

Our Savior's Voice

Our Savior's Lutheran Church

359 Leonard Street N - West Salem, WI 54669

www.oursaviorswestsalem.org

608-786-0030

December 2020



Vision Statement:

***We are a church centered in Christ,
inviting all into a community of worship,
nurturing all to be disciples of Jesus.
Together we reach out to make a difference
here and throughout the world.***

Our Savior's Voice

December 2020

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Pastor's Reflections

Light at the end of the tunnel!

Look carefully...there it is...light at the end of the tunnel! The word that two vaccines have shown remarkable effectiveness and appear to be safe, is great news. Finally, there is some hope.

But before we get too excited, as they say, “the devil is in the details.” And the detail is “April!” That’s when they think the vaccine will be available to the general public. Before then, the most vulnerable, and health care workers who take great risks, go first, and rightly so! We care in our society for the vulnerable, and we affirm the work of those who are willing to take risks to care for others. That’s the right thing to do.

But it does mean the tunnel is longer. And that means the darkness will not only last, but probably get deeper before it gets better.

Darkness. Other than the dreaded four-letter word (snow!), darkness defines the season. Yes, I know we have Christmas (I’ll come back to that), which gives us a momentary (and hopeful) diversion, but in the end it’s the darkness that remains. The darkness that deepens. The darkness that overwhelms us.

For some, with “seasonal affective disorder,” this is a really bad time of the year. But even if we aren’t struggling with “SAD,” the darkness still wears on us and drains us.

And this year, the darkness is even darker. Yes, the election is behind us and while the transition is proving challenging, it will happen. But Covid remains. And Covid is still Covid. Talk of vaccines may lighten our spirits a bit, but the pandemic is still strong, raging, and deadly. And it will be for months to come. The darkness isn’t going away anytime soon!

Of course, you know that. You've felt it, and so have I. The anxiety over routines that remain changed and then still changing.

Like, for example:

- We can't be with family during the holidays as we'd like.
- Kids remain virtual in school.
- The shopping season is all messed up (bad enough for shoppers, but what about store owners and employees?).
- Restaurants can't do the normal business, so what happens with Christmas and New Year's?
- NO Christmas Eve worship – no church, bustling with worshipers, singing the familiar carols with gusto.
- Health care facilities are filling up...elective procedures are on hold...and what of the people, health care workers? What's their stress level these days?
- And then...that little cough or bit of a sore throat. Is it, could it be, maybe me too? I don't even want to think about that!

The darkness...darker, deeper, bleaker...than before. The vaccine is on its way, but there's a lot of darkness before we get there. A lot of hurt, fear, uncertainty, anxiety, despair, and even death. The darkness is overwhelming and unrelenting.

But remember the season. And remember the promise.

A child was born long ago in a land far away. In a simple stable, surrounded by dirt, and cold, and yes, darkness. Yet, this child was, and is, more than a child. This child is Immanuel. This child is "God with us" (that's what the word "Immanuel" means!).

That's the season. We love the music, food, trimmings, decorations, and yes, the gifts, but that's not really it. The season is the child, the season is Jesus. Immanuel, "God with us." God here, in our world, in the cold and darkness, not abandoning us, but sharing our journey with us.

But then...what happens when "God is with us?" The season becomes the promise.

And what's the promise? Light! Light shines! And not just on bright, sunny days. Light shines in the darkness, and no matter what, the darkness cannot overcome the power of the light (John 1:1-5). Even in the midst of Covid.

There are going to be difficult days ahead. I wish I could promise that God will somehow miraculously, almost magically, return us to the normal life we so dearly miss, and do so with joy and wonder, avoiding the pain and fear. But the fear, the pain, the brokenness are real and powerful. Yet, the gift of faith (God's gift TO us through the Holy Spirit) clings to the promise. That promise, that in the fullness of time the darkness will be shed aside by the light of Jesus, even this year, even in a time of pandemic.

