

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ORONOCO

December 2017 Newsletter

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service *4:00 p.m.*



"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to all."
(Luke 2:11-14, KJV)

On Christmas Eve, we will once again gather as beloved children of God - old and young, near and far, family and friends, long-time members and new faces alike - to celebrate the birth of this Christ Child, God's ultimate "I love you" to the world. Join us on Christmas Eve as we worship and pray, sing and celebrate communion. Join us as we hear again the age-old tale of Mary and Joseph, angels and shepherds, a stable and a star, and a blessed baby Savior, Emmanuel, God With Us.

A Word from Our Pastor



What a difference a year makes.

Last Christmas Eve, I was sitting at home. I was grieving so many things: losing the 2nd of what would be 3 pregnancies in 12 mos., not being at church on Christmas Eve for the first time in my entire life, and more specifically, not being with you all for one of our most cherished and beloved services of the year.

And then I got this picture:



Looking at it still makes me weepy. (Truly ... I'm tearing up while I'm sitting and writing this in Panera.) In a time when I was so in the dark, you all held up your Light for me. And it meant more to me than I can even begin to put into words. Your care, your love, your prayers radiated through this picture and wrapped me up exactly when I needed it.

This year, as Advent and the Christmas season approach, we are once again expecting a new addition to our family – a baby, our rainbow baby, who will come just after Easter -- just after a celebration of life after loss and the ultimate display of God's love for us *no matter what*. No matter how uncertain. No matter how scary. No matter how troubling. No matter the obstacles.

What a difference a year makes.

Last year, we were struggling as a congregation. Our attendance was low. Our finances were challenging. We were still part of a yoke relationship with First Congregational Church in Zumbrota: a relationship that lasted 50 years and which brought an incredible amount of blessing to both congregations as well as its own set of challenges. We spent a good amount of time

appreciating what that significant relationship has meant to us as a congregation while also realizing that there is a time for everything – “a time for planting and a time to uproot what was planted” (Ecclesiastes 3:2).

This year, as Advent and the Christmas season approach, we are in a new place as a congregation. In March, we voted to make a drastic change – to go it on our own to see if a new way of being could bring new life to our church. Our numbers are up across the board, and even more encouraging, our energy and our level of joy are up as well. We took a leap of faith, trusting in the love and promise and plan that God has for us *no matter what*. No matter how uncertain. No matter how scary. No matter how troubling. No matter the obstacles.

What a difference a year makes.

As we once again look toward Advent – toward a season of darkness and anticipating the light, a season of reflection, a season of both joy and sorrow, a season of renewed hope – one of the Scriptures that we read on Christmas Eve often echoes through my head:

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned. You have made the nation great; you have increased its joy. They rejoiced before you as with joy at the harvest.” ~ Isaiah 9:2-3

We all encounter our times of challenge, our walks in darkness, our periods of living in a pitch-dark land – both as individuals and as a congregation. But God's light shines through all of that, reminding us that we are precious ... that we are loved ... that we are valued ... that we have worth ... *no matter what*. No matter how uncertain. No matter how scary. No matter how troubling. No matter the obstacles.

A child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be vast authority and endless peace for David's throne and for his kingdom, establishing and sustaining it with justice and righteousness now and forever. The zeal of the LORD of heavenly forces will do this.
~ Isaiah 9:6-7

Hallelujah.
Hallelujah.
Hallelujah.

Pastor Gina

Advent Sermon Series – “Songs of the Season”

I have to admit that the season of Advent is one of my very favorite seasons in the life of the church. In our culture of instant gratification and “right here right now” mentality, it is a season specifically dedicated to waiting, to anticipation, to what is to come. It is indeed a season of darkness but also a season of an approaching light. We see that played out in our Advent wreath every Sunday; as we light one candle after another, the light grows brighter and brighter, stronger and stronger.

