

# Vision of St. Stephen

## December/January 2023/2024



St. Stephen Lutheran Church  
7800 Erie St. • Sylvania, OH  
(419)885-1551  
[www.ststephenlutheran.church](http://www.ststephenlutheran.church)

Pastor: Rev. Beth Ferne Johnson  
[sslcpastor@buckeye-express.com](mailto:sslcpastor@buckeye-express.com)

“So how many Christmas trees do you set up at your house?”, asked the cashier at Target. Upon further conversation the checkout person confided that a previous customer had mentioned that they decorate 16 trees in their home. The cashier thought that was a bit much and was asking other shoppers about their own Christmas traditions. I’ve been thinking about that conversation since then.

I find it interesting that Christmas celebrating has become very aspirational: people strive to have the most beautiful decorations, including trees in multiple rooms in the house. They strive to create “the Perfect Christmas” in terms of presents, cookies, outside lights, family photo sessions; the list goes on and on. Making Christmas perfect has become a goal in and of itself—especially if you have little kids—and the standard for what is a “normal” Christmas celebration keeps getting more complicated.

Perhaps in response to this, I’ve seen some posts shared on social media that serve as a critique—don’t believe the hype. Christmas will still come even if you don’t have a tree up at all. It will be here even if you haven’t made a single cookie or watched a single Christmas movie. You aren’t a bad parent if you don’t do “elf on the shelf” every day, if you don’t make Christmas crafts together, if you don’t curate every minute of the day.

God has already made Christmas “perfect”. The first Christmas was not beautiful and did not have matching décor—it was bloody, painful, and scary, as most births are. The barn was not photo worthy—the animals were not freshly groomed—it was likely chaotic and a bit of a mess—and I’m fairly certain no cookies were served.

And yet, that first Christmas was perfect—because the birth of the baby Jesus changes the world. Jesus comes to teach us that the most important thing in this world is to “Love God with all our heart, mind, and strength—and love your neighbor as you love yourself”. And Jesus models what that looks like in his years of ministry.

So, take the Christmas hype with a grain of salt. I would encourage you to do what feels best for you. If you love decorating and it gives you joy, go for it! If the thought of dragging all the boxes out of the attic seems overwhelming, leave them there! Above all, this Advent and Christmas season—be kind to yourself and be kind to others. Love God, love yourself and love others as God has first loved you!

Peace,  
*Pastor Beth*

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# Spiritual Growth

## Gathering Space Returns

Dave Haddix will be continuing his presentation on the Old Testament stories from Joshua to David, which will conclude on December 17<sup>th</sup>. Gathering Space will return on January 7<sup>th</sup> at 9:15 a.m.

## Wednesday Bible Study

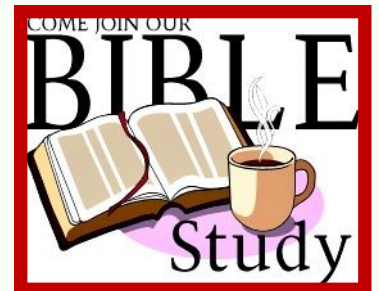
Our current study of Paul's message of grace to the churches in Galatia will conclude in December. We'll be thinking of a new topic to study when we return on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. This group continues to grow and welcome new people—so feel free to join in and see what it's like. Prior experience or expertise is not required and all questions are welcome!

## Inquirer's Class

Interested in learning more about what being a member at St. Stephen involves? Wanting to transfer your membership here? We'll be holding an inquiry session on Sunday, January 7<sup>th</sup> from 11:30-12:30 in the fellowship hall. If you'd like to learn more and this date doesn't work for you, please speak with Pastor Beth to arrange a separate session.

## Youth Catechism

Catechism classes will be held on Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> from 7-8 p.m. In January, we will meet on Sunday, January 14<sup>th</sup>, from 7-9 PM. We'll continue to talk about the Old Testament stories of God shaping and forming the people during their wanderings in the wilderness.