And so, as you do every year, hear again the Christmas story, and in the manger, as you gaze at the child, see before you the season. But as you hear the story and see the season, take a glance down the tunnel. The darkness is strong. But there is light.

And in the light, hear the promise, and know that the promise is stronger. We will get through this, not because we persevere, or dig deeply, or hang on tenaciously. We will get through this because the light is shining, and it is greater than the darkness.

That has always been the message of Christmas. This year the message rings out even louder!

In the meantime, remember the words of Martin Luther – to trust God, but also to do what we need to do not only for ourselves, but especially to protect our neighbors (*"Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague," Luther's Works 43:132 – for more on that, check out my article in the July, 2020 newsletter*). That means I wear my mask, I distance, I avoid unnecessary groups, and I work hard to honor and uphold others around me, knowing that we are all stressed and in need of care and understanding.

So, embrace the season, live in the promise, be faithful, and care for the “others” you encounter. The child – Immanuel – God is with us! And the darkness cannot overcome the light!

Pastor Jon



Christmas Greetings!

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all of you, from the staff at Our Savior’s! We treasure the community that gathers here, even though this year we have had to gather from a distance. Know that we are grateful to all of you for your support and your partnership in the gospel of Jesus, and anxiously await the time when we can gather together again.

In the meantime, we pray that God’s blessings in the Christ Child be yours during this Holy Season, and throughout the coming New Year!

Pastor Jon, Pastor Jean, Kris, Wendy, and Josh



We Are Worshipping!

Lots of ways, lots of times!

Online videos bring a message, prayers, and music. Posted by 6 PM on Saturday on YouTube, access them through our web site: www.oursaviorswestsalem.org/videos. You can watch any time, and you can even catch up on previous weeks.

DVDs are also available of our online service. If you, or someone you know, does not have the ability to watch online, but can use a DVD, let us know. Currently, we have 10 DVDs going out each week, reaching over 60 individuals – and we can do more!

Drive-way communion – we come to your house, and outdoors, safely distanced, we share a brief (10-15 minutes) worship with communion. You provide your own bread and wine/juice, the driveway, and maybe even some neighbors – we bring the Word and a message. We've done about 30, and are eager to do more, even with colder weather. Contact the office to get scheduled.

Zoom Communion...join us on Sundays at 10:30 in virtual worship, using the Zoom platform. Easy to do – just head to our home page, and click on the link. Have bread and wine/juice available as we take 25 minutes to hear God's Word and celebrate the sacrament.

For more info and updated details, check out the Covid-19 Response page on the web site.

Advent and Christmas

No, we can't worship as we want, but we can still come to the manger!



Midweek Advent Worship

Join the journey to the manger!

Videos posted on the web site by 5 PM
www.oursaviorswestsalem.org/videos

Hanging of the Greens

December 2

The journey begins...

December 9

We're getting there!

Children's Christmas Program

December 16



Christmas Eve

*We are there, at the manger,
worshiping the child!*

Zoom Holy Communion

Zoom link on the home page of our web site

3 PM from the Sanctuary

Surrounded by some of the familiar decorations, in a longed-for place, we worship together, even across the distances.

7 PM from the Stable (literally!)

*We're out at the Holthaus Farm,
in the barn, in the cold and the dark,
yet the light of the Christ Child
brightens our world and warms our hearts.*

Make sure you have bread and wine/juice as we celebrate the Sacrament together, along with music, a message, and time for reflection, even in a troubled world!

YouTube Worship

Video posted on web site by 1:30 PM

Lots of music, a message, the Christmas Gospel,
and most of all, the Christ Child,
as we celebrate even in strange and challenging days!

YOU ARE INVITED ...

Since we can't meet in person for the long awaited Sunday School



Christmas Program, you are invited to check it out virtually.

"Miracle in the Manger" will be part of the Advent worship video on Wednesday, December 16. Watch for the link on the website.



Adult Bible Study

Bible study, via Zoom (or dial in as a conference call) continues, with two opportunities each week!



Wednesday from 9:30 to 11 AM we discuss the gospel reading for the coming Sunday. Some great conversation and probing discussion – all from the comfort of your home!

