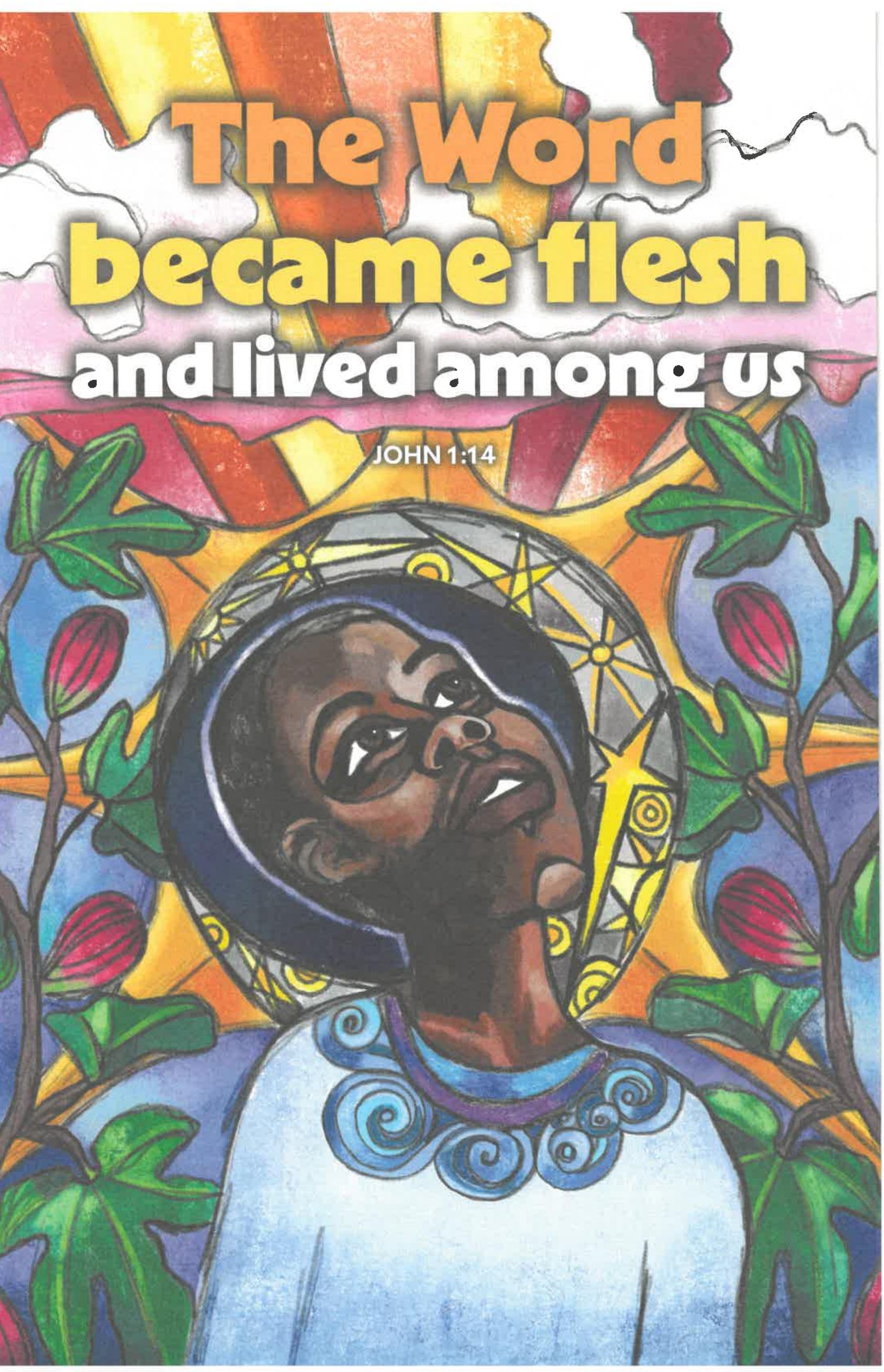


**The Word
became flesh
and lived among us**

JOHN 1:14





January 4, 2026
The Second Sunday after Christmas

... What do you fear?
let fear fuel a fire for justice
Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Welcome to people new to this church or faith, long time Lutherans, and Christians from every tradition. Welcome to all who have no church home, want to follow Christ, have doubts, or do not believe. Welcome to new visitors and old friends. Welcome to people of every age and size, color and culture, sexual orientation and marital status, ability and challenge. Welcome to believers and questioners and questioning believers. This is a place where you are welcome to celebrate and sorrow, rejoice and recover. This is a place where lives are made new. Welcome on this day.

