

Messiah Lutheran Church
1796-15 Avenue East
Prince Albert, S6V 8A1

Website: www.messiahluthpa.ca

Facebook page and YouTube channel: MessiahLutheranChurchPrinceAlbert

Pastor Fran Schmidt
Cell: 1-306-716-3954
Email: pastor.mlc@sasktel.net
Donna Deobald
Office: 306-763-7374
E-mail: messiah@sasktel.net

Musician: Colleen Bowen
Readers: Cheryl Bauer Hyde
Wayne Hyde
Camera: Merv Bender

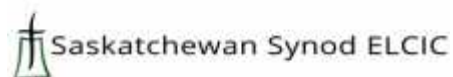
The Messiah office is closed until January 5 as Donna is away; phone message and emails will be checked daily. If you need to be in touch more immediately, please call Pastor Fran or Chery (306-961-2967). Please note the use of hand sanitizer and wearing of masks is required for anyone entering the building.

We thank you for your financial support throughout this very challenging year. Financial donations for 2020 can still be made up to and including December 31. If you wish to drop off your donation at the church office, please contact Pastor Fran.

Worship for Sunday, December 27, 2020
1st Sunday of Christmas

As we are not worshipping in-person at this time, online Worship Services are live on Sunday mornings at 10:30 am. You can view this live by going to the Messiah Lutheran Church Prince Albert YouTube page and look for "live" feed. If there are technical issues, the recorded service will be available on Messiah Facebook page and Website by 1:00 p.m. on Sunday.

Prayers for Healing and On-Going Health Concerns: We pray for comfort and healing for all those who are suffering in body, mind, or spirit; give them courage and hope in their time of need.



From the desk of Bishop Sid

Peace

Blessings to you all as you prepare to celebrate the birth of the Christ into our world—in the birth to Mary in Bethlehem, in coming to earth in a cloud of hope in a time unimaginable, and in the between time—in the many ways the Spirit moves among the people.

It is going to be a different sort of celebration this year, with Health Authority directives in place. The directives are frustrating for our faith communities, no doubt. We will so miss gathering for Word and Sacrament, for congregational singing and prayer, for lit candles and Silent Night, for greeting those who have travelled 'home for Christmas'. How we will miss that celebration. But we are committed to follow the Health Directives for the sake of the health of our churches and the communities we serve. And Christmas will still happen.

If all that is left for Christmas is a stable in a little town of Bethlehem, Christmas will come. The Christ will be born among us in a special way in this season. As faith communities, we will Facebook Live together, Zoom together, Youtube together. Some of our congregations, particularly in town and country parishes may be meeting in restricted face-to-face gatherings. Either way, it will be a quieter day. We will listen to the story. We will listen to the music. We will pray for the world and for each other. We will offer gifts to each other and to a world in need. And it will still be Christmas. More like a little town of Bethlehem than a packed Christmas eve church. But still Christmas.

I would encourage you to continue to celebrate Christmas as community this year—whether that is meeting virtually though Facebook or Zoom or Youtube or face to face in a group of less than 30. Faced with a pandemic, we need to lean in to the stories of faith even more. We need trust God even more, as God leads us to a new day.

If your congregation does not have access to virtual services, please check our website at www.sasksynod.ca for links to the various services across Canada. I have also recorded a Christmas eve service for a Christian radio station in Yorkton. It is about a 45-minute service with a message, prayers, and traditional carols, and will be aired at 5:00 pm Christmas Eve on 98.5 FM The Rock. The station itself reaches about 100 km around Yorkton. For those out of range, the program will be available online at therock985.ca/listen-live and outside of its broadcast time by Smartphone (TuneIn Radio OR Radioplayer Canada App: Search: The Rock 98 Five) or on SaskTel Max TV, Channel 839.

Peace to you all during this Christmas season.

Bishop Sid

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

GATHERING CAROL: ELW#289 "Angels We Have Heard on High" vs. 1 & 3

OPENING PRAYER

Praise the Living God! Praise God from the heavens:
 Sun and moon and shining stars, praise the Living God!
 Praise God's Holy Name,
 whose word speaks all things into being, who is present in the expanse of the universe,
 and in the voices of children.
 Praise the Living God, our rescuer and deliverer,
 whose wonder is found in the heavens and in all creation,
 who comes in innocence, and with mercy.
 O God, our light, our beauty, our rest: With the appearance of your Son,
 you have brought us into your new creation.
 Form us into your people, and root our lives in you;
 through Christ, the Living Light. Amen.

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

READING: Isaiah 35:1-10

The prophet describes the return from the Babylonian captivity as a joyous procession to Zion. God's coming reign will bring a renewal of creation in which health and wholeness will be restored. There is no need for fear, for God is coming to save.

A reading from Isaiah.

¹The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus ²it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. ³Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." ⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. ⁸A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. ⁹No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. ¹⁰And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Word of God, word of life. Thanks be to God.

