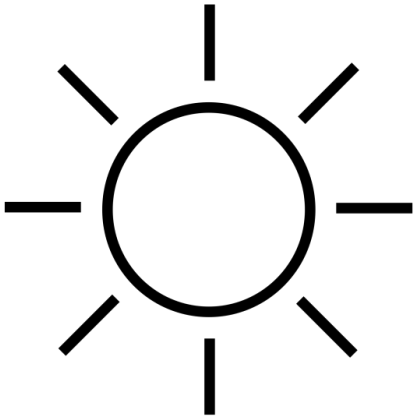


St. Stephen's Lutheran Church



Sun

December 2024

Sundays in Advent 10am

Dec. 1 HOPE

Dec. 8 PEACE

Christmas Pageant & Bake Sale

Dec. 15 JOY

Dec. 22 LOVE



Tuesday Dec. 24th
7:00 pm

Christmas Eve

CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

Please invite someone to come with you as we celebrate God's love for the world in a new-born baby! This season is a time when folks may be needing to feel more included and connected with other loving people at a home church. So let's extend a welcome on Christmas Eve!

The livestream and recorded Candlelight Service will also be available on our website: www.ststephenslutheran.org

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
2500 Soquel Avenue, Santa Cruz, California 95062
Phone—831-476-4700 — Fax—831-476-3918
www..ststephenslutheran.org
email—office@ststephenslutheran.org
Rev. James P. Lapp, Pastor

Ministers: The Entire Congregation

Church Council: Pres. — Beth Stiles V.P.— Steven Hendrickson
Secretary - Alyssa Burkhardt
Treasurer— Mark Linder
Shelly Barker, Sofia Bartee and Iva Tracey

Director of Music: Gary Roberts

Sunday School: Leslie Lapp

Pre-School Director: Kathy Berens

Custodian: John Hopping

Church Administrator: Leslie Lapp

Office Open: Mon.—Fri. 12:00—5:00 pm

Pastor Jim's Contact Hours — Mon.—Thurs. 9am—5pm at 831-325-9095

MISSION STATEMENT

St. Stephen's is a welcoming, healing community who worship God in Christ, nurture people growing in faith, serve others with acceptance and love, and invite people to share the joy of the Spirit.

VISION STATEMENT

To become an energetic, inclusive, multigenerational, multicultural, missional community that offers, hope, joy, worship, service, play, and life as disciples of Jesus Christ

From Pastor Jim



I recently came across this poem which really helped give expression to so much of what I have been feeling since Nov. 5th. I hope it helps you too. It is a deep lament which is appropriate, since the person our nation elected to be President has been so publicly antithetical to so much of what we know the message of our Holy Bible to be, especially when it comes to caring for the most vulnerable in our society.

Advent is still always a hopeful time and the second part tries to raise us out of the deep lament to focus on our mission in the days to come

God,
We're so tired.
We want to do justice, but the work feels endless,
And the results look too small in our exhausted hands.

We want to love mercy, but our enemies are relentless,
and it feels like foolishness to prioritize gentleness in this unbelievably cruel world.
We want to walk humbly, but self-promotion is seductive,
And we are afraid that if we don't look after ourselves, no one will.
We want to be kind, but our anger feels insatiable.

Jesus, in this never-ending wilderness, come to us and grant us grace.
Grant us the courage to keep showing up to impossible battles, trusting that it is our
Commitment to faithfulness, not our obsession with results that will bring your
Shalom.
Grant us the vulnerability to risk loving our difficult and complicated neighbor,
Rejecting the lie that some people are made more in the image of God than others.
Grant us the humility of a de-centered, but Beloved self.

As we continue to take the single step that is in front of us, Jesus,
Keep us from becoming what we are called to transform.
Protect us from using the empire's violence
In our words, in our theology, in our activism, and in our politics—
or your kingdom of peace.

Keep our anger from becoming meanness.
Keep our sorrow from collapsing in to self-pity.
Keep our hearts soft enough to keep breaking.
Keep our outrage turned toward justice, not cruelty.
Remind us that all of this, every bit of it, is for love.
Keep us fiercely kind.

Amen.

By Laura Jena Truman from *A Rhythm of Prayer* -2021



Happy Advent & Merry Christmas

Once again the season of HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE is here. As we wait to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The Good News Singers will be with us each week during December to remind us of the four themes of Advent through music.

As you prepare for your holiday, think of joining the Christmas chorus, and sing with us.

All that Brass are back again! Time and service will be announced shortly.

We all wish you & your family a very special Merry Christmas & a most Peaceful New Year.