## Youth Night

We'll be having a night of fun, crafts, movies, and snacks on Friday, December 1<sup>st</sup> from 6:30-9:30 p.m. We'll be creating a gift to share with others and perhaps getting a jump on decorating the narthex for Christmas as well!

## Sawmill Retreat

Pastor Beth will be away at the annual all-Ohio professional leadership retreat at Sawmill from January 23-25<sup>th</sup>. In addition to break-out groups, workshops, worship, Bible study, and conversation with colleagues, the main speaker for the event is Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy who will be presenting on "The Stories that Shape Us".

## Decorate/Undecorate

You're invited to help decorate the narthex for Christmas on Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> at 10:00 a.m. and since what goes up must come down, we'll be gathering on January 6<sup>th</sup>, also at 10:00 a.m., to undecorate the space!

# Gathering Space Update

During the weeks of September and October the Sunday morning Gathering Space class focused on a challenge presented by Bishop Daniel G. Beaudoin. Being followers of a risen Christ we all have faith stories to tell. Those of us knowing the story of Jesus Christ have an opportunity, perhaps even more an obligation, to “share this story” to those who have not experienced the Gospel’s news. We spent 7 weeks discussing how best we could move forward.

Initially we looked at the power of our words, how many we are exposed to daily, the responsibility to choose our words carefully so as to uplift, not destroy. We then discussed to whom would/do we share the Good News . . .family, friends, neighbors, strangers, groups? We looked at Mary’s visit to her cousin, Elizabeth; the women following Jesus’ resurrection; the Road to Emmaus story; Mark Ch. 2 when friends lifted a paralytic through the roof; and the feeding of the 5,000. Two big lessons: God uses ordinary people and we are not always welcomed when sharing our faith story.

Sharing our story may not necessarily mean a personal contact, it may mean our actions/talents/gifts. Actions sometimes speak louder than words. So, we studied Romans 12:6-8 to learn how each of us are blessed. Using our gifts is not only a duty, but gives meaning & purpose to our lives.

There is a weight to being called by Christ so in another session we discussed the need to take care of ourselves, to “refuel.” We were surprised how often Jesus himself went away to pray, to remove himself from the crowds and how often He recommended his apostles to do the same. In addition to prayer, our list included exercise, exploring hobbies, listening to music, napping, and sometimes simply saying “NO”.

Our three final meetings focused on “Job Descriptions.” We all agreed that we do our best work when we know the expectations of a job. The Bible is full of job descriptions. . .look at the callings of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Joshua, Jeremiah, the apostles. Even Jesus had a job description (Luke 4:17-19). For ourselves we need only read Acts 1:8 or Matthew 28:18-20.

At our final meeting the Gathering Space participants created a current job description so that future “story tellers” will know the expectations and how to begin. Yes, this job description differs greatly from one developed by corporations for their employees. Yet you will easily notice the similarities...job title, qualifications, salary, duties and where to apply. Please look for the **Job Description** that is posted on the bulletin board at church.

My sincerest gratitude to the following who worked so diligently, and joyfully, in completing this assignment: Jim & Libby Boldt, Herb & Pat Hoehing, Pastor Beth Ferne-Johnson, Sharon Mason, Ruth Moeller, Sharon Sorensen and Jenny Troutman.

Nancy Pfau

# Advent & Christmas Services

## Advent Wednesdays

Pause, Prepare, and Ponder will be the themes of our Wednesday Advent worship services. You're invited to participate, either at 12 noon (no music) or 7:00 p.m. for these times of worship. We'll be gathering on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> this year.

## Christmas Eve

We'll gather on Christmas Eve, Sunday, December 24<sup>th</sup> for worship with candlelight, carols and communion at 4:00 and 7:00 p.m. Our nursery will be staffed for the 4:00 service and this service will be livestreamed on Facebook and YouTube as well. Our Sunday morning Service on December 24<sup>th</sup> will feature texts and music to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent.

Last year Christmas Day fell on a Sunday and we had our usual Sunday worship that day. We likely will do that again in 2033, the next time Christmas Day is on a Sunday.



