas!

According to the Liturgical calendar the church New Year officially begins the first Sunday in December this year with the first Sunday in Advent. For all of you keeping score this begins year B.

My understanding and appreciation for Advent continues to grow with every passing year. When I think of what Advent is all about, it is helpful for us to consider that Advent is to Christmas what Lent is to Easter. It is a time of spiritual preparation and discernment. It is that time when we can consider the incredible gift that we are about to receive and how we would like to use it. I like to think of the gift of Christmas as an unlimited gift card that we can use anytime and anyplace to shape and guide our lives. But like all gift cards, they only give us benefit if we use them.

I think my Christmas' have become richer and more fulfilling as my understanding of Advent practices becomes richer and more intentional. Advent is a time of spiritual centering, reflection, and preparation for the year to come so when Christmas gets here, I am ready. Not necessarily on the outside but on the inside. I think part of what use to (and still can) make me crazy about Christmas is that I thought everything needed to be just right on the outside in order to be right on the inside, including gifts, decorating the house, the tree, the lights, the dishes, the...the..., the.... You see, I can make myself stressed just thinking about it. And in the process of potentially being overwhelmed about the outside, it becomes easier to forget to prepare and make ready the inside. The heart and the spirit of Christmas.

Pastor Ken Newsletter Continued

So for the past few years it is first things first. Heart and spirit first and then allow some time to put up a little tree, a few decorations, and a little bit of shopping. Just as a note, I do not buy things people will not use just because I do not know what they need. Ah.... Christmas

So once again I have gathered my meditation materials and have been making my brief list of any specific things, I am seeking God's direction about in my life. I invite you to join me in spirit for a day in prayer, meditation, or whatever practice you use to center your spirit, I would enjoy sharing that with you. I continue to be excited about the journey ahead. This year I invite you to join me in re-arranging our priorities and sharing with me in ways to more fully enjoy Advent and therefore Christmas.

First, slow down and take time to remember what this season is truly about. It is time for thinking about our individual relationships with God and listening for what it is God would have us to do and who it is that God would have us to be. It is a time of prayer, reflection, and discerning. It is a time for considering and acting on how it is you want God to impact your life. I also want to remind you to expect the unexpected.

Secondly, Advent is the beginning of the new church year. It is a season for appreciating what is, acceptance and coming to terms with what was, together with the hope of what is to come. I look with anticipation toward this New Year both in my personal life as well as our life together as a community of faith. This has been an exciting year of growth and transition for me and our church family. There continues to be an exciting sense of energy and anticipation. I invite you to pray and prepare for what God is calling you individually and we as a community, to be and to do in the year ahead.

Third, Advent is the gateway to Christmas and all the joy and anticipation that comes with it. As I stated earlier, I am aware that during the holidays we are sometimes consumed with trying to make life perfect. It seems that no matter how much we do or how hard we work there will always be a couple of things more we could have done. Is not that the way life is. I think the key to happiness during the holidays as well as throughout life is to slow down, plan for what you can plan, do what you can do, and then relax and take time to enjoy the ride, knowing that things are always going to turn out a little differently than the plan. Make sure to leave room for the Spirit to do its thing.

During this time of Advent, I invite you to follow that simple formula, plan a little, do a little, and enjoy remembering that the biggest gift that you will receive is not under the tree. It is the gift of God's unending love for you, the gift of boundless, unconditional, unearned, mercy, grace, and forgiveness. So sit a moment, wait a while, take a deep breath, expect the unexpected and then prepare to open the Gift that will transform your life forever. Expect a miracle.

Remember that whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, you are held in God's unconditional love, boundless mercy, and unending grace. And there is a place for you here.

May you know the love and grace of God in your life. May your heart and life be filled with the Spirit. Merry Christmas!!

Take care and be well, Peace.

Ken

Prayer List

Prayers for Wayne, Judy, Chris, Frank, Gary, James & Family, Gina, Michael, Trudy, Ken, Kathy, Nancy, Melanie, Don, Families of St. John & St. James



Outreach Ministry

Helping Hands

Current Needs: Crackers, cereal, canned fruit and veggies, boxed foods like Hamburger Helper, Rice-A-Roni, Mac and Cheese

Not accepting books and furniture currently.

No expired or opened boxes of food accepted.

Kids in Distress

Current needs are as follows:

Socks and underwear – all sizes for girls and boys, hygiene items for both boys and girls and adults, adult gloves, coats for girls and boys all sizes, boys pants size 3 and up.

B-WARM

Continued prayers for the future of the mission. They are currently looking at the possibility of having some new people in place at the beginning of the New Year. Pray that all goes well!!!