As a pastor, one of the parts of that waiting and expectancy that I love most are singing the hymns in our hymnals specifically designated as “Advent hymns” – Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus; O Come, All Ye Faithful; Star-Child; and so many more. There is powerful theology in these hymns – stories of light and darkness, stories of waiting in the tough times and the beautiful times, stories of joy that we trust and believe is coming.

However, I know that there are also some much-beloved “Christmas hymns” that we often miss singing as we wait. And so this year, I’ve crafted a sermon series that makes special space for a few of these beloved Christmas songs (via recorded versions from the much-loved a cappella group, Pentatonix!) even as we wait in Advent anticipation. We’ll be hearing:

O Come, O Come Emmanuel
Go Tell It on the Mountain
Mary, Did You Know?
Little Drummer Boy
Joy to the World

“Coffee & Conversation”

Sunday mornings starting at 9:00(ish), we are continuing our “Coffee & Conversation” time – an opportunity for us to discuss faith, life, and everything in between. No pre-reading or prior knowledge required.

For Advent, we will be pausing our discussing of “Shalom: A Biblical Understanding of Peace” to dive into an Advent-themed study: “The Light Will Shine.” Anyone is welcome – to attend, to lead the discussion, to suggest a new topic of study. Please consider joining us!

Kids’ Sunday School

We are starting a Sunday school program! Children ages 6-12 are welcome to join us on Sunday mornings after worship from **10:45-11:30a.** **** Please note that this is a time change.**** *Children will be dismissed during the hymn after the sermon or, on communion Sundays, after communion.* We’ll be exploring God’s compassion throughout Scripture with fun lessons and great materials. While the kids are having fun and learning, parents are welcome to join us in the fellowship room for treats and coffee. And a big, GIANT thank you to Karen Peterson-Rucker, Gail Rucker, Mike Rand, Jenny Rand, and Joanne Schenck for volunteering to teach!!

We will NOT be having Sunday school on Sun., Dec. 24 or Sun., Dec. 31.

Stewardship Giving Tree

First, I want to thank all of you who have contributed above and beyond your usual giving with our yellow Giving Tree envelopes this fall. So far, as of Nov. 19, we’ve raised an additional \$1281.01 to help keep this church that we love up and running. Thank you thank you thank you for our incredible generosity!!

While our Giving Tree has been taken down (and resurrected as the Christmas tree in our sanctuary), the envelopes are still available. We will keep them in a basket on the table next to the bulletins throughout the year. Yes, we emphasize stewardship in the church once a year, but the truth is that we have the responsibility to be good stewards of our time, talents, resources, and devotion all day every day – 24/7/365. So if you perhaps missed your opportunity to pick up a few envelopes or would like to continue that giving into 2018, feel free to pick up more envelopes. Thank you!



Food Shelf News

Our food shelf hours through March will be 4-6:00pm to accommodate those who have difficulty driving in the dark.

Christmas Bake Sale and Decorating

We'll be holding our annual Christmas Bake Sale after worship on **Sun., Dec. 3**. And once you've got your delicious holiday goodies, stick around to help us decorate the sanctuary and fellowship hall for Christmas. We'll have a holly, jolly time!

Christmas Joy Offering—December 24

Devoted and caring leaders have led many of us in the way of Christ. They have been church workers equipping us to respond to the grace we have known in Jesus Christ, and they have been God's gifts among us. As we celebrate Christ's coming, and think of the profound impact these individuals have had on us, the Christmas Joy Offering provides a way for us to offer a gift in response. Gifts to the Christmas Joy Offering will raise up leaders from small places that are too often overlooked by the church. The historically Presbyterian racial ethnic schools were founded to educate emerging leaders from underrepresented groups so leadership in the church would better reflect the diversity of God's people.

Half of the Christmas Joy Offering supports the continued ministry of educating and forming Christian leaders. The other half of the Offering honors those leaders who serve and have served us well. Through the Assistance Program of the Board of Pensions, current and retired church workers who experience need because of tragedy, health concerns, or financial hardship can receive assistance from the church they have served so well.

