



Christmas in Isolation

This Sunday Pastor Tim is going to invite us to see Christmas through the eyes of two people whose lives were irrevocably changed by the birth of Jesus: Mary and Joseph. In the gospel accounts of Matthew and Luke, the narrative moves quickly from scene to scene, as the bewildered parents are visited in turn by angels and then shepherds and then wise men. But between the key events there were long weeks and months that must have been filled with isolation, loneliness, uncertainty, and fear.

The birth of a child is a blessed event, and no birth could ever be as blessed as that of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But did it seem all that blessed to the young couple who had to experience it? When the baby came they were far from home, in a dirty animal shed, in an unfamiliar town, and cut off completely from all of their family members and friends. It was just the two of them ... then three. A tiny little household, hunkered down in place, feeling very isolated from the world, trying to get through the present crisis without the comforting presence of their loved ones, and undoubtedly uncertain about what the future would bring. (Sound familiar?)

We have surely all felt a sentimental yearning to be able to experience some of the magic and wonder that surrounded that first Christmas night. Yet our desire to 'connect' with Christ's birth is selective. We like to partake in the "good tidings of great joy", but not so much in the negative emotions that Mary and Joseph had to contend with. Yet the pandemic has meant that Christmas of 2020 is going to come, for many of us, with isolation, loneliness, uncertainty and fear 'built right in'.

Is this a good thing? Well, its not something we'd have wished for. But it offers us a poignant reminder of a truth that we ought never to lose sight of. Which is that His coming isn't contingent on our state of joyfulness. Rather, our ability to experience true joy can only ever ultimately flow from the knowledge that He has already come, and is coming again.

Let's Celebrate His Coming!

Each year we gather together to celebrate the coming of the Saviour at our annual Christmas Eve worship service. This year we will 'gather together' virtually, as the public health restrictions made necessary by the second wave of the Covid -19 pandemic have compelled us to move our worship services online. On Thursday, December 24 we will be releasing a specially-recorded Christmas Eve service for you and your household to watch and enjoy and take part in at home.

Our Christmas Eve service this year will feature all of the familiar elements that you love. The story of the first Christmas will be read from the pages of Scripture. Pastor Matt and his worship team will lead us in the singing of familiar Christmas hymns, carols, and songs. The final candle of the advent wreath - the Christ candle - will be lit. Pastor Jamie will deliver a timely and moving message of hope. And as a bonus feature this year you'll get to see the Christmas greetings recorded by many of the members of our Sevenoaks family.

Different households have different customs and practices in terms of what 'the schedule' on Christmas Eve looks like, so we'll be making this year's Christmas Eve service available for viewing starting on the morning of Thursday the 24th, and it will remain available for viewing right through until the end of the day on Saturday the 26th. That way you can decide what time of day works best for you.

NOTE: During the service, when we light the Christ Candle, we will invite you to join us in lighting a candle at home yourself. So please make sure to have a candle and a lighter on hand when you sit down to watch.

Our hope is that this special service will help you to celebrate Christmas with the joy that it should instill in all of us, regardless of our circumstances. For unto us is born this day a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

Upcoming Sundays

December 20 – Pastor Tim

Sunday, December 20 will be the fourth Sunday in Advent. We have previously lit the Prophecy Candle, the Bethlehem Candle, and the Shepherds Candle, and so this week the Angels Candle will be lit. The role of the angels is not insignificant in the Christmas story, and it was through the visitation of just such a heavenly being that Mary first came to learn that she had been chosen by God to give birth to His son.

The story of Mary and Joseph and their role in the Saviour's birth is set out in the first chapter of Matthew, and in the first two chapters of Luke. This Sunday Pastor Tim will be drawing on those passages as he invites us to see Christmas through the experience of this young couple.

December 27 – Pastor Jack

In contemporary North American culture, we have reached the point where it is understood that the "Christmas season" *begins* anywhere from four to eight full weeks prior to Christmas Day, and it is not therefore surprising that so many people tend to think that the Christmas season ends on Christmas night - in a nativity scene that shows adoring shepherds (and perhaps even exotic wise men with camels) all standing around the manger in Bethlehem a few hours after Christ's birth. But the traditional European understanding has always been that December 25th is the beginning of the Christmas season.

On Sunday, December 27 Pastor Jack will be inviting us to enter into one of the perhaps less-celebrated parts of the Christmas story, as he invites us to see Christmas through the experience of two faithful servants of God who had the chance to "meet" the baby Jesus about six weeks after he was born. In Luke 2:21-38, we have an account of how Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, and how the Holy Spirit enabled a righteous and devout man named Simeon as well as a Prophetess named Anna to recognize the newborn messiah for who He truly was, and to rejoice in the encounter.