In Christ ~ The Music Team



CHRISTMAS POTLUCK

Sunday, December 22
Right after church

Gary's bringing the HAM . . . You all bring the rest!

Reconciling In Christ Welcome Statement

(Approved at January 2020 Congregational Meeting)

“We welcome all who are seeking God’s love and grace.

We welcome all because God welcomes all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or relationship status.

We welcome all without regard to addictions, physical or mental health, imprisonment, socio-economic circumstances, or anything that too often divides us.

Our unity is in Christ.”

Church Council Highlights

1. Devotions from Psalm 146 reminded us to “Put not your trust in rulers.” Which was very prescient since we gathered just one week after the Presidential election. The rest of the Psalm goes on to be very clear about what the will of God is for humanity: “who gives justice to the oppressed, and food to those who hunger. The Lord sets the captive free. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord cares for the stranger (lit.—immigrant); the Lord sustains the orphan and the widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked.” We are concerned that this new President does not understand God’s will (based on many things he has said and done publicly) and we will be prepared to stand up for what is right and Godly.
2. Pastor Jim has visited Connie Cunningham (widow), George Webber (hospice care), and Lew, Bobbie and Eva Erickson (homebound). He has arranged for the new AFC effort in Watsonville to be supported by our sister church there—Lutheran Community, and helped plan the AFC Clergy Gathering as he continues to serve as the Board V.P. He continues to chair Lutheran Campus Ministries at it goes through its major transitions.
3. Eight members attended the recent COPA Assembly with State Senator Anna Caballero and other elected officials at the Vets Hall in Spreckels near Salinas. We heard many stories from our 25 institutions about the cost of housing and the need to assist our neighbor immigrant farmworkers as they are being unfairly targeted by our new President for deportation, despite making up so much of our essential workers in the important agricultural and tourist economies in our region. We committed to work toward more humane solutions.



Child Development Center News

We are ready to entertain you once again with our Friendly Beasts, accompanied by Pastor Jim on guitar in celebration of Christmas. Leslie is always faithful to create or find a story and recruit people from multi generations to participate in this annual event. It is always special. Thank you, Leslie! I

am putting the finishing touches on the commemorative ornament with their picture in it to remember the moment in time. Hope to see you on **December 8th** at 10:00 for this special worship service.

Over the years I have been so grateful to have faithful volunteers help with fixing up our school. Bill Schraft is always ready to help us out. He came over on a Saturday to clear out the rubbish in the back corner of our playground. When John Hopping found out he joined him on a Saturday morning to do this task together. Over the years these two friends of our preschool have been faithful to help me with tasks I cannot do. Thank you, Bill and John!

Paul Cunningham was a good friend to us as well. He was so supportive to me and encouraging. While he was still doing his woodworking, he rebuilt our playground sinks and built us a new gate. I think about him every time I go through the gate. Paul and Connie were the most gracious and kind greeters for so many years at worship service. I still picture them there together. What a true blessing to call Paul a friend.

As we harvested our playground I have had Joel Hurttgam on my mind. He was essential to helping me create a wonderful garden area for our preschoolers. We had fun talking about it especially since he was taking horticulture at Cabrillo. I had taken the class years ago before that at Saddleback. He recruited friends to help build and fill our raised planter beds. Plus, he set up a drip system. Joel helped with many projects, and I'll never forget in those early days he said, "What Kathy wants Kathy gets." Joel, Ron, Bill, and Paul along with many others have left their legacy of talent and caring to our preschool. John Hopping keeps us going daily and is a great partner to work with!

A big support to our preschool is our School Board members Bill & Margaret Schraft, Barbara Johnston, Kathy Allen, and Pastor Jim. These are

our current members and there have been several more over the years. As the Long-Range Task Force continues to put together ideas for the future of our church the future of our preschool is automatically part of this decision that ultimately the congregation will make. I have never really thought about when I would retire as it is hard to picture not being here. Our preschool has been at the forefront of my life and all the kind folks I have worked with, including so many volunteers.

This year we began with a young group. Some of them are now settling into the routine. It takes a while and consistency to develop a social emotional bond with younger children. I am feeling those connections now after focusing our efforts on this. They are more likely to redirect when they trust the kindness we are offering and draw a boundary they can understand. I see progress and that is always rewarding. With progress they are still young, and we continue to adjust our activities and methods to remain appropriate to their abilities.

Children can listen to stories, sing, and follow directions. It is a matter of whether they want to, or if using the power not to is more important to them at the time. This is probably the most challenging part. Typically, we notice a big growth spurt over Christmas vacation. They return more settled in. We look forward to the year 2025 and experiencing the growth the children are making as they turn three and four.

