



St. John's

Ev. Lutheran Church

VOL. 148 No. 12 MONTHLY

DECEMBER 2020

HOSANNAHS IN THE MIDST OF OUR *ANNUS HORRIBILIS*

It was just after college for me. Queen Elizabeth II's house had burned, marital strife tore through the royals, and the house of Windsor—interpersonally—was in a shambles. All within the space of a year. Her Highness called it an *annus horribilis*—"a year of horrors." She may have even said "the *annus horribilis*," as in the one on par with none other. I don't recall. But she couldn't wait to turn the page, to get that *annus horribilis* behind her.

As you read this newsletter we turn the page on our own *annus horribilis*: the Feast of St. Andrew, 30 November, is just days away, and with it Advent (Advent always starts on the Sunday that falls closest to St. Andrew, whether before or after). The Church Year 2020 is behind us. O, the sorrow and heartache of this year! The fatigue! Social strife like we haven't seen for decades; political rancor; a pandemic that rages on; and, in many of our families, sufferings and losses that can never be undone which, bad enough alone, seem only to be accented or underscored by the madness and death engulfing world and nation. On all that we turn the page.

Usually when we turn the page, we do it with some optimism. A new chapter!

But right now no one's really optimistic. Whatever else winter will bring, it won't bring an immediate end to the pandemic. Or to the social strife. Or to the political rancor.

But not for naught do we welcome the New Year—the new Church Year, that is—with the cries of the crowd along the road into Jerusalem, "Hosannah to the Son of David!" For in whatever ways princes and plagues have disappointed us, here comes One who *saves*.

That's what Hosannah means: "Save us, we pray!"

And that's the Christian message in a nutshell. Jesus comes, and He comes to *save*, to *rescue*. No one can "unget" COVID. But in Christ's resurrection from the dead, the chains even of a COVID death are burst apart. It's a rescue. No sinful prince (or president or president elect) can sinlessly govern sinners and somehow usher in a new Eden. But in Christ we have a King who rules from His cross by the forgiveness of sins and will eternity reign in the new heavens and new earth where sin and death are no more. That, too, is a rescue.

But alas, we live in a culture rapt by the notion of progress. It looks at advances in, say, automobile technology and decides *everything* must be getting better, forgetting that the dying always die and sinners always still sin. In a sense, imbibing the culture of progress is a form of self-medication. It casts a veil over the truth that this life, as good as it can often be (thanks be to God!) and filled as it is with good gifts from a gracious heavenly Father is also, because of Adam's sin and ours, a "valley of sorrow," as our Catechism puts it, and always "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23).

Church Year 2020 has shattered that delusion of an Eden brought about by progress. And praise God for it. Most of you have never seen the misery Christ came to save you from. But now you have. Could His salvation stand out any more clearly than it does today? How could you not be moved to cry out with the crowds along the highway into Jerusalem, "Hosannah! Save us, we pray"? Is His salvation not cause for true optimism—the kind that the latest election tallies or death counts can't dull? For as plague, pandemic, and death rage on, Christ alone

is victorious over the grave—and all His believers with Him. And as this world's princes continue to tear each other to shreds in their mad struggle for power over kingdoms that will one day be dust, the Kingdom established in His blood endures for forever.

Even so, Lord Jesus, come. Come quickly! And save us, we pray.



Senior Pastor - Rev. J. S. Bruss, ext. 104
Associate Pastor – Rev. D. M. Kerns, ext. 101
Kantor - Bethany M. Johnson
TLS Teachers – Erin Grass, Josh Grass, Andrea Kosmicki

ONGOING SAFETY PRECAUTIONS AT ST. JOHN'S

- Congregants and pastors are masked
- Communion ware is sanitized after every use
- Pastors wash their hands in rubbing alcohol immediately before administering communion
- Seating observes social distancing
- Seating in nave is staggered from one Divine Service to the next to reduce surface contamination; seating in courtyard is sanitized between uses; at our Christmas Eve and Christmas Divine Services, nave seating will also be sanitized
- The hymnbook you use in the Divine Service you attend hasn't been touched for an entire week; COVID dies after 72 hours
- Courtyard uses only bulletins
- SignUpGenius and multiple Divine Services ensure attendance at each Divine Service at or below social-distancing maximum
- Divine Service is shortened
- Ingress and egress is expedited—no gathering in confined spaces

By God's providential grace, these measures have prevented a single instance of the spread of COVID at St. John's. God be praised!

