

# GROWING IN *Grace*

The Monthly Newsletter of Morning † Star Lutheran and Monroe United Methodist Churches

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## January 2022

## HAPPY EPIPHANY! & HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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

Throughout Advent light has been a focus as we light Advent wreaths, as we decorate and light candles, as our neighborhoods and world around us becomes so bright that it is hard to see the true light of all the people, the baby Jesus. This light found in a humble manger has come into the world to love and make the world whole again.

*“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”* John 1:5

The Epiphany season of the church year celebrates the discovery that *Someone* has come, sent by God to bring God into our lives, to make a difference in our lives and world, to heal our brokenness and to reveal the unimaginable depth of God’s love for you and I. Epiphany, which is January 6<sup>th</sup>, is also a season of light in the dark seasonal days of our world. **We will celebrate Epiphany on Sunday January 2<sup>nd</sup>.** Throughout this season of light Jesus is revealed to us as repeatedly stepping beyond the accepted tribe.

In this COVID world of 2022, we are especially called to be not just a place of healing and grace, but also a beacon of light for our world and our community, and a place of radical hospitality where all are welcome. A Place where *all* are welcome, not how we want them to be or think they should be, but just as they are, and who they are when they come!

Epiphany is a Greek word meaning “appearing” or “revealing” the revealing of God’s son to all the tribes of the world, all of us! In the readings of this season before Lent Jesus is consistently breaking down walls between tribes: between women and men, between powerful and marginalized, between gentiles and Jews, family and stranger, clean and unclean.

Today our tribalism is and must be challenged by Jesus’ fierce inclusiveness. We are called to question our defensive loyalty to family, school, political and social affiliations, denomination, neighborhood, class, religion, church and buildings, country or any other tribes of exclusion in the face of Jesus’ life, teachings and actions. The Glory and love of the LORD was, is, and shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together.

*Where will our light Shine and upon whom, in our community?*

## HAPPY EPIPHANY

*May you find the Epiphany light of promise and hope! In this Epiphany season may the light of the star and the glory of God be revealed to you in new and unexpected ways! May you light candles and pray for the revealing of God’s light in your darkness and for the ever widening of God’s love, hope and compassion in your lives. May you share this Epiphany light with those beloveds of God, who are far off from God in God’s world!*

Pastor Malcolm

## **WORSHIP NEWS**

On Monday evening December 27<sup>th</sup> the worship team met to make some difficult and critical decisions as to what the future of in-person worship might look like for the near future. It was a hard conversation to have as we all know how important it is to be together, especially after 22 months of being apart.

As an act of love, Pastor Malcolm and the worship teams of both Morning Star Lutheran and Monroe United Methodist Churches have decided to postpone in-person worship services for the next two weeks, as the best way to act with love as Christ Jesus would. We feel that the risk is just too high right now, in this strange and dangerous time, as we learn about the Omicron form of this virus. We are committed to work out of perfect love and not fear, taking into consideration the health and well-being of you and our neighbors as we move forward.

In one way, we have more mitigation strategies than we've ever had. Between vaccine, treatment, and prevention strategies, we have the opportunity to knock back COVID Omicron significantly. On the other hand, COVID Omicron is more contagious than previous variants. Being vaccinated and boosted protects against serious disease and hospitalization from COVID Omicron, but not minor disease. More dangerously, COVID Omicron is contagious even when the bearer has no COVID symptoms. To protect against Omicron's contagion, we will require proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test within the previous 24 hours in order to attend in-person worship. To obtain a COVID test, an appointment may be required. You can schedule an appointment at [pharmasavemonroe.com](http://pharmasavemonroe.com) or [www.seamar.org](http://www.seamar.org).

We are continuing to follow the county, state, and CDC guidelines as we consider our options in this new time, understanding that Omicron appears to be more adept at exploiting the gaps in our understanding of this variant. We will meet often to review our response as County and State recommendations continue to change. Lastly, we are within the recommendations and guidelines of both the NW Washington Synod of the ELCA, and the Greater NW Area of the United Methodist Church.