# Fun & Fellowship

## Fellowship Meal

You're invited to come over to St. Stephen for supper on Wednesday December 13<sup>th</sup> and January 10<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. for soup and conversation!

## Cookie Exchange

Enjoy tasting different kinds of homemade Christmas cookies? You're invited to a cookie exchange here at St. Stephen on Sunday, Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> at 11:30 a.m. Here's how it works: Bring a dozen of your favorite kind to make, take a dozen home with you! (We'd also welcome some extra cookies for sampling that day as well!). If you have a container to take cookies home in, that would be helpful, but not necessary. Any questions--please contact Lin McKelvey by text.

## JOY Club

We will be having lunch at the home of Jettie Sansbury on Tuesday, December 19<sup>th</sup> at noon. Jettie will be providing ham and those attending are invited to bring a side. Ruth Moeller is coordinating the side dishes so contact her to find out what is needed! At this meal, we'll be gathering Christmas gifts for members and neighbors of Salem Lutheran Church in Toledo's Vistula neighborhood. If you'd like to participate, please speak with Ruth Moeller. Look on the narthex bulletin board to sign up to attend.

In January we will be meeting on Tuesday, January 16<sup>th</sup>. You can discover our noon lunch location by looking in our Sunday bulletin or by calling the church office.

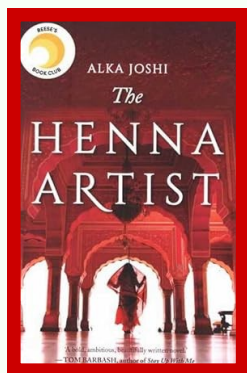
## Game Night

Looking to enjoy an evening of euchre or board games? Stop over on Friday, January 12<sup>th</sup> from 7-9 for an evening of fun and conversation. We'll have food—please bring cards or a favorite game!

## Pop-Up Prairie Sowing Party

With the warm fall feathering continuing, we have yet to schedule a time to prepare the ground in our prairie for planting. We're still aiming to scatter the pollinator native seeds once the ground is frozen, and hopefully before New Year's. Stay tuned to our Sunday morning announcements and Facebook for more information. On the day we're able to scatter the seed, we'll be having hot chocolate, donut holes, and a bonfire to celebrate! So, plan to stop by—either to help with the sowing process or to cheer on those that are doing the work!

We'd love to have community members and extended family members come to help participate in this project that will benefit the entire community—so please help us spread the word and invite people you know who are interested in environmental issue to come and help!



## Book Group

We'll be meeting on Thursday, January 25<sup>th</sup> from 7-8 to discuss The Henna Artist by Alka Joshi. Here's a description of the book: Escaping from an abusive marriage, Lakshmi creates a new life for herself as a henna artist in 1950's Jaipur. As she works, she learns about the lives of her customers, until one day when people from her own past reenter her life.

# Outreach

## Sylvania Area Family Services

We're assisting 3 Sylvania area families this year with Christmas gifts and food. If you'd like to help, we encourage you to donate through gifts of cash/check (envelopes labeled for SAFS are on the narthex table). We'll be tracking our progress on the special board in the narthex and using your financial gifts to purchase gift cards for the families. The deadline for participating is Sunday December 10.



## Warm Clothing Drive

The warm winter clothing is here: We are gathering warm winter clothing to share with others in the area. SAFS and the Family House have requested good clean items for all ages such as coats, hats, scarves, boots, leggings, sweats, and sweaters. Twin blankets and fleece throws are welcome. Thank you!

## Christmas Caroling By Phone

Would you like to spread some Christmas joy to those at home? We'll be gathering around a phone here at church, calling folks, singing 3-4 songs, reading the Christmas gospel to folks. We tried this for the first time last year, and it was well received! Please sign up on the narthex bulletin board to let us know of your interest in participating. We'll be "phone caroling" on December 17<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m.



## Sensory Santa

Santa Dave Davis will be here on Saturday, December 9<sup>th</sup> from 2:30-4:30 for area families wishing to have a quieter, less overwhelming experience with Santa. Please help us spread the word about this special event that is returning to St Stephen. (Please note that this is a change in date from previous communications to accommodate Santa's schedule).