SOUND WORDS ACADEMY AND YOUTH & ADULT CATECHESIS 2020-2021

For the foreseeable future we'll have to continue to focus on just core functions—and that has an impact on Sound Words Academy. We are with regrets presently unable to have our regular dinner, Rhythm of Faith, Jr. Lutherans, the adult Bible study and Young Adults & College students (YACS / LCMS-U).

That said, we continue to use Wednesday evenings for Youth and Adult Catechesis. The schedule for Wednesday evenings begins at 5:55 and ends around 7:35. In the 5:55-6:50 period YCat I meets separately, YCat II meets separately, and Adult Catechesis meets separately. From 7:00 till 7:35 catechesis for all catechumens (YCat I, YCat II, and Adult Catechesis) will meet together in the nave for Evening Prayer. Evening Prayer is also open to other members of the congregation who'd like to attend. With a six-foot-social-distancing capacity of 72, we hope that others in the congregation will look forward to this opportunity to gather with all the catechumens.

Catechesis and Evening Prayer began on Wednesday evening, 16 September, but it is still not too late to sign up for these sessions. Please enter by the south / aka glass / aka Luther Hall doors and arrive by 5:50 so that we can start classes on time.

We look forward to seeing catechumens at 5:50 and other congregation members at 7:00 for Evening Prayer.

ADVENT SERIES: GOD ON TRIAL—GOOD IN THE MIDST OF EVIL?

“For we know that all things work together for those who love God, for those who are called according to His purposes.” So says Paul in Romans 8. But can the coronavirus be good for His church? The fact is, the Lord has used what we call evil throughout history for the wellbeing of His people. Sulfurous rain saved Lot and his family; a flood preserved faith through believing Noah and his family; repentance and faith in God was worked through the death wrought by the fiery serpents; David was brought to repentance by a plague that befell Israel; despite the deportations to Assyria and Babylon the Lord preserved a faithful remnant; and when the Roman army crashed into Jerusalem in A.D. 70 bringing death and destruction the Lord cast His Gospel throughout the Mediterranean world on the lips of His Christians who fled the horror. He can and even does use ... pandemics to achieve His good and gracious purposes. Join on us on Wednesdays (2, 9, 16 December) at 12:15 and 7:00 p.m. for Advent Vespers as we take up the theme: **God on Trial—Good in the midst of evil?**

VOLUNTEERS STILL NEEDED

Looking ahead, winter will be here before we know it. Ugh! (if you're Pr. Kerns) Hurray! (if you're Pr. Bruss) St. John's is looking for volunteers to help shovel snow on Sunday mornings if needed. If you would be willing to help contact Jeff LaCrone at jlacrone@stjlcms.org or call the church office at 354-7132.

HYMN OF THE MONTH FOR DECEMBER

By *Bethany Johnson*

“Comfort, Comfort Ye My People”

LSB 347

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. (Isaiah 40:1-2)

We are Jerusalem, the church here on earth, who sits in the darkness of this world, mourning over the sorrows of our days, yearning for peace, and enduring the warfare of sin and death that continues to battle on. God, through the prophet Isaiah, speaks to us with words of true comfort and peace that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake.

“Comfort, Comfort Ye My People” (LSB 347) was written by Johann Olearius and translated by Catherine Winkworth. It was originally written for the festival of St. John the Baptist, since it highlights his work of preparing the way of the Lord and calling all people to repentance. This hymn then became an Advent hymn, which is appropriately used in this season that prepares us for the coming of Christ.

Stanza 1 highlights Isaiah 40:1-2 and encourages God's exiled people to rest in His promise of His grace fulfilled by Christ who covered our sins and ended the warfare of sin and death by dying for us. This light of Christ, the Word made flesh, shines on those sitting in darkness and delivers to them the good news of the Gospel. In this time of mourning over sin and its dreadful effects, we have the only cure of peace that is proclaimed and distributed in God's Word and Sacraments.