Birthdays in December

- 1 - Mark Beattie
- 3 - Jerry Maedel
- 6 - Kim LaDuke
- 9 - Rusty Stover
- 9 - Sierra Nicole Pauley
- 10 - Teri Lynn Ross
- 11 - Ashley Beattie
- 13 - Frank Tringali
- 19 - Shirley Teltow
- 25 - Jeff Bandlow
- 25 - Ken Gadd
- 27 - Jim Robertson
- 28 - Jeff LaDuke
- 28 - Robin Meldrum

Earthly Gifts

Our monthly goal for December contributions is \$5,877.25. If you are new to our church or have lost or misplaced your envelopes, please leave a message on the church phone 586-727-1623 or e-mail ourstjameschurch.org. You will receive an envelope packet for the remainder of the year by mail or contact Ralph or Roberta before or after the service and you will receive the packet before you leave.

Anniversaries in December

- 12 - Kelly & Terry Pauley
- 16 - Kris and Wally Dombrowski

Spiritual Ministry

Please feel free to bring your children to church and partake in the bi-weekly Sunday School classes (2nd and 4th Sunday). Please contact Sue Tews if you are interested in helping with Sunday school.

The Discretionary Fund December 3, 2023

Did you know this fund is utilized to aid with rent, utilities, medical supplies, food, and transportation to doctors, etc.?

This is generated from the loose change collected the first Sunday of each month. Please empty your pockets and change purses that day to meet the needs of our church and community.

Christmas Blessings!



A Christmas Blessing
During this Christmas season

May you be Blessed with the spirit of
the season, which is peace.

The gladness of the season, which is hope.

And the heart of the season, which is love.

Somehow not only for Christmas, but
all the long year through.

The joy that you give to others, is the
joy that comes back to you.

Christmas Tote Bags for Local Community Charities

Christmas Tote Bags

A new updated list is available downstairs in the church of what is needed for this year. The tote bags are for both boys and girls between the ages of 2 and 14. The items accepted anytime: hygiene items such as: toothbrush holders, toothbrushes, toothpaste, washcloths, dental floss, comb/brushes, hair accessories such as head bands, ponytails, clips, bows, and barrettes and school supplies such as: notebooks, crayons, colored pencils, colored markers, pencil sharpeners, scissors (for youngsters and older children) , rulers, large erasers. Pens, pencils and socks, hats, scarves and gloves/mittens and toys.

Please donate travel size items, we only have so much space to store the items in for the year and we need to get all items to fit in the bags.

Bottle / Can Collection

We are continuing to collect all bottle and cans at church. They can be placed in the back-room downstairs at church.

All donations should be empty and clean bottles and cans. The money will be used towards St. James Painting Project.

If you need someone to pick them up please contact Don or Betty Robertson at robertson3265@comcast.net.