Music “Joy to the World” by George Frederick Handel

Call to Confession

Friends, every day we are given choices—the choice to be a friend, to be an ally, to extend a welcoming hand. Some days we choose wisely, but from time time, we inevitably get it wrong. That is one of the many reasons we need the Prayer of Confession. In this moment of prayer, we are able to practice the art of forgiveness. So join me in this transformative moment. Join me receiving grace. Let us pray.

Prayer of Confession & Words of Forgiveness

When you were afraid,
did I stay by your side?
Did I offer my hand,
or did I leave you alone?
When you were afraid,
did I choose solidarity?
Did I see your fear,
or did I only see mine?

**Friend, none of us are perfect. We all make mistakes.
Fortunately, God offers grace, and we do too.
So take a deep breath, and let's start again.**

Thank you. Your mercy is a gift.

**Now we must ask—
when you were afraid,
did we stay by your side?
Did we offer our hands,
or did we leave you alone?
When you were afraid,
did we choose solidarity?
Did we see your fear?
Or did we only see ours?**

Friends, none of us are perfect. We all make mistakes.
Fortunately, God offers grace, and I do too.
So take a deep breath, and let's start again.

**Thank you. Your mercy is a gift.
We accept your grace and would love to start again.**

May it be so, with God's help.
Alleluia, amen.

*Opening Hymn

“Angels, from the Realms of Glory” Red #275

1. Angels, from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Once you sang creation's story,
Now proclaim Messiah's birth;

REFRAIN

Come and worship, come and worship
Worship Christ, the newborn king.

2. Shepherds, in the fields abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing,
Yonder shines the infant light;

REFRAIN

3. Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great desire of nations,
You have seen his natal star.

REFRAIN

4. All creation, join in praising
God, the Father, Spirit, Son.
Evermore your voices raising
To the eternal Three in One.

REFRAIN

*Greeting

P: The steadfast love of God, the life of Jesus Christ
and the power of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you.

Call to Worship

Here in worship—
we pray together,

we stand together,
we sing together,

we listen together.

Here in worship — we are not alone.

So when life gives you reason to grieve, to fear, or to worry,
remember this moment.

We are not alone.

Let us worship our with-us God.

Kyrie

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” # 257 vs. 1 ~ 2

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

REFRAIN

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel,
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

O come, O Wisdom from on high
embracing all things far and nigh:
in strength and beauty come and stay;
Teach us your will and guide our way. **REFRAIN**

Hymn of Praise

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” #270 vs 1 & 3

Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.”
Joyful, all you nations, rise;
Join the triumph of the skies;
With angelic hosts proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

REFRAIN

Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn king!”

Hail the heav’n born Prince of Peace!
Hail the sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Ris’n with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
Born to raise each child of earth,
born to give us second birth REFRAIN

*Prayer of the Day

P: May God be with you.
C: **And also with you.**
P: Let us Pray. Celebrate pg. 1

The Word of God

God Stories

First Reading Jeremiah 31:7-14 Celebrate pg. 1

L: Word of God, Word of Life.

C: Thanks be to God.

Psalm 147 Congregation refrain Celebrate pg. 2

Second Reading Ephesians 1:3-14 Celebrate pg. 3

P: Word of God, Word of Life.

C: Thanks be to God.

(Please stand as you are able)

Gospel Acclamation

“Angels We Have Heard on High” #289 vs. 1

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains

Gloria... in excelsis Deo
Gloria... in excelsis Deo

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Mathew

C: Glory to you, O God.