STORY

In 1865, the famous preacher and abolitionist Phillip Brooks rode on horseback from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and participated in the Church of the Nativity's Christmas Eve celebration. In response to his experience there, he wrote the now-famous carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem," which was first performed by the children's choir of his church a few years later. Unlike many Christmas carols, the lyrics of this reflective and hopeful song are set in the present tense rather than the past. The author's experience of wonder and awe are palpable and cover the seemingly great distance between the birth of Christ then and our experience of it now.

Carol: ELW#279 "O Little Town of Bethlehem" vs. 1 & 4

READING: Isaiah 11:1-9

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. ² The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³ His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. ⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

STORY

Though the tune is taken from a much older madrigal, John Mason Neale's "Good King Wenceslas" (1853) is about a man who braves winter storms during Saint Stephen's Day (December 26) to help his poorer neighbours. The story it tells is based on a real person—Wenceslaus I, Duke of Bohemia—who was assassinated by his own brother and had been adored by his subjects. His charity and popularity eventually led to his being named the patron saint of the Czech Republic.

This carol is beloved by many, in large part because of the evocative story images and the possibility for performance. Traditionally, the part of the Page (the king's assistant) is sung by a treble voice, while the King is sung by a bass voice. However, in a congregational setting, the same could be achieved by assigning a part to higher and lower voices, or children and adults, or one half of the church and the other, with everyone joining together for the non-dialogue parts. The whole thing is quite a bit of fun, especially since the opportunities to sing this simple Christmas story are so few.

CAROL: "Good King Wenceslas" vs. 1 & 5 (copyright-public domain)

STORY

Written by Massachusetts Unitarian minister Edmund Sears, this pastoral-sounding carol carries a much deeper meaning than simply retelling the birth of Jesus. Sears hoped to offer an uplifting message amid the great poverty he was witness to and to remind people that God, in the form of a child, had entered a world sorely in need of love and peace. Richard Storrs Willis' tune, CAROL, paired with the words only a year later, gave the carol its lasting appeal and one of its two most common tunes, the other being NOËL.

A very fine movie made in 1992, *A Midnight Clear*, tells the story of American and German soldiers laying aside their weapons on Christmas Eve of 1944. The story ends tragically, as miscommunication causes hostilities to resume. Yet, the powerful third verse of the carol, with its invitation to hush the noise of battle in order to hear God's "love song" to the earth and all people, is a strong one. This carol speaks gently, yet powerfully, God's word of peace amid strife and weariness.

CAROL: ELW#282 "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" vs. 1 & 4

READING: Isaiah 63:7-9

I will recount the gracious deeds of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us, and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. ⁸ For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not deal falsely"; and he became their savior ⁹in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them, in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

STORY

In 1816, Father Joseph Mohr wrote the poem "Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!" while stationed at a pilgrim church in Mariapfarr, Austria. Two years later, now at St. Nicholas' church in Oberndorf, he asked Franz Gruber to set the poem for guitar and choir, which the two performed on Christmas Eve of 1818. Since then, a legend has grown around the circumstances of this collaboration, beginning with a broken organ at St. Nicholas' and ending with a dramatic, last-minute musical setting for the now-familiar carol. To what extent the legend of the carol's origins is true is perhaps less important than its beauty and simplicity.

CAROL: ELW#281 "Silent Night, Holy Night"

OFFERING

Let us pray,

In the gifts of word and song, we hear the story of your gift of life, O God.

Here, we offer what we can of ourselves, we who are part of that same story, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

As you have drawn us to your cradle of wondrous love, O God, draw us together in this place, that we might pray for your people and your world, praying, hear us O God, and responding, Your mercy is great.

Today, we give you thanks for the gift of your child, Jesus Christ, who in birth, life, death, and resurrection revealed your unending love for all people and opened to us the purpose and promise of life together. hear us O God, Your mercy is great.

We give thanks also for the gifts of this season: hope for the vision of justice you promise, even in the midst of despair; for peace within and among your people, even in the midst of conflict; joy found in reunion and celebration, even amid the challenges of this life; and love, with the power to transform and heal all things, even in the midst of brokenness. hear us O God, Your mercy is great.

We pray for those who still long for these, your gifts, God of Love:

for those who will spend this season alone or anxious...

for those who grieve an empty place at the table this year...

for those who are ill, in body or in spirit...

for those in hospital and in care...

for those who endure the terror of conflict and oppression...

for those who will go hungry this day, and who long for the simplest of creation's gifts...

especially we pray for hear us O God, Your mercy is great.

Let us listen to the angels' song again, your song of love for this world. Move us to return that song in what we say and do, that we may be instruments of your hope and peace and joy and love. hear us O God, Your mercy is great.

We pray these things in the name of Jesus, who became the Christ, and who taught us when we pray to say,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

BLESSING

Almighty God, who sent the Holy Spirit to Mary, proclaimed joy through the angels, sent the shepherds with good news, and led the magi by a star, bless you this day in the name of the Father, and of the Son, ✠ and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

SENDING SONG: ELW#298 "The Bells of Christmas" vs. 1 & 3

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Share the gift of Jesus.

Thanks be to God.