



Christmas Newsletter 2020

Central United Church

135 Wellington St., St. Thomas, ON N5R 2R7

ph. 519-631-3503 fx. 519-633-7525

admin@centraluc.ca

www.centraluc.ca

As Christians in an increasingly non-Christian and commercial context, every year we have to remind ourselves about the real meaning of Christmas. While this Christmas will be different from those past, it is in ways we never could have imagined. The world has been turned completely upside down. We've been robbed of those precious moments that center us, including the ways we worship during Advent and Christmas. We will miss the cherished, familiar traditions and rituals.

In the midst of this upheaval, where do we find Christmas? For me, the answer comes in the **stories**. They were originally told to listeners who understood shepherds and sheep, magi and camels, angels and stars as symbolic, in ways we do not. For those listeners, the stories were unencumbered by centuries during which the stories became charming heart-warmers from an ancient past. So, I am led to ask: What is the essential truth of these stories? How do they speak to us and to the world **now**?

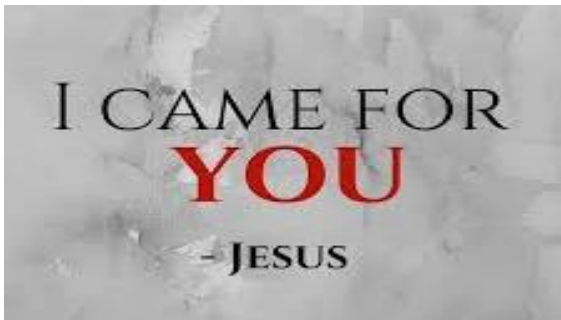
When we dig deeper into the stories, they are about oppression, misuse and abuse of power, poverty and the systemic structures that keep people poor. They are about fear and displacement, refugees and discrimination. Their meaning and relevance to the 21st century is apparent and undeniable.

Importantly, the stories remind us of how to navigate through the world, as it was then and is now. As people of faith, we believe in hope, love, and justice. Trust in God leads us to live differently in the world: speaking truth to power, giving voice to the disenfranchised, and living in right relationship with our neighbours.

Even in these, for us unusually, tumultuous times, the true story of Christmas is the one that comes alive **in and through us** into the 21st century world we find ourselves.

This Christmas, may you have hope and health and be a beacon of love and peace.

Rev. Pegi



Our family is pondering how our Christmas celebrations need to be changed due to Covid restrictions. There would be 19 of us if we were all together ---- but we anticipate that such a group gathering cannot occur. Therefore, how do we reconfigure our family groups? My guess would be that many of us will be pondering the same questions. Isn't this just one more change in the midst of a year of drastic changes?

All of this causes me to reflect and to give thanks that some things remain constant. I will again appreciate the truth of the words of the hymn – “Joy to the world! The Lord is come.”

A writer has portrayed what it would be like if Jesus had not come. He sets this in the context of a young boy bounding down the stairs on Christmas morning and finding neither tree nor presents – just the same old furniture arranged in the same drab way. The boy rushed out into the street and encountered a gloomy atmosphere. No smiles on people's faces, no one calling out to him, “Merry Christmas!” – just people scurrying along with their daily concerns. He came to the church, at least the vacant lot where the church had once stood. No church now: only a sign in the centre of the lot. Going nearer to it he read the words, “If I had not come”. Suddenly the meaning of it all dawned on the puzzled boy, and he said, Oh, I know. “If I had not come” – that's why there's no Christmas Day or any Church.”

Covid or not - Christmas Day will come. We will remember the birth of Christ. We will rejoice that God's Love – through his Son – continues to be our support and strength for all of life's challenges.

This Christmas I will again say – “Thank you, Jesus, that you did come”.

How about you?

Christmas Blessings to all,

Rev. John



**Presented by Central & First United Churches
Sunday, December 6 @ 7:00pm**

You must have reserved seating in advance due to numbers allowed by Southwestern Public Health
Proceeds go to Pearce Williams Christian Centre

A 'Free Will' donation can be made on the First United Website www.1stunitedchurch.ca under the Concert Announcement on the 'Upcoming Events' page.

Merry Christmas Central Family

As I say the words, “Merry Christmas”, I know there are some of you that may be struggling to feel the Spirit of Christmas during these challenging times. Christmas for many of us will not look the same. Even our Christmas Eve service will be different, as it will be pre-recorded and online only.

This does not mean that Christmas will be any less meaningful. In fact, this Christmas may bring us a new appreciation for the struggles that Mary and Joseph endured during their journey to the Town of David. Mary was very pregnant and only had Joseph at her side when Jesus was born. Families were not together, but separated, as they travelled to the various towns to be counted.

Even with all that Mary and Joseph endured, they knew there was hope. It was foretold to them by the angel Gabriel. Mary expressed this hope and joy in a song of praise to God in the gospel of Luke 1:46-55, which goes like this; “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, ⁴⁸ for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Mary and Joseph may have struggled, but they never gave up on hope for themselves and the world. Even though Gabriel does not come to us, like he did to Mary, to show us that everything would be ok. God did bring us hope as God promised us, through a child born in Bethlehem, that we are not alone. God will always be with us in all circumstances of life, for we are loved. All of us.