**John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Movement**, summarized God's directives in "**Three Rules: do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God.**"

*"Do No Harm" is the first rule. To do no harm basically means that we refrain from causing destruction where we go. While it sounds kind of ridiculous to think that we are walking around producing harm, I think that we sometime unintentionally end up doing just that. Our decisions may cause harm to God's creation, our actions may cause harm to our relationships, and our lack of self-care may cause harm to our bodies.*

**In 1527, Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation**, wrote about the deadly plague which affected the town of Wittenberg where he lived. Luther wrote a letter entitled, "Whether One Should Flee from a Deadly Plague," to his friend, Rev. Dr. Johann Hess, who was a pastor in the city of Breslau. Included in that letter is this quote:

*I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me, and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above.*

Let us focus on what draws us into relationships with others in our local neighborhoods and communities. Let us emerge from the pandemic with a reputation as a church that cares for others above ourselves and let us remember, the church building is not the only place where ministry happens, it is a mission outpost hub for ministry in and for our whole community,

Please check out our joint website: [www.unitedingrace.org](http://www.unitedingrace.org) for updates. Our worship services will continue on our YouTube channel: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMkxHD\\_ur738IWzKUQnwyvQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMkxHD_ur738IWzKUQnwyvQ)

*With grace, peace, and love,*

**Pr Malcolm, Margaret Ray, Missy Maxson, Nancy Franke, Jill Sumpter, Kathi Cooley, and Jasmine Ray-Symms**



## ***New Year, New You!***

This is the time of year where we look forward to a new year and all the possibilities that newness brings. We make resolutions. We tell ourselves, "This year will be different!" With the continued stress of the pandemic looming over us we *need* that hope that this year won't be the same fears that plagued us last year.

As we all know, those resolutions fade as the struggles reality brings wear us down. We get discouraged and give up on following that diet or hitting the gym. We fall back on old

habits and the newness turns back into sameness.

It doesn't have to be that way. This isn't a pitch for some gimmick, it's a spiritual truth: We don't need to start anew, we ARE NEW! **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" 2 Corinthians 5:17**

The idea of being new can be scary. Giving up old ways of thinking and being can feel overwhelming but we're not new because of something we do; we aren't new by our own power, **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Ephesians 2:8-9** Our gift of freedom we've been given comes from the source of all power. So, face 2022 with all the strength and power from the Heavenly Father that loves us knowing: **"I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13**

Jasmine Ray-Symms

[www.jasmineraysymms.com](http://www.jasmineraysymms.com)

**Join the Women of  
Monroe United Methodist Church  
on Saturday, January 15, 2022 at 10:30  
am for the regular monthly meeting.**

**To Join the Zoom Meeting:**

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84796699000?  
pwd=OEFKdXpUMGJVNm0vTk15UVFPazBvUT0  
9](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84796699000?pwd=OEFKdXpUMGJVNm0vTk15UVFPazBvUT09)

Meeting ID: 847 9669 9000



**ALL ARE INVITED TO JOIN US FOR  
WOMEN'S BOOK CLUB**

The novel is: ***"Light Between Oceans"***  
by M. L. Stedman

**Hosted by** Tuesday, Jan. 18  
**Missy Maxson** At 6:30 p.m.

More information and directions are found on  
our website: [Unitedingrace.org](http://Unitedingrace.org)

**→ THE LITTLE FREE PANTRY IS CRITICALLY CLOSE TO RUNNING OUT OF FOOD ←**

**Thank you everyone** for all you've done to help our neighbors in need these past 20 months. The warm clothing that you donated has been so appreciated. The pantry exists because of your generous and caring hearts.

The Little Free Pantry Team is asking for your help now. Our cupboards are nearly empty and we are in need of food to continue with this ministry. With the weather as it is, food that needs as little preparation as possible is best: chili, cup-o-noodles soup (not ramen) individual shelf stable milk, protein drinks, granola bars, meat sticks, jerky, cereal, fruit cups, individual peanut butter packs, chips, crackers, etc.