Stanza 2 points to our sin and how deserving we are of God's anger. For each “dark misdeed,” for the sins that grieve us, and for the sufferings that sadden us, God has exchanged it all for “ever-springing gladness” found in the forgiveness He won for us. This joyous exchange is the redemption we have in Christ.

Stanzas 3-4 reflect Isaiah 40:3-5 while highlighting the themes of Advent: John the Baptist's voice crying in the desert; his call to prepare a way for God by repentance and bearing fruits of repentance; and both the coming of Christ and His coming to us now. The life of the repentant is a life that bears the fruits of making “straight what long was crooked” and the “rougher places plain.” Good works naturally flow from faith, which is made alive only in Christ and His gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation for us.

What comfort we have that while we were still sinners, sitting in darkness and mourning over our sin and death, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). God's Word is never broken, meaning that His promises ring true for us even today – the promise of grace, peace, and comfort that this world will never give.

ST. JOHN'S FINANCIAL REPORT THRU OCTOBER 2020

	<u>Budgeted</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Difference</u>
YTD Income	\$606,319	\$578,211*	-\$28,108
YTD Expense	\$621,155	\$594,059	-\$27,096
YTD Income-Expense (\$14,836)		(\$15,848)	

*Includes the Payroll Protection Loan the church received

ST. JOHN'S WOMEN'S LEAGUE

LWML Mini Bazaar will be held Sunday, December 6 in Luther Hall from 8 a.m. – 1 p.m. There will be no luncheon, however crafts and food items will be available for purchase. Safe distancing and masks will be required.

2021 FLOWER CALENDAR

The 2021 Flower Calendar is now up. Please check the Calendar on the bulletin board outside of the church offices. If you would like to provide flowers for a particular service this coming year, sign your name and phone number by the date of your choice. You may pick the flowers up after the late service that day, or at the latest, Thursday morning of the following week. You will be reminded the week before your date.

SHARE THE HARVEST

This year, St. John's members will again have the opportunity to "Share their Harvest." This donation goes to local agencies to assist the needy in the Topeka area. The Harvest will be gathered at services on Thanksgiving Day and the following Sunday. Please use the "Share the Harvest" Designated Offering envelope from your contribution envelopes. Additional "Share the Harvest" envelopes and canisters are available in the narthex. Through "Share the Harvest" we direct those in need of assistance to a local agency that we support. Last year, \$1244 was distributed in support of Topeka Rescue Mission (25%), Let's Help (25%), Doorstep, Inc. (25%), and St. John's Human Care (25%). We deeply thank you for your contribution to this human care effort. "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His love endures forever." Psalm 107:1

DOORSTEP NEWS

This month is all about the Christmas Store, even if it is completely different than in years past! This year is not a 'Store', but more of a Christmas Adoption Project. All of the families who signed up through the Christmas Bureau will receive a food order and \$15 gift card per person in the household. Doorstep is also adding a blanket and health kit for each household. Distribution days this year will be December 14th – 16th.

What we currently need for Christmas: Towel sets (bath & hand only), Full-sized Shampoo/Conditioner, Toothpaste, Combs, Deodorant, Full/Queen and King Blankets, and money. We need money to purchase the gift cards, the food, and any of the above items not donated. Where we have asked for items in years past, please send a check or go to our website (www.doorsteptopeka.org) to donate by credit card.

We appreciate anything you can do to help this year during Covid Christmas. Don't forget your year-end donations as well! Doorstep would gratefully accept your donations to help us start out 2021 in the black. Our extra Covid funds will be nearly spent, but people will still be in need in 2021, whether it is Covid related, or life has just happened to, and they need our help! Below is a recent update of items still needed:

Twin Blankets	37
Full/Queen/King Blankets	129
Bath Towels	76
Hand Towels	92

Please help spread the word...

We would like these by Monday, December 7th if at all possible.

SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES HAVE RESUMED

We have worked hard and used out-of-the-box thinking in order to create a schedule that would allow Sunday School to resume in person. We are offering our regular Sunday School classes through 8th grade in the 10:00 – 10:45 period. If you have any questions, contact the church office or speak with Pastor Bruss, Pastor Kerns, or Mrs. Kosmicki

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A VOTING MEMBER?

Our constitution defines “voting member” as a communicant member who has reached the age of 18 years and been received as a voting member upon application for such privilege upon approval of the voters of the assembly. **We encourage all eligible St. John’s members to join the voters assembly.** You can contact the office, a pastor, or your elders to get instructions on how you can become a voter.

QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTIONS

This only applies to members who are at least 70 ½ and are required to withdraw funds from their retirement accounts. **However**, because of the Covid situation, the **IRS** is not requiring individuals to make these withdrawals for 2020. But for those of you who have used these withdrawals as a way to fulfil part or all of your charitable gift to the church, **you can still do so.** Typically, these withdrawals are taxed as income. A way to defer part or all of those taxes is through a Qualified Charitable Distribution (Contribution). If you have been giving to St. John’s with your charitable gifts each year, or are seeking a way to contribute, we would advise you to look into this option with your financial advisor if you meet the above-mentioned criteria. We believe you will be glad you did.

Board of Stewardship

Campaign Newsletter December 2020



A PRAYER

Almighty God, Heavenly Father, as we continue to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and attempt to get back some sort of normalcy for all our school and church families, we ask that You shower Your blessings on all of us. During this Christmas Season, remind us of the gift You gave us, Jesus Christ, Your only Son for the forgiveness of our sins and the sins of the world. We also pray that You especially bless our principal, teachers and support staff at TLS to enable them as they help raise, train and educate our children.

In Christ’s Holy Name, Amen.

SUPPORT TOPEKA LUTHERAN TODAY! CLICK TO DONATE.

<https://www.topekalutheran.org/pledge-tracker>

TOTAL COMMITMENTS

Capital Campaign (GGC) Fund

Total Amount Committed: \$818,963 Total

Pledged Gifts Received: \$487,512 To those

who have not yet submitted your

pledged gift, we would love to hear from you!

TLS UPDATE

Outdoor Classroom We are excited for another TLS edition with an outdoor learning space. This special outdoor classroom is just getting started and we could use your help! Contact Principal Francik for details and donation inquiries.

DOUBLE OF DONOR - HELP US EXPAND THE CAMPAIGN

Double Our Donor promotion is officially underway, with the goal being to increase the number of pledged gifts from 119 to 238 or more by Spring 2021. Any amount of gift is welcome and now is the time to take advantage of year-end giving! Complete your pledge card and make your gift on-line for your convenience! Go to www.topekalutheran.org/capital campaign tab to learn more!

PRAYER VIGIL - DAY OF PRAYER

Stay tuned for a morning prayer vigil for the Growing God's Children Capital Campaign.

Saturday, December 5 from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm in the TLS Gym. Sign up will be online via Sign up Genius.

TEACHER HIGHLIGHT: MS. RACHELWEINHOLD

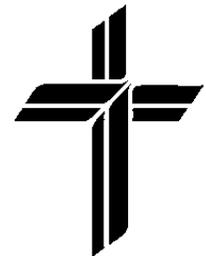
Ms. Rachel Weinhold is the new 1st grade teacher at Topeka Lutheran School. Here's a fun question and answer series that has been featured in the TLS Wildcat Tale newsletter that goes home each week with the students.

Question 1: Where were you born and where are all the places you have lived?

Answer: She was born in St. Joseph, MO. She has lived in Wausau, WI, Aurora, CO and Lockwood, MO. Question 2: What is your favorite Bible Verse or Book of the Bible and why?

Answer: She loves the book of John because of the style of writing. It is different from the other gospels.

Time To Come Back To Church!



THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19–20a)

So that we may obtain faith in Christ, God instituted the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. Through the gospel and sacraments, as through means, God gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when He wills, in those who hear the gospel. (*Augsburg Confession*, Article 5)