So, as you get closer to December 25th, look to the sky and follow the Star of David. Journey to the place where the light of Christ will brightly penetrate your heart and your soul. Feel the Spirit of the Lord with HOPE, PEACE, JOY AND LOVE.

Merry Christmas Everyone! May God be with you!

Pastor Paul



Sadly, Central United will not be having a Christmas Eve Service inside the church walls this year due to the pandemic. There will be a ‘Link’ for a Joint Virtual Christmas Eve Service (Central and First United) available soon. A Joint service is being pre-recorded at this time. If you do not have access to a computer or Facebook, Please, do not hesitate to contact the office for more information on the link.

For those who wish to be present with others at a service on Christmas Eve, First United will be opening their doors at 4:00pm where you will be able to watch the service the screens.

As the Christmas season approaches, we must get ready for the new “normalcy”, even as we all remember years past. What was our normal then, unfortunately, is not our new normal today with the world facing a crisis like few have seen before or hopefully will never see again. Does this mean Christmas and the joys that come with the season will have to take a step back ? For many families the answer to this difficult question is “yes”. To make it easier we must remember that Christmas isn’t about giving and receiving presents, it’s about spending time with loved ones and others that hold a special place in our hearts. In trying times, it’s a lot easier to lean on those that know us best. They are probably feeling the same apprehensions that we are sometimes feeling, but realize we are always not willing or able to share this information with others. This is where our church life plays a major role in our lives. We know that the power of God will be there for us in ways we might never know. We will be given the strength and courage to continue to face this worldwide crisis and whatever other roadblocks are in our way. I would encourage you more now than ever to realize this and to take a look at your life to see what’s important to you. Would it be nice to have a new TV, or would you rather have a special meaningful meeting with a family member or friend either in person or by zoom. Do you need any major home improvements, or do you realize your home is fine the way it is, and you should be happy with what you have instead of what you don’t have. If the world events have shown anything at all during this unprecedented time, it’s that we all should be more grateful. There are many people not only where we live, but all across the world, facing far worse circumstances while still facing the ongoing and lasting effects of this pandemic. I know when I write my letter to Santa this year, I will let him know that as long as I have my family, friends and my church family, I will be okay. Sure some chocolate Turtles under the tree will be nice, but I realize a vaccine to keep everyone safe and healthy would be the greatest gift. In the interim the staff, church council and countless committee team members of Central continue to do everything they can to be open for those that need our resources. Meanwhile, I encourage you to take a step back and take that look in the mirror and ask yourself, what’s important to you, at this time. Maybe some rearranging in your life will lead you to have the outcome that you desire, which in turn will add even more smiles and thankfulness to your life. On behalf of your Council, I want to wish you all a safe and very Merry Christmas and a Joyous New Year.

Scott Doupe, Board Chair

To browse Central’s Virtual Bazaar on the internet, go to
www.centraluc.ca/shop

or

www.centraluc.ca & click on the Bazaar tab

Bringing you unique, Handcrafted Gifts & Christmas Décor



Finance and Stewardship Team Report

Thank you to everyone for your support to Central including financial. We ran a surplus in October of slightly over \$3,000 with the help of donations from the Don't Bake/Sew Donate Bazaar campaign. The meat pies, and on-line Bazaar and Silent action are proving to be great fundraisers as well! Thank you all! Your support provides the foundation that keeps our staff and facilities available to serve our community as creatively as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our General Fund deficit is sitting at \$40,139 by the end of October. Recently the Federal Government has increased the Canadian Emergency Business Account from \$40,000 to \$60,000 and the non-repayable part (grant) from \$10,000 to \$20,000. The church council has approved applying for the maximum available. We continue to work on the paperwork that could provide up to \$15,000 of additional government rebates for the wages that we have paid during these COVID-19 times.

Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in our grant application for additional funds for replacing our aging lift. We will keep looking for other grant possibilities.

On that first Christmas Mary and Joseph faced a world of uncertainties and yet, with trust in God, they moved forward with their lives.

We invite you to consider a Christmas giving at this time and an envelope is enclosed. May you recognize, find, and create Joy over this Christmas season.