We understand that bringing food to the annex now with the road conditions as they are may not be possible. When the roads clear and you're able to get out of your driveway and to the store, would you pick up a few extra things while you're shopping? You can drop off your donations to the back porch of the annex/office or call a member of the Little Free Pantry Team to set up a drop off time if you prefer.

Or, since it looks like the roads may not clear anytime soon, a monetary donation might make more sense. A member of the team can shop for what is most urgently needed. Go to our website [Unitedingrace.org](http://Unitedingrace.org) click on 'Give Back', then choose 'Evangelism/Outreach' (MSLC) or 'General Operating' (MUMC. Let Nancy or Tanya know that you've donated to the Pantry). You can also mail a check to the church office, indicating in the memo line "Little Free Pantry" Remember, this is a tax deductible donation!

*Isaiah 58:10:*

*if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,  
then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.*

Thank you for caring for our neighbors,

The Little Free Pantry Team

Nancy Franke, Kathleen Sallee, Shannon Burke, Velma Smith, Cindy Gulbranson, Kathi Cooley

## Care

*God of all time,*

*Help us enter the new year quietly,  
thoughtful of who we are to ourselves and to others,  
mindful that our steps make an impact and our words carry power.*

*May we walk gently.*

*May we speak only after we have listened well.*

*Creator of all life, help us enter the new year reverently,  
aware that you have endowed every creature and plant,  
every person and habitat, with beauty and purpose.*

*May we regard the world with tenderness.*

*May we honor rather than destroy.*

*Lord of all souls, help us enter the new year joyfully,  
willing to laugh and dance and dream,  
remembering our many gifts with thanks  
and looking forward to blessings yet to come.*

*May we welcome your lavish love. In this new year, may the grace  
and peace of Christ bless us now and in the days ahead.*

Author: Vinita Hampton Wright

Dear Church Family,

We are so thankful for the kindness that you have all shown to us during our time of grief. We are truly blessed to have such caring friends and we appreciate all your support. From bringing us meals for over a month, to getting together for dinners, to all of the phone calls and visits and Facebook messages and cards and gifts, we are truly grateful.

To all who helped with Jesse's memorial, thank you for helping make it a special day. The service was so beautiful and that is due to all of you, especially Rhonda Morgan, Pastor Malcolm Brown, Samantha Missel, Cindy Gulbranson, Ken Gross, Kathi Cooley, Missy Maxson, Callie Maxson, Chris Missel, Nanette Missel, Cody Missel, Ken Tompkins, Delaney and Marla Wardell, Jim and Ellen Olson, Joel and JoLynn Garrison, Pete Maxson, and so many more people who helped with setup and cleanup and made cookies and so many things we probably aren't aware of. Thank you to all who were able to come and those who were with us in spirit.

We hope you all have a blessed and wonderful holiday.

Best wishes,

Gwen and Martin Paietta

**IN NEED OF MOVING BOXES**

Jane Kelly is moving to California on February 1<sup>st</sup> to be closer to her son. She's got a 'bit' of packing to do and is in need of boxes. Give Jane a call if you have extra boxes to share: 360-794-7485.



Everyone at Morning Star will miss her immensely and we pray that she continues to receive the many blessings that God has given her.  
God be with you, Jane.

**January Birthdays  
and Anniversaries \***

- 4 Pete Hartzell
- 6 Cody Missel
- 10 Jim Gee
- 20 Jasmine Ray-Symms
- 23 Annette Kyle
- 23 Gary & Margaret Lottermann \*
- 24 Jerry & Judie Esqueda \*
- 31 Margaret Lottermann



**JANUARY 2022 MONROE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Happy New Year Everyone!

As we enter year 3 with the Coronavirus pandemic still very much a part of our lives, I pray that you all are keeping safe and healthy and trying to find the joy in each day. I know for me, there have been some down times, but being a person of faith and knowing that the strength that I need is there for the asking from my God, has helped me through and I hope it will you too.