Sunday from 11 to 11:30 AM we check out one of the other passages appointed for that weekend. Again, lots of good connecting and exploring!

Details on how to join us are on the Covid-19 Response page on our web site, or call the office and speak with Pastor Jon. Either way, we'll get you on board!

Christian Education Update

Sunday School



Soon the snow will be flying and the Christmas bells will be ringing. We continue to keep our creative juices flowing as we gather together each week virtually

Just a reminder – the weekly Sunday School lessons are available on YouTube. The links for the grade appropriate videos can be found on the church website (www.oursaviorswestsalem.org -- resources/videos). You should also receive an email from Pastor Jean each week with the worksheet that goes with the lesson. *If you aren't getting the emails (check your spam file), please call the church office (786-0030) and we'll get them to you. Or ... if you don't have email, we can send them to you via the Post Office.* We are starting the next quarter of material, so if you need the packet of materials, please let us know and we'll get them sent to you.

Confirmation

Watch your email for details and schedules of upcoming classes and activities. Or, check the calendar at the end of the newsletter for important dates.





From the Youth Director ...

The outdoor gatherings for 7th-9th grade confirmation students this fall have been well attended and everyone has enjoyed spending time around the new firepit roasting hotdogs and marshmallows, throwing the football around, and being able to connect with each other.

As the seasons change, we are working on ideas for ways to connect safely. Watch your emails for details of future gatherings and projects coming in the new year.

Take care, and stay safe!

Wendy Kane

youth@oursaviorswestsalem.org

college
connection

As our college students are studying in challenging environments at home or on campus, we keep them in our



thoughts and prayers. This month please pray for: **Abby Johnson** (UW-L), **Liam Sjoquist** (UW-L), **Jake Iliff** (UW-L), **Jordyn Schurhammer** (UW-L), **Carlie Burkhardt** (UW-L), **Olivia Haun** (Winona State), and **Mahli Fleckenstein** (Viterbo).

Watching over you ...

The days are growing shorter, the weather is getting colder, the white stuff will soon be swirling, and the Covid virus continues to wreak havoc with our world.

We want to keep everyone as safe as possible with the recent increase in COVID positive cases, especially those most at risk in our community. If you need help with grocery or medication pick up, shoveling snow, raking leaves, minor home repairs, a friendly person to chat with, or other needs, please call the church office (786-0030) and let us know how we can be of service. We have members ***ready and willing*** to help out with these tasks.



Willing and Able ...

Early in the pandemic several folks stepped up and offered to help with tasks for members unable to get out. Thank you for thinking of others, but needs did not materialize as we expected. Now, as the winter descends, we want to be prepared for the changing world. We are rebuilding our list and welcome your call (or email) to say you are still willing to be a part of caring for our community. As the needs arise, we will get you connected.

Still Looking...



We are still eager to hear from you! The last few years we have followed a process of “group discernment” to lift up leaders for the congregation. We’ve asked you – who do you see around you who has the gifts to be a leader in this community of faith? That process worked well – we’ve received good names, people who then discerned that God has both gifted and called them to the ministry of leadership. Thank you!



But, this year...that’s a bit tougher to do! Still, we believe that God is at work in our midst. So...we’ll ask the question...who do you see? Even though we can’t be together in worship, who do you see who has the gifts and abilities to partner with us?

We invite you to share the names you discern. Send them on to Pastor Jon, Pastor Jean, or Steve Ahles. Your eyes and ears might just be the way God chooses to bring new leaders into the mix!



Pictorial directories

If you had your picture taken, there is a directory waiting for you. If you chose not to have your picture taken, but would like to have a directory, they are available for \$5 to cover the cost.



The directories are available in the church office (call before you come to make sure we are here).



One Last Call for the Lutfisk Challenge!

Sorry, no Lutfisk, but a way to make a huge difference in a time of great need.

The cancellation of our Norwegian Dinner means that the proceeds (usually around \$7500, but this year...none!) cannot impact programs and ministries in our community and beyond. People who are hurting even more this year, will not have their needs met.

