



Christmas Eve

This Christmas Eve, our service will be available on **YouTube**. You may watch at any time from 4 p.m. onward.

The link for the service is <https://youtu.be/2d000ncPQs8>

Please have a candle ready to be lit during the service.

At 6:00 p.m. Julia will host a Zoom gathering for De Winton and at 7:00 p.m. a Zoom gathering for Okotoks. Bring a beverage of your choice and join us for a wee chat and opportunity to wish others blessings of the season. The links will be sent by email.



Please Pray For:



- Big Valley-Erskine United Church
- Tired, overworked health care workers
- Those distributing and receiving vaccines
- Those working on Christmas to protect us

December 27 and January 3

Julia will host Zoom gatherings on the Sundays following Christmas and New Year's Day. These will take the format of a devotion and prayer, then we will have a chance to check-in with each other and see how everyone is doing. Please plan to join us in your pajamas with a beverage (or breakfast) as we share in the company of our Faith Community.

Warm Wishes from the Office

Merry Christmas to our wonderful Faith Family.

We want to thank you for your continued support and encouragement over the past year. So many people have popped into the office for a chat or a word of thanks. We have so appreciated the people of Okotoks and De Winton who have been here for us. It is such a great community, and we are grateful for all of you.



Have a safe and happy holiday as we pray for a brighter New Year.



Who Tends the Shepherds?

Shepherds in Jesus' day were not recognized or highly valued for their service. "Out of sight, out of mind" might aptly describe their circumstances. As long as they did their jobs, they were tolerated. David, who would one day be King of Israel, was a shepherd. Yet, when the prophet Samuel asked David's father Jesse if he had another son, Jesse responded that he did, but that the boy was out in the fields. He wasn't really worth looking at for king.

We have all become aware of the people in our communities who have courageously and graciously served us through this past 10 months: people who may work in the "fields" of retail, service, aesthetics, groceries; truckers who have endured difficult circumstances to deliver goods; people who have laboured to produce the resources that we need or want. People who are underpaid, under-recognized and perhaps underemployed. These are the people who are necessary but considered rather expendable by society.

The good news of Jesus' birth was pronounced first to the shepherds, the ones who were ignored and overlooked. The angels appeared to them in the fields where they lived, to proclaim a message that only they could see and hear because they lived outside of mainstream life.

The astounding message of Christmas is that the good news is for all people of all time, particularly for those that society ignores or treats as expendable. God proclaims that they are valued, and worth loving, even dying for. That God treasures them beyond measure and proclaims that these, the least, will be first in God's kingdom.

This is where we can find hope in the Christmas story. That the Shepherds, the least in society are being noticed. We are hearing conversations like never before regarding the inequities people are enduring. The injustices we have overlooked and the hardships that plague so many in our communities are being noticed and hopefully being addressed.

We are asking the tough and touchy questions about poverty and racism, misogyny and privilege. We are seeing the injustices that have been perpetrated in the name of progress, democracy and free markets. They are the beginning of a larger conversation about what to do for those who have had it so hard for so long.

The good news will not be good news for any of us until the poor are fed, the oppressed are free, the blind see, the lame walk and the lost are found. It must be lived out to be the good news it was meant to be.

As Christians, it has always been our calling to live out the good news. To do as Jesus did. To notice and tend to the shepherds of all generations. We are a "good news" people.

Who are the shepherds you know or know of? What is your desire and prayer for them? What would a world look like where everyone's basic needs were provided for and the stress of living did not take its toll on those who struggled so hard to just get by? Sounds a little bit like the kingdom of God! Let's do our part to make it happen.

Julia

Kid's Korner:

We will be having Zoom-only Sunday School following our morning worship service. Youth group will meet every Friday by Zoom until the Christmas break and we will reevaluate in the New Year. Also, a reminder that the nursery is closed during this time. Any questions, please contact Candice at cnfdcstutton@gmail.com.





White Gifts This Christmas

As we are all aware, this year has been challenging and while we have hope for the possibility of a vaccine for the coming year, we don't know when this will be and what challenges people will face in 2021.

In the past we have had a White Gift Sunday, usually Pageant Sunday, where we offered gift cards for the Benevolent Fund. We are going to continue that tradition this year but ask that you drop your gift cards off at the church office, mail them in or drop them in the offering if you attend Sunday worship in person.

The gift cards will go to the Benevolent Fund to distribute as needed. The cards most used are grocery and gas cards. Please make sure you note your name and envelope number (if you have one) on the envelope. Or, just use a regular offering envelope for the cards. **Also, please make sure that the gift cards are clearly marked with the dollar amount as the donation will be noted on your tax receipts for 2020.**

We will be taking gift cards up until the end of December. Thank you in advance for your contribution. You are a generous community. I hear it all the time from the wider community.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH

Written by P. Marie Wedderburn



For myself, and no doubt for many of us, Christmas will be different this year. However, whatever is different there remain many blessings for which to be thankful. Perhaps these blessings include reading a book, laughing, crying, speaking on the phone with our family and friends, gathering together virtually on Zoom, singing, enjoying God's creation around us, laughing at our pets (if we have them), and the list goes on and on.

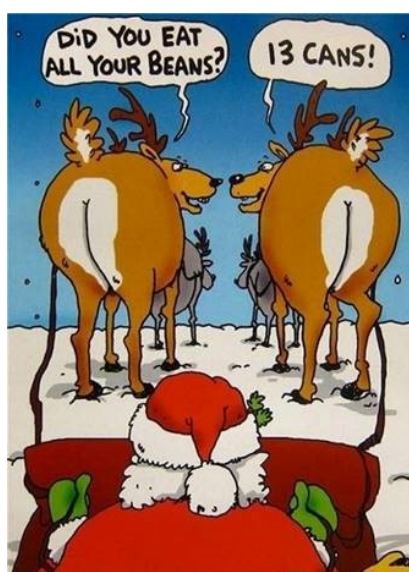
In my daily devotions, I read that with the many differences this Christmas brings to us, perhaps this is a great time to see the many unexpected ways that God shows up this Christmas. For is not at its core this the reason for the season as we celebrate the message the angel proclaimed to the shepherds all those years ago: "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find the child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:10-12 – NRSV) So let us not fear – for unto us has been born our Saviour – Jesus the Christ! Let us celebrate this rebirth in us daily with songs of joy and hope and peace and love.

At St. Andrew's United Church this year, we missed the candlelight service where we share communion and sing "Silent Night" as our candles are lit. Be that as it may, we continue to connect with one another through our buddy system, meeting weekly via Zoom, and phoning one another. As we will share Christmas Eve virtually this year thanks to Julia, may we lift our hearts and spirits to remember and to share the many blessings we have been given and continue to receive.

And so, Christmas blessings to everyone as we reflect on the One who was born and whom the shepherds visited – the One who continues in our lives this very day and always as we remember that we are not alone. Thanks be to God!



DECEMBER 23, 2020



Okotoks United Church Office - We're here for you!
The office continues to remain open at this time Monday to Friday 9:00 - 2:00. Please contact Diane at okunited@telus.net or 403-938-4357 for church related news.

Please contact Julia at okjulia@telus.net or 403-702-2249 (cell) at any time.

Congregational Care Team invites you to reach out for confidential spiritual and compassionate care by email at: okcongregationalcare@telus.net

Please refer to our website www.okunited.ca for updated information and links to the newsletter.