*Gospel Reading

John 1:1-18

Celebrate pg. 3

P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon

Rev. James Lapp

*Hymn of the Day

"Of the Father's Love Begotten" #295

1. Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the Source, the Ending He,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see
Evermore and evermore.
2. Oh, that birth forever blessed
When the Virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bore the Savior of our race,
And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
First revealed His sacred face
Evermore and evermore.
3. This is he whom seers in old time
Chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word;
Now he shines, the long expected;
Let creation praise its Lord
Evermore and evermore.

4. Let the heights of heav'n adore him;
Angel hosts, his praises sing;
Pow'rs, dominions, bow before him
and extol our God and King;
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Ev'ry voice in concert ring
Evermore and evermore.
5. Christ, to Thee, with God the Father,
And, O Holy Ghost, to Thee
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving
And unending praises be,
Honor, glory, and dominion,
And eternal victory
Evermore and evermore.

Affirmation of Faith

We have seen the valley.
We have seen a sky without stars.
We have seen the longest night, and *still* we believe.
We believe in a with-us God.
We believe that good news is louder than fear.
We believe this good news is for all people.
So even when our knees shake,
even when our voice trembles,
even when fear is all around us,
we will hold onto that good news.
We will reach for each other.
We will look for God in our midst.
We will sing songs of joy.
We will proclaim: *Unto us, love is born.*
We have seen the longest night,
and we have seen unimaginable love.
So *still*, we believe. Amen.

*Prayers of the People

Ever-reaching, with-us God,
we don't always know the words to pray.
We stumble over our words. We meander in our thoughts.
We fail to be eloquent when we try.
But no matter our words, we know that you are listening.
So today, holy God,
we want to say thank you for the "reachers."
Thank you for the people in our life who have reached for us
when we have needed it most.
Thank you for friends and family,
for Sunday school teachers and confirmation mentors,
for therapists and school chaplains,
for neighbors and attentive strangers.
Thank you for the people, who like Joseph,
chose to reach for us and stay by our side
when we needed it most.
We pause to remember their names and faces now,
and to silently lift these individuals to you in gratitude.

(Moment of silence)

Holy One, while we count our blessings,
we also pray for those who face their fear alone.
We pray for those who do not have a Joseph in their life.
In particular, we remember those in isolation jail cells,
and for those in medical quarantine.
We pray for single parents, and for widowers.
We pray for immigrants and foreign exchange students,
who so often feel alone in a new country.
We pray for those who feel isolated by their grief,
their addiction, or their mental health.
Show us how to reach across dividing lines.
Show us how to walk with each other,
on the good days and the bad.
Show us how to see each other.
Show us how to reach for each other.

As you do, like Joseph,
we will do our best to walk each other home.
With hope for a better tomorrow, we pray the words your son
taught us to pray, saying. . .

*Prayers of Intercession

Celebrate pg. 4

Thank you for the beauty of nature
as we welcome a new season.
Thank you for the contagious joy of children.
Thank you for homemade meals
and the kindness of strangers.
Thank you for music that ascends our spirits,
and scripture that points to your presence.
It can be hard to put into words how grateful we truly are.
And all God's children said: **Amen.**

The Communion Meal

*Passing of the Peace

P: May the peace of God be with you always.
C: And also with you.

Offering — We honor and worship God by returning some of
the gifts with which we have been blessed.

Music “Gloria in Excelsis Deo”

Offertory

“O Come, All Ye Faithful” Red #283 vs. 1

O come, all ye faithful
Joyful and triumphant
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem
Come and behold him
Born the King of angels

REFRAIN

O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him
O come, let us adore him. Christ the Lord

*Eucharistic Prayer

We live in a fearful world.
If we’re honest, we come to this Table today
with the taste of fear on our tongues.
We come to this Table carrying our anxiety.
We come to this Table asking for guidance.
We come to this Table with all of life’s “what-ifs.”

But you do not disregard our fear.
You do not brush it under the rug or call us foolish.
You do not ignore the realities in front of us.
You do not dish out empty or hurtful platitudes,
telling us to “toughen up” or “power through.”
Instead, you meet us here.

You listen to our fears.
You remind us that we are not alone.
You surround us with people who love us.
You show us where we are strong. You walk beside us.
And you give us a new song to sing.