But...recently, a family came forward with a challenge – they offer \$400 to replace the profits that are lost, and they challenge you to match – or to at least add – to this gift.

YOU have responded! We have over \$2000 to replace the proceeds, and allow us to support those in need. And there's still time to be a part of this ministry, either by sending in a check, or through our electronic giving on our web page.

We may miss the dinner, but we can still make the difference. For more information, or more conversation about the challenge and the needs of people, contact one of the pastors!

Stewardship for All Seasons Update

Thank you! We had a GREAT response to our “drive-up” Stewardship Sunday on November 15. Over 80 people joined us, safely in their cars. And what did we do?



- Shared a brief Holy Communion service...
- Received “Statement of Intent” cards...
- Distributed the remaining “Lakeview Giving Tree” tags (I knew we could get them all out!) and a number of pictorial directories...
- Sent everyone forth with a bag of lefse...
- Relished the opportunity to see some faces and engage in some brief conversation.

Others have mailed their Statement of Intent card back to the office. If you haven’t had a chance to do that, there’s still time. We appreciate all you share with us, and your Statement of Intent allows us to make appropriate and responsible plans for our ministry in 2021. Your response is important!

And a bit more...

The CARES Act adopted earlier this year includes two provisions for tax consideration...

- If you take the standard deduction in your Federal tax return, for 2020 only you can include a one-time deduction of \$300 to charitable giving.
- If you itemize, you normally cannot deduct more than 60% of your adjusted gross income. For 2020 only, there is no limit on your charitable contribution deduction.

Why these provisions? To encourage charitable giving during these difficult times. But, as always, consult a qualified tax advisor for all the details!

Year End Contributions



With the end of the year fast approaching, this is the time to make sure you are up to date on

your financial support of our ministry at Our Savior's.

*Your gifts **DO** make a difference!* You can mail your gifts to the office, or go to the church website:

www.oursaviorswestsalem.org for secure electronic giving options.

In order to be included on your 2020 giving statement, gifts must be received in the church office **by noon on December 31, 2020.**

Any checks dated 2021, regardless of when they are received, will be acknowledged for 2021.



2021 Offering Envelopes ...

If you haven't already received your offering envelopes for 2021 in the mail, you should be receiving them soon. As the New Year begins, if you still need envelopes, please let Kris know in the office and she will gladly get some for you. If you are new to Simply Giving or are changing your amount in 2021, please be sure to fill out a new form and get that to the office ASAP. **Also note: it is possible you will have a new number in 2021, so be sure to use the 2021 envelopes beginning in January.**



Scrip Cards Available

Start your Christmas shopping early!



We continue to have Scrip cards available for purchase in the office during the day. We ask that you call ahead to make sure someone will be there to get the cards for you.



Just a reminder ... we have Kwik Trip, Kwik Trip car washes, Woodman's, Festival, and Ship Shape car washes.



Proceeds go to help World Hunger and Our Savior's Youth programs.



ANNUAL REPORT

Thinking Ahead ... 2021 Annual Report deadlines

It's hard to imagine, but the new year is right around the corner. And that means getting an annual report together to share with the congregation all that has happened in 2020. We are looking for reflections from the various committees, teams, and ministries to be included in the report. Please note we will need those reports, preferably electronically, in the office as follows: **Written Reports by Wednesday, January 6** and **Financial Reports by Monday, January 11.**



Congregation Council

The Congregation Council met via Zoom on Monday, November 9, with President Steve Ahles presiding. At this meeting the council:

- Shared in study and prayers.
- Approved the minutes of the October 12 Council Meeting, and received the October financial report.
- Heard an overview on what has been happening with our various ministries.
- Heard that Pastor Jon has submitted the paperwork for the PPP Grant.
- Heard a preliminary report from the Tech Team. Asked that the team explore a second proposal/bid for the work.
- Received a report from the Administration Committee. Decided to remove the “interim” label and engage Wendy Kane as permanent Director of Youth Ministry.
- Discussed Nominations, noting that while we still have time, that time is running short.
- Received a video message from Bishop Arends thanking the council for its work to keep people safe.
- Watched videos and heard preliminary information about Safe Families for Children.
- Received Dolores Sinclair into membership from Mabel Lutheran Church, MN.
- Noted that this will be the first year without a “council and families” Christmas gathering. The December meeting will continue to be virtual.