In gratitude to God for the wondrous gift of Jesus, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) invites congregations to join this celebration of God's presence with us by supporting those in need of help and hope.

Watch for the special envelopes for your Christmas Joy offering on December 24th.

Update from Revs. Shelvis & Nancy Smith-Mather

Revs. Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather are the missionaries serving in South Sudan and Uganda who we support with our 2nd Sunday Spare Change Sun-

day funds. Shelvis, Nancy, Jordan, and Adalyn welcomed another daughter/sister into their lives in October – baby Nicole. If you would like an update on the incredible work that Shelvis and Nancy are doing with RECONCILE International and how their family is doing, you can either check out the Mission Connect newsletter on the information board at church or go to <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/missionconnections/shelvis-and-nancy-smith-mather/>. In the top right portion of the screen you will find a box with a link to their 10 most recent update letters. Also on this page, you can find links to contact both Shelvis and Nancy as well as information on how to contribute financially as an individual to their mission.

About Per Capita

As 2017 comes to a close, I wanted to give you a reminder about per capita payments. Here's a brief rundown of what per capita is and how it works.

“One of the great strengths of our denomination is its connectionism. Presbyterians in Minnesota and Wisconsin are tied to the larger church in ministry. One concrete form of that connection is through our per-capita. Every Presbyterian church in the country is required to pay a certain amount for each active member on its rolls. This money goes to support the work and ministry of our church throughout the country.” – *from the website of the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area*

This year's per capita payment is \$33.75 per member. Of that \$33.75, the largest portion (66%) is used by our presbytery while the rest is shared equally (17% each) between our synod (the Synod of Lakes and Prairies) and the General Assembly (national office).

It is and has been the policy of the Presbyterian Church of Oronoco to pay our per capita by the end of every year, whether individual members have contributed their apportionment or not. If you haven't paid your per capita for this year, please consider doing so. You can make a check out to the O church and simply write “per capita” in the memo. If you're not sure whether you've paid your per capita this year, please contact Kay Erdahl.

And, since the new year is right around the corner, here is the per capita for 2018: \$34.50.

Readings for the Month of December



Sun., Dec. 3 – Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Mark 13:24-37
1st Sun. of Advent

Sun., Dec. 10 – Isaiah 40:1-11; Mark 1:1-8
2nd Sun. of Advent

Sun., Dec. 17 – Psalm 126; Luke 1:26-55
3rd Sun. of Advent

Sun., Dec. 24 – Isaiah 9:2-7; John 1:1-18
4th Sun. of Advent

Sun., Dec. 31 – *various readings*
Celebrating the Year Behind and the Year Ahead

Filling Busy Bags

We are continuing to collect items for the Ronald McDonald House busy bags – small toys, games, arts & crafts supplies, stickers, etc. Joanne Schenck has already made all the busy bags themselves, so we will also be filling them after church on **Sun., Dec. 17**. Please stay and help if you can. Thanks!

Advent Readers

Believe it or not, Advent is just around the corner. The first Sunday of Advent is Sun., Nov. 26! If you're interested in being one of our advent readers/candle lighters, please add your name to the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board. Pastor Lisa will get the readings to you as soon as she can. ****NOTE: This year, the 4th Sunday of Advent happens to fall on Dec. 24, so we will need a reader/readers for the morning worship service as well as a reader/readers for the Christmas Eve service in the evening.****

Treats After Church

Everyone loves hanging out after worship with coffee or juice and a tasty treat, right? So let's do it *every Sunday*! We're looking for people willing to bring after worship treats. They can be as simple or as fancy as you like. The coffee is here, but you may want

to consider bringing juice for all of our beloved non-coffee drinkers. If you (or you and a group of others) are interested, please put your names on the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board. As of today, most of Dec. is still wide open. Thanks!