Just an FYI – we had a break in to the church the week before Christmas. A window was smashed out in the nursery area and someone entered and went to the sanctuary - luckily nothing was taken and the only evidence that someone was inside was that they used the church computer in the sanctuary to check their Facebook and left it open for us to find. What some people won't do to access their social media! 😊 Jerry made a police report and the hole was patched up (thank you Ric Hart and Jay Morgan) and will be repaired after the first of the year. Since the church has a \$5K deductible on the insurance policy, no claim can be made and we will have to pay for the repair.

Finances look good going into the new year and we thank you all for your faithful giving and care of your church. A reminder that your annual giving statements will be sent to you by mail in the next few weeks. If you would like a copy emailed to you soon, please let me know.

**2022 MUMC LAY LEADERSHIP**

- Board of Trustees Chairman  
**Ric Hart** 360-794-7772
- Finance Chair
- Treasurer  
**Tanya Hubbard** 425-210-2095
- Financial Secretary  
**Nancy Franke** 360-794-6954
- Staff-Parish Relations Committee  
**Judie Esqueda** 951-201-0061
- Membership Secretary  
**Rhonda Dean** 425-359-2851
- Lay Leader to Annual Conference  
**Nancy Franke** 360-794-6954
- UMW President  
**Jasmine Ray-Symms** 425-223-9866
- Recording Secretary  
**Margaret Ray** 509-432-3029

Total Receipts November	\$ 5829.83	YTD \$ \$75657.75
Total Disbursements November	\$ 6212.98	YTD \$ \$71893.26
For November 2021	- \$ 353.19	

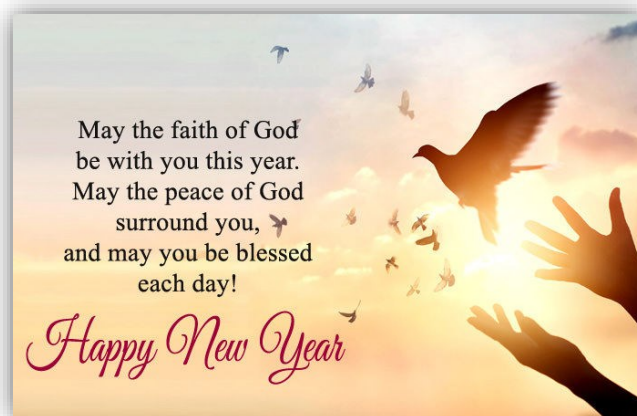
May you all have a good New Year in the Big Snow of 2021-22 and may your blessings and joys be as abundant as the snowflakes that fall and pile up at your doorstep.

As we enter this new year, may our resolutions be as John Wesley said:

*“Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.”. — John Wesley.*

Happy New year –

Nancy



**JANUARY 2022 MORNING STAR LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**RESULTS FROM THE DECEMBER 12 ADMINISTRATIVE CONGREGATION MEETING**

Complete meeting minutes can be mailed to you upon request  
 Held on Zoom and in person  
 12 Congregation Members present

**• 2022 BUDGET APPROVED**

- \* Offering Revenues: \$118,282.10
- \* Expenditures: \$135,008.65
- \* Net: **-\$ 16,726.55**

**• 2022 COUNCIL AND OTHER ELECTED**

- \* **Ministry Director:** The Nominating Committee was unable to find a candidate for the position.
- \* **Communications:** Jill Sumpter was approved unanimously.
- \* **Nominating Committee:** Cindy Gulbranson and Patty Tompkins will serve as outgoing council members. Two additional committee members are needed.
- \* **Audit Committee:** No one presented themselves for the positions so they remain open.
- \* **Synod Representatives:** Delaney and Marla Wardell



**MINISTRY DIRECTOR NEEDED**

I would like EVERYONE to prayerfully consider how God is calling you to serve Him in 2022. Morning Star is a generous and loving community that just needs a leader to guide the way. Trust me, as Ministry Director, you will have a small army willing to help and contribute. Unfortunately, many feel like, "I can't lead that," "I wouldn't have a clue how to lead," and "That's too much."