Other than a week in January we will be working with Sam in December for her last month with us. Sam has been a delight here for 5 years. She is an excellent teacher of young children. Her education makes her one of the best I have ever worked with. It is instinct with her, a natural nurturing way, yet strong and predictable. I am so proud of how hard she worked here and how hard she is working for nursing school. May the best future be waiting for her once she graduates. Brenda, Rosio and I remain as we decide if or how to fill Sam's shoes. In the meantime, I sure do appreciate Brenda and Rosio and finding out what the future holds for all of us.

I have always trusted that God has a plan for our ministry, and I give grace, and practice patience as I wait for the signs that he shows me to move in the direction meant for all of us. Have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Warmly, Kathy Berens



CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

December 8

10:00 am

Come experience a fresh retelling of the Christmas story. Bring a friend!

- * There may be some giggles
- * Likely some smiles
- * Hopefully some toe tapping
- * Definitely some oogling over our cute kids
- * Maybe even an ah – ha moment

You are the light of the world we sing

I am your child

Light it up through me

Are any of you able to help? This pageant requires some audience participation. May we shine OUR lights, as we remember the true light of Christmas.

Mary Martha / Ruth Rebecca Circle

ANGEL TREE

Our Angel Tree is in the narthex, thanks to these MMRR Elves. 30 Angels are ready for the taking and gifting to children ages 3 to 12 years old. Pick up your Angels, sign the gift sheet and buy a gift for \$20.00 or less for each. **Return the unwrapped gift on December 8th with the Angel tag securely attached.** Our Angel gifts are provided to deserving children through the "Adopt a Family" outreach program of the Volunteer Center of Santa Cruz. These local families are dealing with hardships such as: unemployment, homelessness, disabilities, health challenges or victims of violent crime.



Sunday, December 8th BAKE SALE!!

We have a great way to expand your variety of holiday goodies for family and friends. Bring your batches of homemade specialties. Buy the delights that intrigue you! Bake Sale proceeds will continue Circle ministry projects.

Thursday, December 12th, 10:30 – Circle Cookie and Gift Exchange.

Bring a dozen cookies and a \$10.00 gift. We will take a break from holiday preparations to visit over cookies, coffee and tea.

NEW YEAR, NEW ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS!

January 9 - Valentine decorating and greeting for "I You Venture".

for further information, contact Tina gateschristina84@gmail.com
or Cheryl Curry cherylcjf@cs.com

ELCA Good Gifts & God's Global Barnyard

As odd as it seems to **give someone the gift of a cow, or a goat, or some chicks, or honey bees**, it is this kind of a gift that can change a life, a family and possibly a whole community.



These Gifts are a creative, meaningful way to support the ministries that mean the most to you and your loved ones. The items in the Good Gifts catalog lift up examples of work being done in different projects and programs supported by funds from the ELCA: **Fund for Leaders, Global Church Sponsorship, Malaria Campaign, New Congregations, Vision for Mission, World Hunger and Disaster Response**. Each of these programs is a long-term partnership-based ministry that focus on the needs identified by local congregations and global companion churches and their communities.

Your gifts to **God's Global Barnyard will support the sustainable development ministries of the ELCA World Hunger**, which include training, education, resources (and much more) to help the community care for animals and create new market opportunities **like starting a small business selling eggs, meat or dairy products**. Your gifts support this comprehensive approach to animal husbandry. ELCA.org or 1-800-638-3522



December - Special Benevolence Offering

This is a ministry of U.S. Lutherans serving communities living in poverty overseas. It is perhaps best known for the way it responds to the suffering induced by natural disasters. The current crisis is in the path of Hurricane destruction in Central America. But day in and out, LWR works far beyond emergency operations. Their vision is a world in which each person, every community, and all generations live in justice, dignity and peace. Learn more at LWR.org.



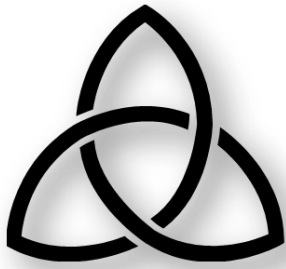
Happy New Year! Advent is the beginning of the new church year. It is a period of four weeks before Christmas that help us focus our hearts and minds toward the coming of the Christ into the world.

The circular shape of the wreath symbolizes God's infinite love for us. It has no beginning and no end. The four candles on the wreath symbolize the concepts of hope, peace, joy and love. One candle is lit each Sunday in Advent. This year the color of the candles is blue – the color of hope. The wreath itself is formed from branches of laurel, which reminds us of victory over persecution and suffering. The greens that form the wreath, pine, holly, and yew signify immortality, cedar in the wreath signifies strength and healing. The wreath has four candles. The candle lit on the first week is called the prophecy candle. It is the candle of hope. This candle helps us remember the 300 prophecies God gave to the people in the Old Testament telling them to keep watch and expect the Messiah.

