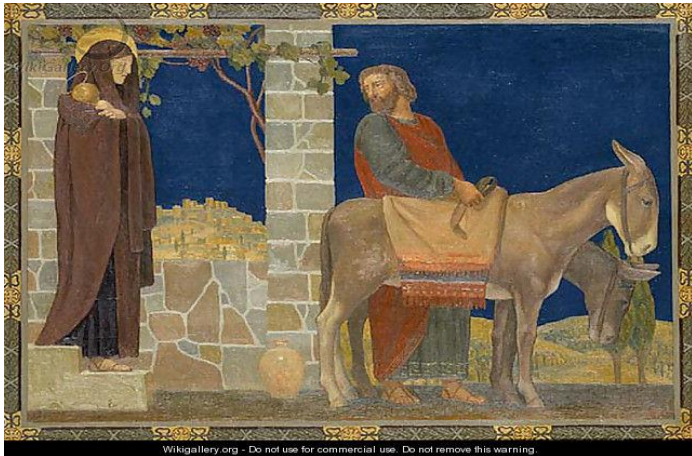


**PLEASE NOTE, THERE WILL BE
NO BULLETINS FOR
JANUARY 8 AND JANUARY 15**

**FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
JANUARY 1, 2023**



“LOVE AND MERCY”

St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail Fairview Heights, IL
Telephone 397-6323
e-mail- stjohnuccfairview@gmail.com
Website: www.stjohnfairview.org
Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay

COLLECTION OF PENNIES FOR MISSION:
Supplies for Dubois Horses (See list at end of bulletin)

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: Let all of creation praise the name of the Holy One!
Many: The rhythms of life praise the Everlasting God through the markings of time.

One: Let all of creation praise the name of the Holy One!
Many: The flowers, land, and trees praise the Divine Gardener through rest and renewal.

One: Let all of creation praise the name of the Holy One!
Many: Living creatures praise the Spirit of God through our breathing, living and being. Praise God!

***INVOCATION:**

Holy Love, You make us a community. You gather us as your offspring and knit us together with grace and mercy. In your presence, there is fullness of love, joy, hope, and peace. Thank you for being among us this day and with us in every moment of our being. Receive our praise, dwell in our midst, and create in us a heart that yearns for you and your kingdom. In the name of Emmanuel, we pray. Amen.

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**
Eternal God, the dawn of a new year prompts us to reflect on our past and hope for our future. Help us live every day seeking your way and moving on your path. Help us commit to love and resolve to extend the grace and mercy we need from you and our neighbor. Make us new. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

The God who counts our days knows us intimately, loves us abundantly, and abides with us relentlessly. Receive the brand new mercies of this day. Hold the love of God closely,

firmly, and freely. Transformation, grace, and new life is assured this day.

FIRST TESTAMENT READING: Isaiah 63:7-9

Prayer of yearning

⁷ I will recount the LORD's faithful acts;

I will sing the LORD's praises,
because of all the LORD did for us,
for God's great favor toward the house of Israel.
God treated them compassionately
and with deep affection.

⁸ God said, "Truly, they are my people,
children who won't do what is wrong."
God became their savior.

⁹ During all their distress, God also was distressed,
so a messenger who served him saved them.
In love and mercy God redeemed them,
lifting and carrying them throughout earlier times.

EPISTLE READING: Hebrews 2:10-18

Qualified to be a high priest

¹⁰ It was appropriate for God, for whom and through whom everything exists, to use experiences of suffering to make perfect the pioneer of salvation. This salvation belongs to many sons and daughters whom he's leading to glory. ¹¹ This is because the one who makes people holy and the people who are being made holy all come from one source. That is why Jesus isn't ashamed to call them brothers and sisters when he says,

¹² *I will publicly announce your name to my brothers and sisters.*

I will praise you in the middle of the assembly.^[a]

¹³ He also says, *I will rely on him.*^[b] And also,
Here I am with the children whom God has given to me.^[c]

¹⁴ Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he also shared the same things in the same way. He did this to destroy the one who holds the power over death—the devil—by dying. ¹⁵ He set free those who were held in slavery their entire lives by their fear of death. ¹⁶ Of course, he isn't trying to help angels, but rather he's helping Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way. This was so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God, in order to wipe away the sins of the people. ¹⁸ He's able to help those who are being tempted, since he himself experienced suffering when he was tempted.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 2:13-23**

Escape to Egypt

¹³ When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him." ¹⁴ Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. ¹⁵ He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: *I have called my son out of Egypt.*^[a]

Murder of the Bethlehem children

¹⁶ When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. ¹⁷ This fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet:

¹⁸ *A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and much grieving.*

*Rachel weeping for her children,
and she did not want to be comforted,
because they were no more.*^[b]

Return from Egypt

¹⁹ After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. ²⁰ “Get up,” the angel said, “and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead.” ²¹ Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus ruled over Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee. ²³ He settled in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: He will be called a Nazarene.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God.