Sharing Prayer Requests

One of the things that so many people appreciate about our congregation is the way that we can share our lives with each other in prayer on Sunday mornings. We lift up the prayers that are a part of our lives and know that we are not lifting up those joys and concerns alone. This family of faith is lifting up those prayers with us. In order to better facilitate those prayers and in order to share them with those who cannot be with us on Sunday morning, we're going to start sending out a Monday morning prayer email which will share the requests raised during worship on Sunday morning. If you are getting this email and would prefer not to, please don't hesitate to let us know. If, for some reason, you would like to be getting this email and are not, also let us know so we can add you to the list.

Church Staff

Organist: Katha Johnson
Secretary: Sue Johnson
Custodians: Sue Johnson
Pastor: Rev. Lisa Johnson

Presbyterian Leadership Team

Kay Erdahl, Treasurer
Kim Stanton, Asst. Treasurer
Mike Rand, Clerk of Session
Ron Peterson Rucker, Ruling Elder
Brenda Longman, Ruling Elder
Janice Ostrom, Ruling Elder
Mike Rand, Ruling Elder
Linda Sorensen, Ruling Elder
Lance Sorensen, Ruling Elder
Deb Nelson, Deacon
Joanne Schenck, Deacon
Karen Peterson Rucker, Deacon
Jenny Rand, Deacon
Gail Rucker, Deacon

People of the Church

Janice Ostrom, Co-Moderator
Jenny Rand, Co Moderator

The Final Product:



This image is currently on both our website and our Facebook page. If you can think of any other places we might be able to use it, please talk to Pastor Lisa.

Local Presbyterian Youth Events

The local PC(USA) pastors have gotten together and planned some area youth events. Currently, the participating congregations are First Pres in Hayfield, First Pres in Rochester, First Pres in Kasson, Associated Church in Owatonna, and Community Pres in Rochester. Westminster Pres in Austin may participate as well. These events are all open to students in grades 6-12.

Here are the events:

Jan. 5-6, 2018 – lock-in and service opportunity: joint lock-in at The Barn in Hayfield and a Sat. morning service opportunity at Feed My Starving Children in Eagan for an 11:00-1:30, then lunch in the cities before heading home

Start time: 8:00 p.m. on Fri.

End time: 4:00 p.m. on Sat. (estimation)

Feb. 17, 2018 – sledding and pizza party: sledding at Ironwood Springs Christian Ranch in Stewartville, then heading to the Pizza Ranch in Stewartville for lunch

Start time: 10:00 a.m.

End time: 1:30 p.m. (estimation)

Mar. 17-18, 2018 – 30-hour Famine event: 30-Hour Famine is a national event sponsored by World Vision as a way to raise money for hunger relief around the world. It is exactly what it sounds like – 30 hours of fasting for participants. No food allowed. As the fundraising part of this event, students will collect pledges from people (e.g. - \$.50 for every hour that they fast). Students will spend Saturday together participating in a number of different activities, then will go home for Sat. night. (That means they'll need your help continuing their fast!) On Sun. morning, they'll be in their own congregations to talk about what they're doing and what they're learning during this fast time. On Sun. afternoon, we will all re-gather to break the fast with communion and a meal provided by the participating congregations.

Start time: TBD

End time: TBD

We're also discussing a joint mission trip next summer. Plans are still in the early stages for that, so I will get you more information on that when I have it. In the future, we also hope to possibly participate in some joint confirmation retreats or joint youth retreats at Clearwater Forest Camp, possible area carpooling to various summer camp sessions, and larger PC(USA) gatherings such as Triennium 2019. ***Please talk to Pastor Lisa if your student is interested in any of these events or if you're interested in chaperoning.***

Presbyterian Church of Oronoco
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(507) 367-4711



**Check out our website at
www.oronocochurch.org**

**Worship is held at 10:00 a.m. each Sunday morning
Communion is the first Sunday of each month
Adult Coffee and Conversation 9:00—9:45 a.m.
Sunday School for ages 6-12 10:45—11:30 a.m.**



Christmas Eve Candlelight Service 12/24 4:00 p.m.

**Reverend Lisa Johnson - Contact Information
Cell Phone 1-507-995-7310 Email address: pastorlisaj@gmail.com**