So today we pray, gracious God:
replace the fear on our tongues
with words of hope and songs of joy.
As we come to this Table,
pour out your Spirit on this bread and cup.
Remind us that even in a fearful world,
you are on the move.
Remind us that even in a fearful world, you are here,
inviting us to the Table, nourishing our spirits,
reminding us that we belong, calling us by name.

Instill that good news in us, for this is a joyful feast.
Fear is not the loudest voice today.
What a gift that is.
Now with hope for a better tomorrow,
we join our voices together in thanksgiving to you.

*Great Thanksgiving

May God be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to God.

Let us give our thanks to God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

*Words of Institution

***Lord's Prayer**

**C: Our Father, in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today, our daily bread.
 Forgive us our sins
 as we forgive those
 who sin against us.
 Save us from the time of trial,
 and deliver us from evil.
 For the kingdom,
 the power and the glory are yours
 Now and forever. Amen**

(You may be seated)

***Invitation to the Table**

Here at this Table, there is enough room, enough food, enough love for everyone.

Here at this Table, Jesus is standing up on his chair, waving his hands over his head, saying to each of you, "I saved you a seat!"

Here at this Table, you are wanted and welcomed.

Here at this Table, you are safe and loved.

Here at this Table, you belong.

So my friends, there is no need for fear here, for this is a joyful feast, and you are invited.

Come. All are truly welcome.

Holy Communion

Guests; You are welcome to come forward to receive Communion as part of this church family! Please receive the bread and dip into the cup. The wine is red. The grape juice is white. Children are always welcome to come forward and receive Holy Communion or a special blessing—parents please provide direction.

Lamb of God *“Love Has Come”* Red #292 vs. 1 & 3

Love has come a light in the darkness!
Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.
See, all heaven has come to proclaim it;
Hear how their song of joy arises:
Love! Love! Born unto you, a Savior!
Love! Love! Glory to God on high!
Love has come and never will leave us!
Love is life everlasting and free.
Love is Jesus within and among us,
Hear how their song of joy arises:
Love! Love! Love is the gift of Christmas.
Love! Love! Praise to you, God on high!

Communion Hymn *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly*” #276

Infant holy, infant lowly,
for his bed a cattle stall;
oxen lowing, little knowing
Christ the child is Lord of all.
Swiftly winging, angels singing,
bells are ringing, tidings bringing:
Christ the child is Lord of all!
Christ the child is Lord of all!

(hymn continued)

Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping
vigil till the morning new
saw the glory, heard the story,
tidings of a gospel true.

Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,
praises voicing, greet the morrow:
Christ the child was born for you!
Christ the child was born for you!

The Sending

*Communion Blessing

P: May this Holy Communion of our Lord Jesus Christ
strengthen you and keep you in God's grace
now and forever.

C: Amen.

* Prayer After Communion

Loving God,
When the world is racked with fear,
you gather us together.
You set the table. You meet us here.
You nourish our bodies as you nourish our spirits.
You remind us that this is a joyful feast,
and that fear cannot win every time.
So with renewed courage, with renewed hope,
with renewed conviction, send us out into the world.
Help us to feed others as you have fed us.
With gratitude we pray, **Amen.**

***Blessing**

May you look for God's spirit.
May you reach for each other's hands.
May you choose courage whenever you can.
And in all things, may you remember
that good news is louder than fear.
In the Name of the One who calls,
+ the One who sends,
and the One who journeys with—
Amen.

***Closing Hymn**

“Cold December Flies Away” Red #299

1 Cold December flies away at the rose-red splendor.
April's crowning glory breaks
while the whole world wonders
at the holy unseen power
of the tree which bears the flower.
On the blessed three blooms the reddest flower.
On the tree blooms the rose here in love's own garden,
full and strong in glory.

2 In the hopeless time of sin shadows deep had fallen.
All the world lay under death.
Eyes were closed in sleeping.
But, when all seemed lost in night,
came the sun whose golden light
brings unending joy, brings the endless joy
of our hope, highest hope, of our hopes bright dawning,
Son beloved of heaven.

(hymn continued)

3 Now the bud has come to bloom,
and the world awakens.

In the lily's purest flower dwells a wondrous fragrance.
And it spreads to all the earth
from the moment of its birth;
and its beauty lives.