# Church Finances

## KROGER REWARDS

We have received the Kroger Community Rewards from August 1-October 31, 2023 with 25 households participating. Total rewards to St. Stephen were \$110.57. Thank you to all who participated! We will be using these funds to support SAFS Christmas! If you would like to sign up your household, please check on the bulletin board in the Narthex, or our website for more information!

## ONLINE GIVING

For those who are comfortable using technologies to contribute, Vanco services provides us with a smart phone app (Vanco Mobile Faith Engagement) that we can use to make our donations. You can use this app to make a one time gift to St. Stephen or an ongoing gift. If you have any questions, please contact the church office!

# Administrative News



## NEW YEAR, NEW PRAYER LIST

Our list of people in our prayers for Sunday morning may not be current. In an attempt to refresh it, all names on the prayer list will be suspended, beginning January 7th. Please let Pastor Beth know if the person you named continues to be in need of prayer and she will gladly add it back on our Sunday morning prayer list.

## OFFICE CLOSED

Due to Christmas and New Year's falling on Mondays this season, the office will be closed on those Mondays for the holidays!

## NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

If you have something that you want to include in the February Newsletter please submit your article to [sslcsecretary@buckeye-express.com](mailto:sslcsecretary@buckeye-express.com) by January 9th. Thank you!



# A Year in Review

- Acoustic Panel Replacement
- Adult Gathering Space
- Advent Worship Services
- Bible Studies
- Bonfire Get Together
- Canned Fruit Collection (94 cans + 152cups)
- Celebration of Marriage
- Children's Program
- Christmas Donations & Gift Cards
- Community Concert / Ice Cream Social
- Clothing Collection
- Donuts for Dad
- Easter Breakfast / Egg Hunt
- End of Summer Potluck
- Facebook Page Revamp
- Friends & Family Day / Picnic
- Fruit Collection
- Game Nights
- Gathering Space
- Gift Bags + Letters for Shut Ins
- HVAC Replacement (2002 unit)
- Helping Hands Group
- In House & Online Worship Sessions
- Increased Benevolence
- Inquirer's Class / New Members
- Joy Group Events
- Knitting/Crochet Group
- LPGA Parking
- Lenten Lunch & Soup Supper Services
- Little Miracles School Program
- Luggage Collection for Genacross
- Men's Group
- Movie Matinees
- Muffins for Mom
- Noisy Offerings
- Operation Christmas Child Shoeboxes
- Pasta Collection
- Pentecost Potluck
- Pet Blessing
- Prairie Group
- Property Maintenance / Upgrades
- Quilting & Dedication
- Salem Personal Care Collections
- Saturday Morning Coffee Group
- Scholarship Distributions
- Shepherd Team / Postcards
- Sidewalk Repairs
- Souper Bowl Soup Collection (154 cans)
- Soup Luncheons
- St. Paul's Community Donation
- Staff Gifts
- Synod Assembly
- Technology Improvements
- Thanksgiving Food Gifts
- Training for Greeters, Ushers, Lay Assistants
- Vacation Bible School
- Warm Clothing Drive
- Wednesday Outdoor Communion
- Youth Events



7800 Erie Street | Sylvania, Ohio | 43560419-885.1551 | [ssisecretary@backeye-express.com](mailto:ssisecretary@backeye-express.com)



# Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father-

It's hard for many right now because they are hurting. They can't feel the joy and happiness of this Holiday season. We are to be thankful for the gift of your Son, but many are just feeling empty.

You promise to be near the brokenhearted and help them with their wounds. Their wounds are deep and the pain is great.

God, they can't see your way and their eyes keep losing focus on you.

Give them peace, and lead them to comfort. Help them find refreshment for their souls. Send to them gifts of your love and let them feel hope in their hearts. Bind up their wounds and decrease their pain.