Here's the reality though ... God doesn't call the equipped. He equips the called. He will provide! You can do this! If you're getting a nudge, **LISTEN** and then give me a call.


~ Missy 206-437-2535

**NON-DESIGNATED OFFERINGS AND EXPENSES**

	2021 Budget	October Actual	November Actual
<b>Offerings</b>	\$ 8,930	\$ 8,906	\$ 7,838
<b>Expenses</b>	\$10,163	\$10,528	\$11,088
<b>Surplus/deficit</b>		<b>-\$ 1,622</b>	<b>-\$ 3,250</b>

**2022 MSLC COUNCIL**

Administrative Director <b>Missy Maxson</b>	206-437-2535
Treasurer <b>Brian Johnson</b>	452-503-8352
Community Relations <b>Jill Sumpter</b>	360-348-7231
Facilities <b>Jay Morgan</b>	425-903-1678
Secretary <b>Marla Wardell</b>	360-794-4072
Ministry Director	
Worship <b>Kathi Cooley</b>	425-293-8694

 Morning Star Lutheran Church

 Monroe United Methodist Church

412 South Lewis Street  
Monroe, WA 98272-4149



January 2: Epiphany of Our Lord with Holy Communion - Scripture: [Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14](#), [Matt 2: 1-12](#)  
January 9: Baptism of Our Lord - Scripture: [Psalm 29](#); [Acts 8:14-17](#); [Luke 3: 5-17, 21-22](#)  
January 16: Second Epiphany Holy Communion - Scripture: [Psalm 36:5-10](#); [I Corinthians 12:1-11](#); [John 2:1-11](#)  
January 23: Third Epiphany - Scripture: [Psalm 19](#); [I Corinthians 12:12-31a](#); [Luke 4:14-21](#)  
January 30: Fourth Epiphany - Scripture: [Psalm 71:1-6](#); [I Corinthians 13:1-13](#); [Luke 4:21-30](#)

## CONTACT US:

**Pastor Malcolm Brown**

Email: [prmalcolmb@gmail.com](mailto:prmalcolmb@gmail.com)

Phone: 360-794-2111

## **MONROE UNITED METHODIST**

**Office Administrator:** Jasmine Ray-Symms

Phone: 360-794-8863

Email: [office@monroeumconline.org](mailto:office@monroeumconline.org)

**Music Director:** Lee Ann Obright: 206-369-1621

Website: [www.unitedingrace.org](http://www.unitedingrace.org)

## **MORNING STAR LUTHERAN**

**Office Administrator:** Kathi Cooley

Cell Phone: 425-293-8694

Phone: 360-794-2111

Email: [mssc@morningstarlc.org](mailto:mssc@morningstarlc.org)

**Music Director:** Jill Sumpter: 360-348-7231

Website: [www.unitedingrace.org](http://www.unitedingrace.org)

worship  
ONLINE

**Monroe United Methodist Church &  
Morning Star Lutheran Church**

The service is ready for viewing  
Sundays after 6:00 a.m. and is  
available 24/7.

**YouTube**





*From the Spirit, January 2022*

**From the Bishop:**

During this winter, as many continue to grapple with - and be discouraged by - the continuation of the pandemic, isolation, discontent, and loneliness, we might feel that our relationships are not as strong as they once were – with family and friends,

with colleagues and co-workers, and with those in our church.

Recently I read a book called *Tempered Resilience* by Tod Bolsinger. While I wasn't enthralled with the whole book, I did resonate with one visual that he used and perhaps you will find helpful in this time, too. He writes about how our different relationships help us in our resilience and in our on-going ability to adapt. On page 112 Bolsinger writes, "To flourish in ministry or other forms of social leadership, leaders need to be conscious of at least three different contexts, and the relationships needed to flourish in those contexts, 'front stage, backstage, and offstage.'"

The Front Stage is the public face that we show to the world. It is the place where "performance" happens. It is critical to have trustworthy colleagues or teammates where you are able to be yourself. These relationships could include peers and teammates, partners, and colleagues. An example from scripture would be the disciples. Who would you include in your life?