MESSAGE: “Let’s Keep Herod in Christmas” (With thoughts from Rev. Nancy Zorn Micke)

There’s one figure from the biblical narrative we rarely see portrayed in a children's Christmas pageant: King Herod. He's just too mean and nasty for that holy night.

Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him. — Matthew 2:13b

You probably seen the bumper stickers lately that read "Let's keep Christ in Christmas!" I'm sure you have never seen a bumper sticker "Let's keep Herod in Christmas!" but I could be wrong.

All over the country, children of church families have recently put on Christmas pageants that tell the story of the nativity. The cast of characters may vary, but always there are three individuals at the heart of the story: Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus, and then there are the shepherds, Magi, etc. Yet, there's one figure from the biblical narrative you'll rarely, if ever, have seen portrayed in a children's Christmas pageant: King Herod.

It's common, on Christmas Eve, to read the story from Matthew about how wise men came to the court of King Herod, asking where they could find the child born King of the Jews. Herod, of course, was the real, live king of the Jews. But he was too crafty a politician to show his hand too soon. There was intelligence to be gathered — and if these naïve foreigners could be enlisted as spies to lead him to this King of the Jews, so much the better.

Fortunately, the visitors from the east aren't slackers in the intelligence department. They can see right through Herod's smarmy hospitality. They return to their own country "by another way." That's where our Christmas Eve reading from Matthew typically ends.

It's only Part 1, though, of a two-part story. Nobody ever wants to read the second part on Christmas Eve, because the details are so horrific. Wise men dropping off baby

presents is one thing. What comes next is rated "R" for intense violence. Not the sort of thing we want little kids to hear before heading back home to leave milk and cookies out for Santa. Visions of sugarplums could be replaced by bloody nightmares.

Herod is enraged to learn the magi have given him the slip. And so, he sends his soldiers out to commit an atrocity worthy of Hitler's SS. They are to break into every Jewish home in the region around Bethlehem, pull every male baby from the arms of their mothers and cut their little throats.

What part does this dark episode have to play in the bright and joyous tale of Christmas? Until now, everything has been sweetness and light. But then, the fists of Herod's soldiers are pounding on Bethlehem's doors. The mothers of the City of David weep their bitter tears, and cradle their lifeless babes in their arms:

Herod — at this point a bitter old man, in the final year of his 41-year reign — was fully capable of playing a role in such atrocities. Herod was king in name only. Everyone knew that. It was the Romans who really called the shots. Herod's job was to do the imperial dirty work, subduing a rebellious colony on behalf of the emperor. That task he performed with relish.

During the course of his reign, Herod had at least nine wives and 14 children. Perhaps more. There were probably more, but daughters' births were not always recorded. He put one of his wives, Mariane, on trial for adultery. Chief witness for the prosecution was Mariane's own mother — who, it's said, testified against her daughter only because she feared for her own life. Herod executed his wife, which

led her mother to declare herself queen, charging that Herod was mentally unfit to rule. Not a wise decision on her part. Herod put her to death without a trial. Talk about a dysfunctional family!

There's more. There were two young sons remaining from Herod's marriage to Mariane. As they grew older, the king considered them threats to his power. But that's still not all. After murdering his wife and his two sons, Herod named his eldest son, Antipater — a child of a different mother — the exclusive heir to the throne. But Herod never could tolerate a rival. He grew jealous of his latest crown prince. He put him on trial for treason like the others and had him executed. Thirty-three years later, one of them, Herod Antipas, would look upon Jesus at last, as he stood before him in chains, wearing a crown of thorns.

We don't know when it was, exactly, that the magi stopped by the palace to pay their courtesy call, but it was probably during this last, turbulent year of Herod's life, the year he executed his third son. Can any of us doubt, now, that this man was capable of dispatching soldiers to kill babies? (*Can you imagine trying to live a peaceful life when this man is in charge, and at any moment you or a loved one could be slaughtered?*)

Jesus, of course, escaped that fate. An angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream, warning him to take his little family and flee to Egypt. There they probably settled in the thriving Jewish quarter of Alexandria, a great center of learning. It's possible Jesus spent his early years there, and learned Talmud from the distinguished rabbis of that city.

So, what's the takeaway? Should we reserve a role for Herod in next year's Sunday school Christmas pageant?

Relax. It's a rhetorical question! Herod doesn't belong in a children's Christmas play. But that doesn't mean we should forget about him entirely.

Herod's important to the Christmas story because he helps us remember what kind of world we live in and why this world still needs a savior. Even if we all had a fine Christmas, there are plenty of neighbors on this planet whose lives are tainted with suffering — people for whom the least of their worries is whether or not they managed to get into the Christmas spirit or bought the correct present for their boss.

Jesus didn't come into the world to bring us a mid-winter festival of peace and contentment. He wasn't born into a placid Christmas-card scene, but rather into the sort of world where families wander homeless and corrupt tyrants rule by murder and deceit.