Be with them this Holiday season! In your name,  
Amen

[unmaskingthemess.com](http://unmaskingthemess.com)

## COMMUNITY PRAYERS

Carrie—Healing

Alice—Healing & Comfort

Chris—Peace & Comfort

Those with Cancer—Healing

Greg—Healing & Comfort

Olivia—Healing & Comfort

Shannon—Comfort & Peace

Dave—Healing & Comfort

Victims of Gun Violence

Wolf—Stomach Cancer

Jessica—Surgery recovery

Nancy Kubiak—Healing

Bob—Healing

Jettie—Healing

Shane—Healing from surgery

Sean—Guidance & Healing

Archer—Healing & Comfort

All victims of trauma and war

# Fun

## ALL IN GOOD FUN

When my daughters were little I would always tell them around Christmas that this is Jesus' birthday and he only received 3 things so do not be disappointed in what lies under the tree. When it came time for worship on Christmas morning, I asked the children what they thought Jesus would think of Santa and all the hype. Would he ask Santa a question? My youngest daughter replied, "I think Jesus would ask how come I only got three things and none of them were toys?"

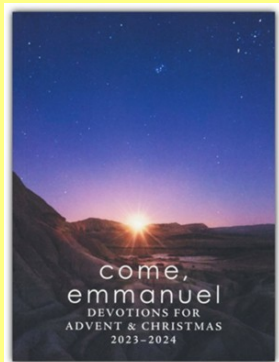
## BIBLE QUIZ

What other biblical person was born in Bethlehem?

(Answer page 10)

- A. John the Baptist
- B. King David
- C. Judas
- D. Queen Esther

# Steve's Bulletin Board



## Advent Devotionals

The Advent devotionals are set out and able to be taken home by anyone who would like one!

## Chili Cook-Off

Congrats to our winners!

1st—Karen Bogdan

2nd—Julie Dangelo

3rd—Shelly Wilczynski



## ELCA Good Gifts

Looking for the perfect gift for someone who has everything already? How about a sheep, cow, or some honeybees? Hard to keep in Sylvania? Well, never fear...ELCA Good Gifts provides these animals to help people become self-sustaining. You can find more information at [goodgifts.elca.org](http://goodgifts.elca.org).



## Operation Christmas Child

We collected and blessed 116 packed OCC boxes this year!

Bible Quiz Answer:

B. King David

# December Celebrations

## Baptismal Birthdays

12/1 Jalen Ballard  
 12/5 Patrick McCoy  
 12/19 Michelle Ballard  
 12/21 Ashley Senci  
 12/23 Ashley Huffman  
 12/24 Kristin Huffman  
 12/28 Kay Bork

## Birthdays

12/5 Sarah McCoy  
 12/4 Rich Cornell  
 12/6 Kay Bork  
 12/12 Becky Henderson  
 12/12 Sharon Sorensen  
 12/18 David Aldrich  
 12/19 Andrea Bogdan  
 12/31 Ray Hendricks

## Anniversaries

12/15 Marty & Lin McKelvey  
 12/17 Ken & Sue Marvin



# January Celebrations

## Baptismal Birthdays

1/1 Rich Cornell  
 1/1 Tom Davis  
 1/1 Dave Haddix  
 1/1 Herb Hoehing  
 1/1 Pat Hoehing  
 1/1 Nancy Pfau  
 1/1 Tom Pfau  
 1/1 Jettie Sansbury  
 1/3 Elliott Huddleston  
 1/22 Libby Boldt

## Birthdays

1/3 Elliott Huddleston  
 1/5 Libby Boldt  
 1/9 Megan Cook  
 1/14 Dave Davis  
 1/25 Richard Johnson  
 1/26 Jim Boldt  
 1/26 Craig Scholl  
 1/30 Barb Davis  
 1/30 Sandy Markin

## Anniversaries

1/18 John & Debbie Lock

## ARE YOU OKAY?

If you find yourself in need of emergency supplies or in need of someone to talk to, please don't hesitate to call the church office and we will assist you however we can or direct you to resources that may be able to help.