The Back Stage is the place to support and nurture you in your "front stage" work. Good front stage work depends on lots of time backstage analyzing and thinking about the work that is being done, learning from the lessons of success and failure from others, and especially, gaining perspective from experienced leaders. In his book Bolsinger cautions, Backstage relationships don't happen because of others. They happen because of you." (p. 116) In other words, you might have to seek out "backstage people. Backstage relationships include therapists, coaches, mentors, spiritual directors, pastors, and more. An example in scripture would be David listening to Samuel or Moses listening to his father-in-law Jethro or Ruth listening to Naomi. Who would you include in your life?

The Off Stage are the people that you are emotionally closest to and who are your confidants. As Bolsinger writes, "The quality of your relationships with other people influences how emotionally resilient you can be in the face of an emotional or physical crisis. In general, the more quality social support you can draw upon from family and friends, the more flexible and resilient you can be in stressful situations." (p. 120) An example in scripture would be Elizabeth and Mary. Who would you include in your life?

So, I'm wondering, how are doing in these three areas? Are your relationships strong "front stage, backstage, and off-stage"? Do you have good connections? Where could you form deeper connections? Where do you need help in forming new relationships?

I'd love to hear from you how we can be a more connected church community, how we can support one another, and how resilience can be built up by forming and growing relationships.

I know this is a difficult and frustrating time for many. I feel it, too. May you feel connected with one another. May you feel upheld by one another. And, especially, in this Epiphany season, may God's presence, love and grace be made known to you.

*Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee*  
[bishop@lutheransnw.org](mailto:bishop@lutheransnw.org)



**A message for the Greater Northwest Area from Bishop Elaine Stanovsky**

*By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

Grace to you this morning, we are well into the holiday season, the holy holiday season. And I have not been speaking to you, my people across the Greater Northwest Area of The United Methodist Church much lately. Time and again, I have thought I want to give a good word, to share good news with the people that I serve with. And yet, the words have not come.

So, I want to start this morning just by saying thank you again. I hope you've heard me say thank you before. This has been an awkward and difficult and trying season and you have kept alive, most of you. And we mourn those who have not made it through this pandemic for reasons of COVID or other life circumstances and health circumstances that have taken their lives.

But those of you who are listening to this message, who are hearing this message today, you are alive and you're serving and you're caring, you're struggling at times. Thank you. God works through us. Whether we feel up to the task or not. People find blessing in us. And so, we get up each morning, we greet the sun, and we go on, as best we can, spreading love and hope and tenderness to the people that we encounter. So, thank you. Thank you, God bless you and keep you.

It is a strange and disorienting time, though, isn't it? Don't you find it so? I certainly do. There are so many urgent matters to give our attention to, to open our hearts to, to learn about, to respond to with compassion and understanding. Every time I think about bringing you a good word, I find myself caught.

Shall I speak about the climate and the flooding and the wild-fires and the need to move away from fossil fuels and find new sustainable sources of energy?

Shall I speak to you about COVID and the deaths and the dangers and the trials of not being able to gather and sing together?

Shall I speak to you of January 6 and the divisions that seem to be separating us as people in our nation and threatening the very foundation of civil society?

Shall I speak to you about racism and the trials of Rittenhouse and the people who killed Ahmaud Arbery and Charlottesville and the danger of losing voting rights?

*cont. on next page*

Each time I think about what to speak to you about, I think, if I speak one word, it leaves unspoken those other words, and we carry it all, all at the same time. And yet we can't speak of it all at the same time. And so, I have found myself in a season of silence. Not because I don't feel deeply, not because I'm not attuned with what you're struggling with, with what the world is struggling with. But I find myself unable to speak because it is so broad and so deep and there's so much, it's hard to know where to begin.

I turned to scripture, into prayer, deeply in the last couple of weeks to prepare for this message and what I found there were two great stories in the Gospel of Luke of people being drawn into stillness.