Carl Fletcher on behalf of the Finance and Stewardship Team

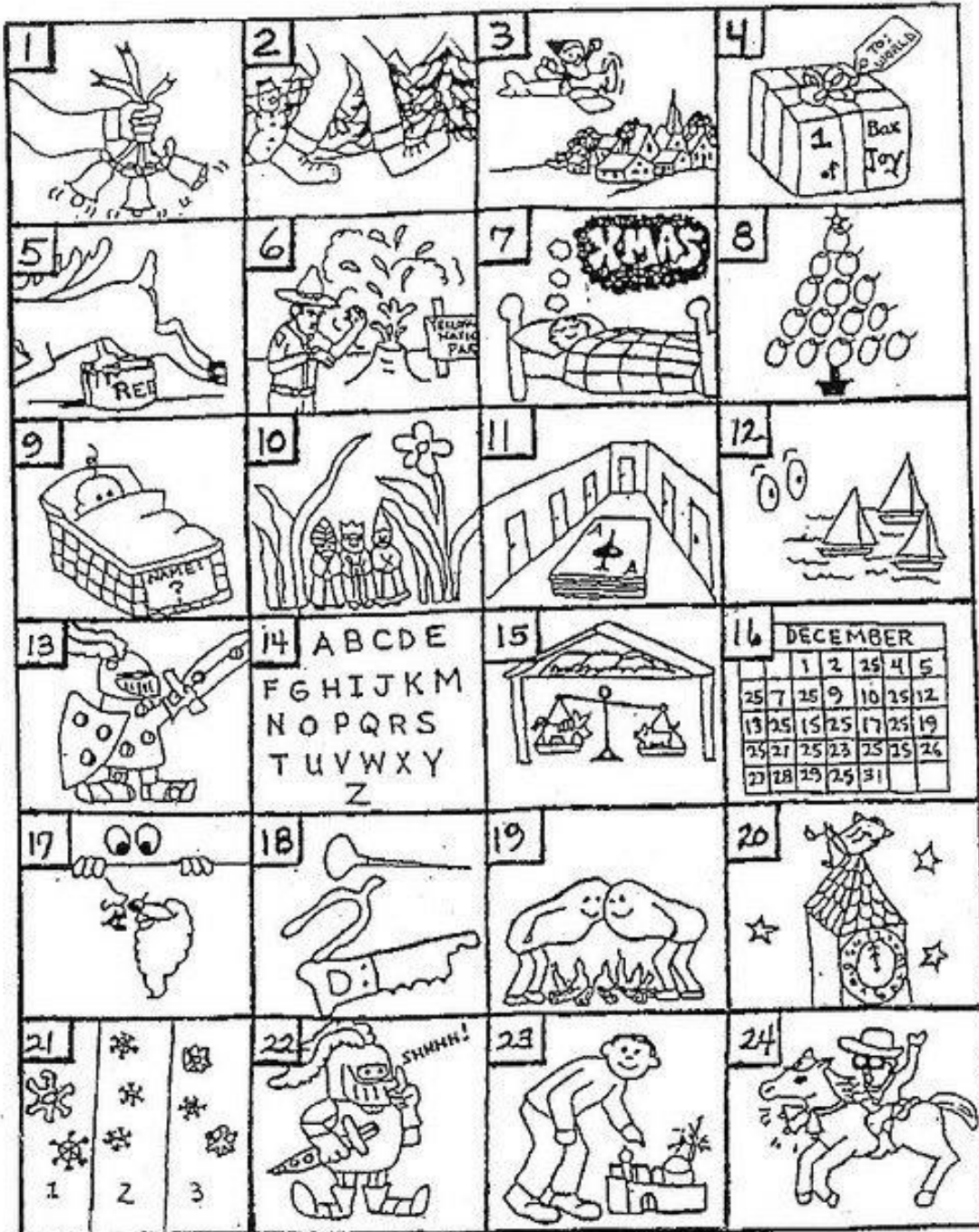


Treat Someone Special! Specially curated Christmas Treat Boxes make a thoughtful and caring gift for shut-ins, family, friends or maybe as a "Secret Santa" gift left outside someone's door! To give or to share each box contains one jar of strawberry jam, 2-white chocolate cranberry scones, mini zucchini or banana loaf, 2-confetti squares, 4 ginger cookies, 2-date squares. (contains peanuts and may have traces of nut oils) We can arrange for curbside pickup. If you would like the box as a gift for later, buy now and freeze everything but the jam until you are ready to gift the box. All treats including the jam were made in our church kitchen which is approved by the Health Unit. Boxes are \$20 and can be ordered at www.centraluc.ca/shop or by calling 519-614-3249



A big 'THANKYOU' to all those who worked on and donated to the Silent Auction. To those who contributed their time and continue to contrite their time working for the Virtual Bazaar.

Can you guess the name of the Christmas Song by the Picture?



1. Jingle Bells 2. Walking in a Winter Wonderland 3. Santa Claus is Coming to Town 4. Joy to the World 5. Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer 6. O Come All Ye Faithful 7. I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas 8. O Christmas Tree 9. What Child Is This? 10. We Three Kings 11. Deck the Halls 12. I Saw Three Ships 13. Oh Holy Night 14. Noel 15. Away in a Manger 16. 12 Days of Christmas 17. I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus 18. All I want for Christmas is my Two Front Teeth 19. Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire (The Christmas Song) 20. It Came Upon a Midnight Clear 21. Let It Snow, Let It Snow, Let It Snow 22. Silent Night 23. O Little Town of Bethlehem 24. Silver Bells