Jesus didn't come to offer respite from the world. He came to save it. As for us — his Christmas-weary disciples — we have a role in carrying out that mission, using the spiritual gifts he's given us, along with whatever material resources we have at our disposal. If we strive to keep Herod in Christmas, maybe it will be just a little easier to remember that mission — don't you think? Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

God of joy and mercy, we are grateful that your son was born to save us from our own sinful way of living. This is the season of love, peace, joy, and hope. And you have brought us all four, and we are thankful.

However, our job is to spread those four good words to everyone we know and all those we haven't met yet. Jesus

will teach us how to do that and the Holy Spirit will bring us the energy, the “how”, the “when”, the “where” to do just that. Jesus has already given us the “why.”

We ask the Holy Spirit to be with us as we pray for all people in all nations to have peace in their lives instead of fear and threats. Finding hope in bad situations is never easy, but the Holy Spirit will show us how.

We pray for all those who are sick, discouraged, grieving, and lost. No matter the situation God surrounds them with love and compassion, and will help them find hope.

We pray for all the workers who bring us comfort, such as doctors, nurses, medical professionals, those who grow, harvest, prepare, and serve us with nutritious food. We pray for all the civil servants who try to keep us safe, like police officers, firefighters, and EMT's. Let them know how much we appreciate them.

For all that you have done for us, gracious God, with give you all the praise and thanksgiving. Hear us as we pray together the prayer your Son taught us. . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

**PRAYER RESPONSE: Third verse of “Away in a Manger”
Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay**

**close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in your tender care.
And fit us for heaven, to live with you there.**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

Let us put our trust in the Living God, who is faithful. Let us praise God for the abundance of creation in the sharing of our gifts of time, talent, and treasure.

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:**

Generous Love, bless these offerings. Stir up the gifts within for your glory, show your provision through the sharing of our resources, and empower us to steward our days as precious and holy. Amen.

HOLY COMMUNION

May the God of Christmas be with you!

And also with you!

Put your trust in the One who has come.

We offer our hearts willingly to our God.

Join all creation in praising God.

We join in the chorus of glad songs to God.

In that not so silent moment, you spoke to creation, God of our dreams and hopes, and birds warbled in the morning, thunder rumbled over the waters, cows lowed in the meadows. For us, those shaped in your image, were these gifts imagined and formed, but we took up after death, getting up to follow sin.

Prophets came to praise your name, and to bring us back to you, but we thought they were trying to trick us.

Then you sent Jesus, Pioneer of salvation, to proclaim your name to us.

With those who are shy and silent, with those who persist in glorifying you, we offer our thanksgiving songs:

Holy, holy, holy are you, ever-loving God.

All creation praises your name.

Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is the One who put his trust in you.

Hosanna in the highest!

In the silence of the night, your holiness became human, our God, and you blessed us with Jesus, Child of grace. When he could have stayed with you, he came to offer us help. When he could have remained in Nazareth, he got up to bring us the good news. When he could have played it safe, he shared his flesh and blood on the cross, so we might have life through the resurrection.

As we celebrate the gift of his life, as we remember his death and rising to new life, we proclaim that mystery called faith:

Christ died, putting his trust in you;

Christ rose, taking on the resurrection life;

Christ will come, to carry us home to you.

Into these moments of silence and sacrament, send your Spirit upon those gathered in this place, and on the gifts of the Bread and Cup.

As we eat of the Bread, send us out to serve the hungry and the homeless, the lost and forgotten, the broken and battered - all whose hopes have disappeared.

As we drink from the Cup, may we see the lonely and forsaken, the hurting and ridiculed, the oppressed and imprisoned - all whose dreams have become nightmares. And when we are gathered to your side, we will proclaim

your glory to our sisters and brothers around the Table,
our praises being offered to you. Amen.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

We give thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.

***SENDING:**

Praising God is not enough.

And so we will go to offer practical help to our sisters and brothers.

Joyful noises do not feed those around us.

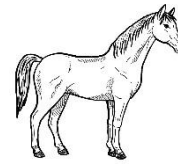
And so we will go with Jesus to the food pantries and shelters, to care for those forgotten by our society.

Songs of thanksgiving do not replace service.

And so we will go to share the peace of the Spirit with a broken, yet hopeful world.

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Cheri Schtzenhofer, Theo Mally, Becky Ballard, Rosemary Williams, Larry Wagner, Jack O'Day, Ronald Bopp, Floyd Lorenz, Alister and Garrett Pickens, S. Schmidt.

CONDOLENCES to the family and friends of Melvin Wagner.



COSTS OF CARING FOR HORSES AT DUBOIS

- \$10 Mineral salt block
- \$15 Bag of horse feed
- \$30 Alfalfa cubes
- \$50 Equestrian helmet
- \$65 Feed a horse for a month
- \$80 New halter and reins
- \$500 New saddle

We can also “adopt” a horse by providing feed for a month. We will find out the name of a horse and celebrate her/him with pictures.