The next meeting of the council will be held Monday, December 14th at 7 PM via Zoom. If you have questions, or if you have ideas for enhancing the ministry of Our Savior’s, contact Steve Ahles or one of the pastors.

Financial Support Ministry



**THANK YOU
FOR YOUR SUPPORT**

THANK YOU!!! *Thank you for your continued financial support of our ministry together!* You make a difference in the lives of children and adults, in those across the globe, and those right here in our midst.

Financial gifts can be shared in a variety of ways. You may choose to mail in your envelope, or use one or more of the electronic giving options which we have available. You can find more information, and directions on starting your electronic giving, on our web site at www.oursaviorswestsale.org/giving. Among the giving options:

- **Electronic transfer**...directly from your financial institution.
- **Mobile app**...Easily create an account to set up recurring donations and review your giving history.
- **Text**...The first time you use texting, you will be asked to register your payment information; after that, enter the amount and send the text.

However you give, give in confidence! At Our Savior's we value integrity in our financial practices. Transactions are made via a secure web portal, and are facilitated by Vanco, an industry leader in online financial products.

***Thank you for your support.
We are grateful for your partnership as
we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ!***



Shopping Online?

Our Savior's has an account with "Amazon Smile." If you shop with Amazon, you can support our work together by designating your "Amazon Smile" contribution to Our Savior's.

Thrivent Choice Dollars



Remember that if you are a Thrivent member you may have "Thrivent Choice Dollars" to direct. Our Savior's is one of the many potential recipients of your choice dollars, but your direction needs to be made each time. A number of Our Savior's folk direct their choice dollars – do you? See Thrivent's web site for more information or stop by the office and we will help you out.



Care and Share Food Pantry

The Care and Share Food Pantry remains open, Saturdays, 10 AM to Noon. As the pandemic continues, your support is critical! As the building is still locked, please call the office to ensure that we will be able to receive your gifts. And, thank you!

December Dates for your calendar:



December 2 - Advent worship video

December 2 - Confirmation @ 6 PM

- 6th grade via Zoom

- 7th grade gathering + video posted

- 8th grade video posted

- 9th grade CLASS via Zoom

December 4 - Lakeview giving tree gifts due back

December 6 - Zoom Communion at 10:30 AM

December 9 - Advent worship video

December 9 - Confirmation @ 6 PM

- 6th grade via Zoom

- 7th grade CLASS - via Zoom

- 8th grade - TBA

- 9th grade - Off

December 13 - Zoom Communion at 10:30 AM

December 16 - Advent worship video & Sunday School program

December 16 - Confirmation @ 6 PM

- 6th grade via Zoom

- 7th grade - Off

- 8th grade CLASS - via Zoom

December 20 - Zoom Communion at 10:30 AM

December 24 - Christmas Eve

- 3 PM Zoom, 7 PM Zoom, Video posted

December 27 - Zoom Communion at 10:30 AM

Web Site: www.oursaviorswestsalem.org
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Eric Sorenson, Senior Choir Director
Karen DeSchepper, Financial Secretary
Josh Corning, Custodian



Check your spam



We have been sending out more emails to share information or keep in touch lately. It has come to our attention that many of you – mostly those of you with **yahoo.com** email accounts – have not received our communications because the emails have gone to your spam file. So ... please take a minute to check your spam files and see if you have any communications from church/pastors that you may have missed over the last several weeks (and maybe even months!). This is especially critical for those of you with confirmation and Sunday School aged children. Please let us know if you have missed dates, deadlines, and information so we can get you up to speed and make sure everyone has the information needed.

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