In the flower it lives,
in the flower, and it spreads in its heavenly brightness
sweet perfume delightful.

***Dismissal**

Go in peace and *Be Not Afraid*.
Thanks be to God!

Music “Alleluia”

*The Altar Flowers are given by
Janet Slay
In honor of Diane's birthday*



2026 Flower Chart is wide open. Sign up in Narthex

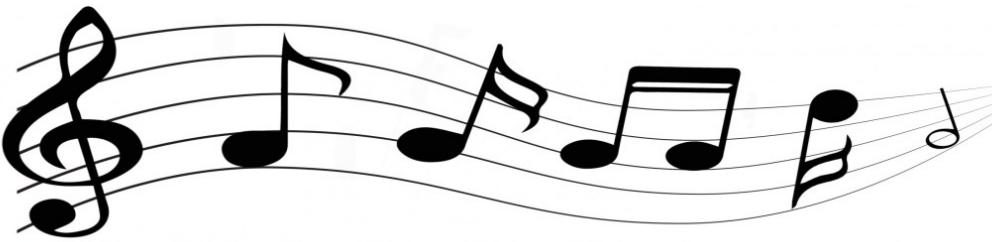


SHORT TERM

Mary Robe & Family, Renee, Family of Laura Gates, Sina & Bella, Katie's family, Chad Fields, Laura, Ayla, Tate & Terry, Beth Stiles, Margaret Schraft, Laura & twin babies, James, Don & Taiyo, Gary & Connie Stevenson, Family of Bobbie Erickson, Kevin, Marc Northcott, Cheryl & David Craig, Beth, Liz, Joan Wilson Family, Sam, Florence, Tom Williams, Tim Oldfield, Kathy M., Nancy, Jennifer Linkeon, Corrine & Daniel, Connie Garcia & Family, Tina & family, Ana, Kathybelle Barlow, Family & friends of Rev. Jim Carr, Grey, Levi, James, Galahad, Debbie, Sam, Nate Barker, Robbin, Keith, Noelle, Ensley, Middle East Peace, Tom Dawson, Dustin, Father Jack Davis, Adolfo, Elida, Jeannie, Anetta, Jane, Barbara Allen, Gary & Marjie Toops, Rachel B., Anne & Chloe Johnston, Isaac & Marissa, Mateo & Lina, Atlas, Sal, Katarina, Stephanie Jager.

LONG TERM Those suffering with Mental Illness, James Sheehan, Biergiel—Colclough family, Eric Utto-Galarneau, Beth UG, Brian Utto, Kathy Brooks, Joel Hurtgamm, Dawit and family (Ethiopia), Miller, April, Aaron Johnson, Shelby, Ashley, Frank, Joe, Lisa & Beau, Linda Johnson, Jan Shadle, Vi Olly, Mike, Susan Anderson, Brouse Family, Janet Baker, Sandy Godvine, Janelle Yung, Karin, Will, Chris & John B., 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.

** Please notify when to remove **



LOVE

Music at St. Stephen's

The Bible tells us, by reminding us that God is Love (1 John 4:8) and demonstrated it by sending Jesus (John 3:16). It also commands believers to love one another (John 13:34), and their enemies. (Corinthians 13), Love is Patient, and Kind.

We show our Love for church, family, and friends. We worship by singing together, becoming a choir, by readings and daily deeds of faith.

As a child, we were loved, and lead in a good direction to where we are now present. By good parents we all demonstrate tons of love each day and it makes us feel good inside.

I am proud of members of the “Good News Singers” who dedicates themselves weekly to spread the Gospel in their singing. Go to the internet and lookup songs of Love—oh and join the choir.

“What the world needs now, is love sweet love.” It’s the only thing there is just too little of. Thank Burt Bacharach, and many others.

Yours in Christ & Mission,
Gary

TAIZE

Prayer Silence & Meditative Song



Wednesday, January 21st at 6:00 pm

Are you feeling a bit out of sorts, stressed, harried, super busy? At times, I do. When I lived in San Jose and was a member of Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, I discovered the power of a Taizé service to help me find peace, calm, connection to community and to God.