The second week of Advent, we light the first candle and add the second candle, the candle of Peace. This is the Bethlehem Candle. The Bethlehem Candle helps us to remember the journey Joseph and Mary's took to Bethlehem.

The third candle is a remembrance of the joy the shepherds experienced when they heard the news and visited the "new born King". The final candle is Love. It represents God's all-encompassing love to us. Known as the Angel Candle, it is a symbol of purity, peace, and justice brought to the world by Christ.

Thank you to Barbara Johnston for her faithful hand made creation for our sanctuary. The Advent wreath is given to the Glory of God and in memory of Barbara's mother, Kathryn Greso who long ago taught her the meaning of Advent and to her old friend Sibbi who taught her how to tie the greens into a wreath.



Trinity Tuesday

(Pub Theology / Discussion)

December 3 at 6:30pm

(First Tuesday of the month)

Place: Discretion Brewing 41st Ave.

1 HOUR

1 QUESTION

1 DRINK

(3-in-1)

Everyone is invited to join us this fellowship gathering. Bring a theological question you would like to discuss or share a “faith” concern in a relaxed space with people who are interested. **Kathy Allen 430-6359 for more info.**

I was asked to describe this time “to be more clear on what to expect”. It’s not a Bible Study, no one has a lesson to teach. The atmosphere is light, and we enjoyed each other. We brought differences to the table - Each added something others didn’t expect. We listened, pondered, and even chuckled a bit. Our first gathering was on election night. The first question asked was something like: “If your candidate wins, does that mean it was God’s will?” You can imagine the fascinating conversation we had (about God, not the candidates).

** Come - share — build community **



On ZOOM with Pr. Jim

Check email on Tues. for link

WEDNESDAYS

11a -12noon (no 4th Wed.)

& 7:30 – 8:30 pm



Sister Parish News

As of this writing, the **2024 Delegation** is underway! The group, including our own Jeanne Boudreau, left on November 18th. As usual, there will be time to interact with people in our communities through craft projects, meetings, and shared meals. There will be time to hear from community leaders speaking about the current social and political conditions in El Salvador. One special event will be the Guillermo Ungo school graduation ceremony. There will also be time for fun! Pictured at right is the group having dinner out in Suchitoto with Sister Peggy.



As a reminder, we will be renewing support for our prayer children in early 2025. Watch this space for more information as it becomes available. We usually receive the new scholarship list from the Guillermo Ungo scholarship committee in February.

On behalf of the Board of Directors for Santa Cruz al Salvador (SCaS), we thank everyone at St. Stephen's who have contributed toward our programs.

Your gifts make a difference!

Peace in Christ,
Kent Madsen & Jeanne Boudreau



God's Gift of Peace

By Steven Hendrickson

But the angel said to them, " Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born today in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."

Luke 2:9-11

Let's face it, we need some good news. Very Good News! Right now we are raw with anxiety, concern, dread, fear, and total uncertainty. In Roman occupied Palestine, it's very possible that many Hebrews were of the same mind, heart, and range of emotions. This part of the infancy narrative in Luke has always appealed to me: the Shepherds and the Angels. Putting oneself in the presence of the shepherds, it is very dark, utterly silent except for sheep bleating, and the shepherds knowing that they are very poor, forgotten, and possibly filled with the emotions named above. Then all of a sudden, an angel appears in very bright light, surrounded by the heavenly host. As the angel begins to tell the good news, they like we, might be terrified of this theophany, a revealing of God's messenger with news we scarcely can fathom, little alone believe! The heavenly host praises God and affirms the message of the angel. Imagine this playing out before your eyes! Once the angel and the heavenly host leaves, it was probably dark and silent again. The shepherds were told where Jesus was born, and they acted on this information. They went to Bethlehem and found Mary, Joseph, and Jesus lying in a manger. This is where God's peace and grace filled their bodies, soul and spirit and filled them with wonder and awe. The shepherds told the story of their encounter with the angel and the heavenly host. This changed their world and ours forever. They returned to their flock, praising God, and experienced a peace beyond human understanding.

My prayer for our beloved community this Christmas is that as we live in our present context, the angel and heavenly host would appear in the cave of our hearts. Wherever we are on our spiritual journey, may the peace and joy in Jesus Christ illumine us. From our inner being, let us radiate the love of God in Christ to a world in a deep need for peace. May it be so.....

Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year to all.....

Birthdays & Anniversaries

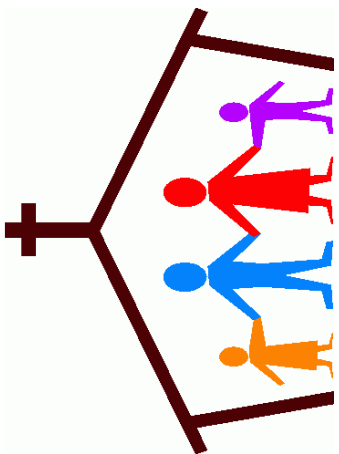
12-2 Ken Gross	12-18 Leslie Ruble	
12-6 Don Smawley	12-20 Stefan Meek	12-04 Peggy & Phil
12-7 Donald Daves	12-26 Shay Barsabe	Crews
12-7 Dawit	12-28 Brad Tuttle	
Gebremeriam	12-31 Jeanette	12-04 John & Kathy
	Dawson	Hopping
12-8 Maryann Hurttgam	12-31 Dusty Gipson	
12-14 Sheryl Brouse		12-22 Chris & Lorie Juhl
12-15 Robert Bartee		



Prayer Concerns

SHORT TERM: Linda, Scott, the family of Ryan Fairrington, For Connie & Family of Paul Cunningham, The Glosier family, For Julie Mouw & Family of Marty Lundin, Unemployed, George Webber, Michelle & Family, Family of Travis, Boci, Isaac & Marissa, Chris Powers, Gloria, Jack & Kim Sanford, Lucia, Dennis Lewis, For Beth & Family of Barbara Stiles, Marta's parents, Adrienne, Gary & Louse Matz, Friends in Tel Aviv, family of Barbara Klapper, family of Lauren Patrick, Patrick & Family, The Moore family, the Brown Family, Family of Sandra Barker, Nick, James, Beth Mills, Mary D., Tom, Galahad, Susan O., Debbie, Sam, James, Michael Lee, Nate Barker, Grandpa Dennis, Bob & Shirley Salter, Monica & Family, Lurline Moore, Beth Butler, Jen, Robbin, Maria Mendoza, Ila & Reina, Francisco, Margot Wilson, Michael, Keith, Noelle, Ensley, Tim Oldfield, Sierra, Julie R., Rosie, Janet, Sue, Middle East Peace, Tom Dawson, James, Taiyo, Marissa, Isaac, Alvarado family, Dustin, Father Jack Davis, Sandi Csik, Janica Paustian, James, John, Elida, Jeannie, Anetta, Jane, Barbara Allen, Sandy, Levi & Alexandra, Gary & Marjie Toops, Paul Paustian, Gaye Cornell, Dorothy, Rachel B., Anne & Chloe Johnston, Nancy, Mateo & Lina, Don, Atlas, Will, Aaron Johnson, Sal, Katarina, Stephanie Jager.

LONG TERM: Biergiel—Colclough family, Carla Brown, Eric Utto-Galarneau, Joel Hurtgamm, Dawit and family (Ethiopia), April McCalmont, Marty Nehring, Miller Mouw, Kyle Lapp, Shelby Volpi, Ashley, Frank, Joe, Lisa & Beau, Linda Johnson, Bailey Ingalls, Jan Shadle, Vi Olly, Bobbie Erickson, Mike, Susan Anderson, Jan Wagner, Richard C., Brouse Family, Janet Baker, Sandy Godvine, Janelle Yung, Karin, Will, Chris, Pearl Runquist, Volpi & Robe Family, Cabel, Noah, Esdras, Immigrant families, The Homeless, People of Ukraine, People of Palestine/Israel, Our Nation's leaders, Mt. Cross, St. Stephen's Child Development Ctr, S.S. Senior Housing, Pastor Jim & Our Church Family, men & women of Armed Forces, and the Youth of today.¹⁵



ST. STEPHEN'S WORSHIP SERVICE

Ready for your participation each Sunday at 10am.

In-person, Live Streamed on our website, or as a recording.

Go to ***www.stephenslutheran.org***

(Print the bulletin and Celebrate so you can read, sing and pray with Pastor Jim. Have some bread and wine/grape juice ready for Holy Communion)

**NEWSLETTER WAS SENT ON
November 26, 2024**

**POST OFFICE:
DATED MATERIAL
PLEASE DO NOT DELAY**

St Stephen's Lutheran Church
2500 Soquel Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95062

Non-Profit Org.
Postage Paid
Permit #7079
Santa Cruz, CA 95060-9998