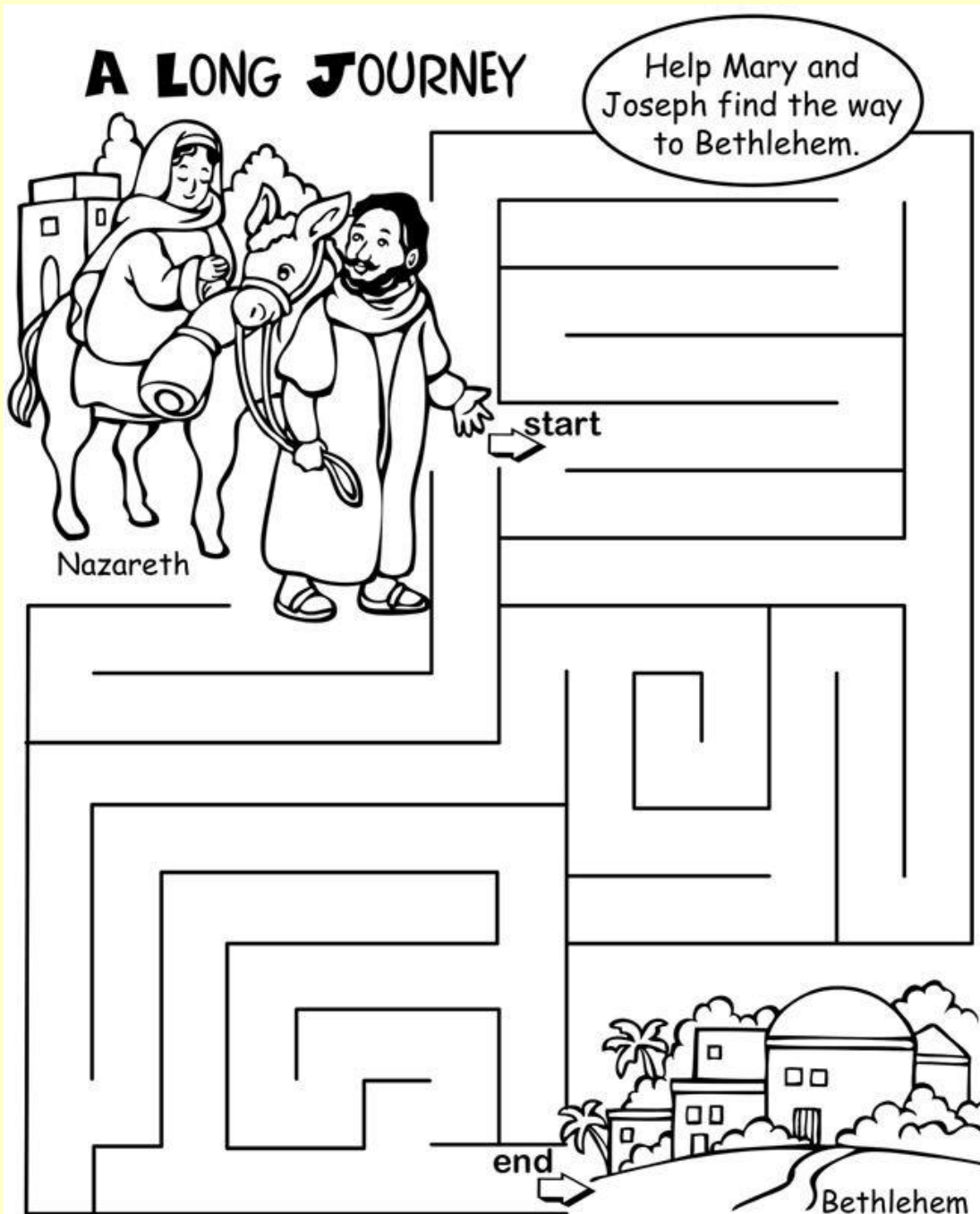


Military Prayer List

I will be including a list in the newsletter of our men and women in the military, to acknowledge those who serve and to pray for their safety. Please submit your love one's, family member or friend's name, rank and branch of service to Roberta Fisher to be placed on the list.

Ian Riley - Marines

Kid's Page



Joseph and Mary went on a long journey from the town of Nazareth to the town of Bethlehem.

(Luke 2:1-5)

December Activities

Saturday, December 2 – Euchre – 6:30pm.

Sunday, December 3 – Sunday Service with Holy Communion - Discretionary
Fund Collection – 9am

Tuesday, December 12 – Council Meeting – 6:30pm

Thursday, December 14 - Ladies Christmas Gathering – 6:30pm

Saturday, December 16 – Euchre at St. James – 6:30pm

Sunday, December 17 – Sunday Service with Holy Communion – 9am

Thursday, December 21 – Blue Christmas Service at St. John's – 7pm

Sunday, December 24 – Sunday Service at St. James – 9am

Sunday Service at St. John's – 11am

Christmas Eve Service with Communion at St. John's – 4pm

Christmas Eve Service with Communion at St. James – 7pm

Monday, December 25 – Christmas Day

Sunday, December 31 – Sunday Service with Healing – 9am

50/50 Drawing to be held during coffee hour after service.

Celebrate the Season

Women's Annual Christmas Party

Thursday, December 14th at 6:30 p.m.

Church Fellowship Hall (Basement)

Come for fun, food and fellowship and enjoy the Holiday Spirit!

Please R.S.V.P. on sign-up sheet or call Roberta Fisher at 586-915-7662.

Potluck dinner with a short program and White Elephant Exchange Not

Mandatory - (\$5.00 to \$10.00 gift).

The free-will offerings from the evening will go towards:

Sacred Heart / Clearview Women and Children Center

In Memphis, MI

Please bring a dish to share

Guests are welcome

If you bring a guest, remember to ask if they want to take part in the White

Elephant Exchange (Not mandatory).



Scripture Readings for December

Sunday, December 3

First Sunday of Advent

Isa64: 1-9

Ps 80: 1-7, 17-19

1 Cor 1: 3-9

Matt 13: 24-37

Where Are You, God?

Sunday, December 17

Third Sunday of Advent

Isa 61: 1-4, 8-11

Ps 126 or Luke 1; 46b-55

1 Thess 5: 16-24

John 1; 6-8, 19-28

Shouts of Joy

Sunday, December 10

Second Sunday of Advent

Isa 40: 1-11

Ps 85: 1-2, 8-13

2 Peter 3: 8-15aSol 6: 17-20

Mark 1: 1-8

Messengers of Hope

Sunday, December 24

Fourth Sunday of Advent

2 Sam 7: 1-11, 16

Luke 1: 46b-55 or Ps 89: 1-4, 19-26

Rom 16: 25-27

Luke 1: 26-38

Birthing a Promise

Sunday, December 31

First Sunday after Christmas

Isa 61: 10-62:3

Ps 148

Gal 4: 4-7

Luke 2: 22-40

Long-Awaited Gift



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