Taizé was founded during World War II by Brother Robert Schutz. The community has grown into an international center for spirituality. Its mission emphasizes reconciliation, peace, and unity among Christians from diverse backgrounds. The heart of Taizé worship are simple repetitive chants that create a serene atmosphere conducive to meditation & prayer.

A Taizé service includes beautiful melodies that allow us to enter into a spirit of prayer. The simplicity of the chants invites everyone to participate. The service includes scripture readings and moments of silence providing space for personal reflection and listening to God's voice.

The service includes candle lighting, symbolizing our prayers and intentions for ourselves and others.

A Taizé service to be a midweek opportunity to step away from the busyness of life and immerse ourselves in God's presence. It is an opportunity for all of us – families, singles, youth, seniors – to pause, pray and connect with God and one another in a peaceful environ. It is an opportunity to gather together for a powerful evening of faith, meditation & community.

If you would like to join a group of us in planning a Taizé experience for St. Stephen's and the wider SC community please let us know .

– Mark Linder

The Season of Giving

This holiday season, we thank everyone who has supported St. Stephen's this past year with their time, talent and financial contributions and look forward to support from all of our members in the year ahead.

If you need a convenient way to make regular offerings or if you plan to make an additional gift before the end of the year, we encourage you to check out our electronic giving options. As the pace of life speeds up, especially around the holidays, you may find electronic giving a most welcome way to make contributions.

For more info. contact Janet Slay 475-5668

Your 2026 Offering envelopes are here, please pick them up in the narthex.

God uses money to confirm direction.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6

Other Giving Options

We are now able to receive donations made by: credit card, debit card, PayPal, Venmo & Zelle.

There are three choices:

- 1) **Vanco**, our regular electronic giving provider;
- 2) **PayPal / Venmo / Zelle** for single one-time gifts;
- 3) **PayPal** with the possibility of recurring donations and an option to cover the fees. All are available at <https://ststephenslutheran.org>



Upcoming Events:

January Benevolence = Community Bridges

Jan. 6 Scouts 6:00 pm

Jan. 6 Trinity Tuesday 6:30 pm Discretion Brew 41st Ave.
Gather to explore how faith intersects with life.
Honest conversation and genuine community.

Jan. 7 Bible Study 7:30 pm

Jan. 8 - Preschool chapel 10:15 am
- Women's Circle of Promise 10:30 am

Jan. 8 & 22 Women's Café Group 6:00 pm Dinner & Devotions

Jan. 8 Mens beginner A.A. 7:00 pm

Jan. 9 A. A. Group 7:00 pm

Jan. 10 Embroiders Guild 10 am— 4 pm fireside

Jan. 13 - Knitters Guild 6:15 pm
- Church Council 6:30 pm

Jan. 14 Annual Report Deadline NOON

Jan. 15 Knitters Guild 10 am

Jan. 22 Newsletter Deadline

Jan. 25 Annual Meeting (bring snacks to share)

Jan. 31 Provide AFC Shelter Dinner 5:45—7:15 pm
St. John's 125 Canterbury Drive Aptos
Offer your resources to our neighbors without housing.
We are all worthy of dignity and connection. You can assist those without homes to a better life. (see sign up)

Worship online at www.ststephenslutheran.org

Recorded for you to view anytime.

Please participate by having your worship bulletin and Celebrate ready

Zoom Bible Studies with Pastor Jim on Wednesdays 7:30pm.
Check your email on Wednesday for the link to the Zoom meeting.

Our 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, invite people to share the joy of the spirit.

Reconciling in Christ

"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."

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church E.L.C.A.
2500 Soquel Avenue Santa Cruz, CA 95062
831/476-4700 FAX 831/476-3918
email: office@ststephenslutheran.org
Web Address: www.ststephenslutheran.org
Office Hours: Mon.—Friday. 12:00 —5:00 pm

Ministers: The People of St. Stephen's

Pastor: Rev. James P. Lapp

Church Administrator: Leslie Lapp

Church Musician: Gary Roberts

Sunday School: Leslie Lapp

Pre-School Director: Kathy Berens

Custodian: John Hopping

Videographers: Jay Johnston, Kent Madsen & Barb Rice

Music used by permission Onelicense #A-706539