# Council

## 2024 Council Members

<i>President</i>	Marilyn Scuralli
<i>Vice President</i>	Tom Dangelo
<i>Secretary</i>	Lin McKelvey
<i>Treasurer</i>	Bob Housel

## Ministry Liaisons were established as follows:

<i>Christian Education</i>	Pastor Beth
<i>Finance</i>	Marilyn Scuralli
<i>Prayer, Praise, Worship</i>	Pastor Beth
<i>Property</i>	Tom Schmidt
<i>Staff Support</i>	Marilyn Scuralli
<i>Stewardship/Evangelism</i>	
<i>Technology</i>	Tom Dangelo
<i>Youth &amp; Family Ministry</i>	Lin McKelvey
<i>Social Ministry</i>	Joan Haddox

## HEARING ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

Hearing assistance equipment for up to 8 users available for anyone who needs help hearing the service better. Please ask Jeremy Hopkins or anyone who uses the equipment for assistance.

# December 2023

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 6:30 Youth Night	2 9:30 AM Coffee & Conversation  10:00 AM Greening of the Church
3  9:15 AM Gathering Space 10:30AM In-Sanctuary/Online Worship	4  1:00 Needler's 6:00 Risk Management Meeting	5  3:00 Walk Up Communion	6  11:00 Bible Study 12:00 PM Advent Service 7:00 PM Advent Service	7	8	9 9:30 AM Coffee & Conversation  2:30 Sensory Santa
10  9:15 AM Gathering Space 10:30AM In-Sanctuary/Online Worship  11:30 AM Cookie Exchange 7:00 PM Catechism	11	12  3:00 Walk Up Communion	13  11:00 Bible Study 12:00 PM Advent Service 6:30 Fellowship Meal 7:00 PM Advent Service	14	15	16  9:30 AM Coffee & Conversation
17  9:15 AM Gathering Space 10:30AM In-Sanctuary/Online Worship  1:00 Phone Caroling 7:00 PM Catechism	18  1:00 Needler's 6:00 PM Council	19  12:00 PM JOY Club @ Jettie's  3:00 Walk Up Communion	20  12:00 PM Advent Service 7:00 PM Advent Service	21	22	23
24  <b>Christmas Eve Day</b> 10:30AM In-Sanctuary/Online Worship  4:00 PM Christmas Eve Worship 7:00 PM Christmas Eve Worship	25  <b>Office Closed</b>  	26	27	28	29	30
31  <b>New Year's Eve</b> 10:30AM In-Sanctuary/Online Worship						

# January 2023

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	<i>1</i> <b>New Year's Day</b> <b>Office Closed</b>	<i>2</i> 3:00 Walk Up Communion	<i>3</i> 11:00 AM Bible Study	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i> 10:00 AM Un- decorating the Church
<i>7</i> 9:15 AM Gathering Space 10:30 AM Online/In Sanctuary Worship 11:30 AM Inquirer's Class	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i> <b>Newsletter Deadline</b> 3:00 Walk Up Communion	<i>10</i> 11:00 AM Bible Study 6:30 Fellowship Meal	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i> 7:00 PM Game Night	<i>13</i> 9:30 AM Coffee & Conversation
<i>14</i> 9:15 AM Gathering Space 10:30 AM Online/In Sanctuary Worship 7:00 PM Catechism	<i>15</i> 1:00 Needler's  6:00 PM Council	<i>16</i> 12:00 PM JOY Club  3:00 Walk Up Communion	<i>17</i> 11:00 AM Bible Study	<i>18</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>20</i> 9:30 AM Coffee & Conversation
<i>21</i> 9:15 AM Gathering Space 10:30 AM Online/In Sanctuary Worship	<i>22</i> LWR Quilting	<i>23</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>25</i> 7:00 PM Book Group	<i>26</i>	<i>27</i> 9:30 AM Coffee & Conversation
<i>28</i> 9:15 AM Gathering Space 10:30 AM Online/In Sanctuary Worship	<i>29</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>31</i>			

Pastor Beth's Sawmill Retreat