The first is from Luke 1 and it's the song of Zechariah. You remember Zechariah is married to Elizabeth and Elizabeth becomes pregnant with the baby that will become John the Baptist. And Zechariah receives this announcement and is puzzled by it and doesn't quite trust it. He and Elizabeth are older and not sure they can have children. And so, he questions the angel that brings him this news. And the angel strikes him silent, takes his voice away for doubting the word from God.

And he sits in silence, then until you recall that Elizabeth gives birth, the baby is born. They're going to name it Zechariah after his father, and Mary says, "No, his name is John." And that people turn to Zechariah and say, "What do you say about this? What do you think, shouldn't the baby be named after you?" And Zechariah gets his voice back, his voice returns. And he says, he doesn't say I want to name him, John. He doesn't say I name him John. He says, "His name is John" as if it comes from beyond. It's a powerful moment in the scripture.

And then I'm drawn also to Mary. And all that she pondered in her heart as the world was swirling around her and she had given birth to this new baby and shepherds and angels, and the sky opened up and prophets are speaking, and she speaks a word. But then she ponders it all in her heart.

The writers of the Bible, know what we're going through – the fear, the disorientation, the danger, the displacement, exclusion, betrayal, the plagues. They know it all, it's all in the story. It's not a happy Christmas Eve story with babies in and animals in a barnyard and halos. It's also a story of deep displacement, disregard, flight. And yet, it's a story that invites us to wait, to find our own silence, to anticipate, not to wait passively, but to anticipate and watch for and prepare for, and live in hope.

Because the core of the scripture is the message that what's going on around us what we see with our eyes, what we hear with our ears, what we experience in the complex and unpredictable social lives we lead isn't everything, that beneath it, there is a spirit. There is a place where our souls live, there is a place where God who watches and tends the whole complexity of our lives, tends to us, plans for a good future, and invites us to partner in creating that future.

So here we are. We're invited into this season of Advent which is all about coming. Advent means coming. It's about God coming into the world, yes, in the baby Jesus. But God coming every year as we celebrate Advent, every day, as we awaken to the dawn, to lead us in new ways, to teach us new

things, to invite us to participate in our own lives in the world with open eyes, and new awareness.

I want to read to you Psalm 46 this morning. You can hear this as foolish optimism, superficial wishful thinking, or you can hear it as an invitation to look for where the goodness and the hopefulness that God promises is alive and being born in the world.

*Our defense is sure, our shelter and help in trouble, God never stands far off. So we stand unshaken when solid earth cracks and volcanoes slide into the sea. When breakers rage and mountains tremble, the Lord of cosmic power, Jacob's God, will shield us.*

*A river delights the City of God, home of the Holy One most high. With God there, the city stands. God defends it under attack. Nation's rage, empires fall. God speaks, the earth melts. The Lord of cosmic power, Jacob's God, will shield us.*

*Come, see the wonders God does across the earth. Everywhere stopping wars, smashing, crushing, burning all the weapons of wars. An end to your fighting. "Acknowledge me as God," God says. High over nations, high over Earth, the Lord of cosmic power, Jacob's God, will shield us.*

And so, in the season of Advent, we wait. We anticipate. We prepare. We hope for what the scripture tells us is the truth we sometimes cannot see.

Be still. Be still with Zechariah. Be still with Mary. Be still with Job. Be still with Jesus in the garden.

Don't be consumed by what you see on television or on social media. Watch for help in trouble. Notice where our world, our city, our neighborhoods are being made glad.

Pray with me this breathing prayer. Come, Jesus, be born in us today. Come, Jesus, be born in us today. Come, Jesus, be born in us today. And see if you can get up about seven in the morning or a little bit earlier and to look outdoors, find a place that looks east and see if you can see the sun rising.

*"By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

May it be so for you, for your congregation, for your neighborhood and for God's amazing wide world.

Amen.

*Elaine W Stanordy*



## DECEMBER WORSHIP ATTENDANCE



**In Person Services: 25**

**YouTube Live and Edited views: 42**

These numbers are an average of four weeks and represent both congregations.