January 3 – Pastor Jamie

2020 has been a rough year by anyone's standards, and so we look forward with particular joy to worshipping together online as the first Sunday in January marks the beginning of a new year. And with a new year will come a new sermon series (Or rather, the resumption of an unfinished sermon series!). On Sunday, January 3 Pastor Jamie will take us back to the gospel of John - and resume the sermon series entitled "John the Eyewitness" - as he picks up where we "left off" last spring at the beginning of John Chapter 13.

January 3 will also be our first chance to celebrate the Lord's Supper together in 2021, so don't forget to have your communion elements (bread and wine / juice and crackers) ready to go before you sit down to worship with us online.

Livestreaming at 8:45 / On Demand after 10:30

Please be reminded that our livestreamed worship service starts at 8:45 every Sunday morning, and that all you have to do to join in is visit our website and click on the "Watch Now" button.

When you open up the window to watch the service, you will be invited to join our online chat with other members of the church family. Just sign in using your name and post a greeting for everyone to see.

Each week a recording of the livestreamed service will also be made available for "on demand" viewing whenever you want, starting at around 10:30 Sunday morning.



Merry Christmas from the staff!

Holiday Season Office Hours

We are pleased that we have been able to keep the church office open during our regular office hours – which are from 8:30 until 4:30 Monday through Thursday – even under the new wave of public health orders that have forced us to temporarily suspend most ministry activities. We are hopeful that we will be able to stay open right through until the Christmas holidays.

Over the holiday season itself, the office will be open on some days as usual but closed on others, due to statutory holidays. Here’s what our holiday season office hours will look like:

Monday December 21	OPEN
Tuesday December 22	OPEN
Wednesday December 23	OPEN
Thursday December 24	Closed
Friday December 25	Closed
Saturday December 26	Closed
Sunday December 27	Closed
Monday December 28	Closed
Tuesday December 29	OPEN
Wednesday December 30	OPEN
Thursday December 31	OPEN
Friday January 1	Closed
Saturday January 2	Closed
Sunday January 3	Closed
Monday January 4	Closed

Not Alone

Those who see the world through the eyes of compassion have long known that the Christmas holiday season can be a time of acute sadness for those who have recently lost loved ones. A season during which our whole culture celebrates the idea of getting together with beloved family members and friends can be a trigger for sorrow to those who are experiencing the absence of a loved one. So each year at Christmas we put on a candlelight memorial service, so that those who are experiencing the grief of loss can gather together and find comfort in fellowship.

One of the cruelties of the Covid-19 pandemic is that just as the virus itself has added significantly to the ranks of those who have experienced the loss of a loved one, the measures that we have needed to take in order to fight the spread of the virus have cut off many of those same people from contact with the communities that could have helped them to bear their grief.

We had to offer our candlelight memorial service in a livestreamed online format this year, and the theme for our service was *Not Alone*. In the selection of this theme, it was our desire to communicate that those who have recently lost loved ones need not feel alone in their grief, that those who do not have spouses or families with whom to share the holiday season need not feel alone as they mark Christmas, and that those who live alone and are isolated by the current public health measures need not feel alone in facing the uncertainty and fear that the pandemic has thrown over us all like a shroud.

The Candlelight Memorial Service is always a beautiful and moving experience, and this year was no exception. Our featured speakers - Len and Barb Enns - shared their intertwined stories of love, loss, grief, comfort and hope. If you weren't able to attend with us on December 8, or if you were and you'd like to revisit the experience, a recording of the service is available to view on our website. (sevenoaks.org)



Welcome, Barb Enns!

We welcome into membership Barb Enns who has decided to make this her church home joining her new husband, Len Enns. It could have easily gone the other way if she and Len had decided to attend her former church (Emmanuel Baptist), but as it is in the fluid body of believers here in Abbotsford, she came to join our particular church family! And we are so glad you have Barb! Bless you.

Barb has already been an active participant in our Gospel Community group and even hosted us on their spacious deck before the Covid restrictions became tighter. She and Len often walk in their neighbourhood greeting any neighbours along their way and the conversations they begin often get turned to their relationship with the Lord because He is such an obvious part of their lives.

She and Len met at Holmberg House hospice society when their previous spouses were being cared for in the last stages of their illnesses. They had the unique privilege of seeing each other express tender compassion to their dying spouses and this ultimately led them to falling in love and getting married.

A verse that is meaningful to them at this time of their lives is Jeremiah 31:13b " I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow".

Pastor Jack Campbell

Extreme Weather Shelter

*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with
shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and
blood?*

(Isaiah 58:6-7)

For the month of January, and possibly for most of the last two weeks of December as well, Sevenoaks will be participating in the Extreme Weather Response program here in Abbotsford by making our gym available for use as an Extreme Weather Shelter for the homeless. In making this space under our roof available to provide shelter from the cold on those nights when the mercury will dip down to below the freezing level, we are becoming only the second church in Abbotsford to open our doors in this way.

As the number of homeless people in our community has grown over the last decade or so, the need for shelter beds has far outstripped the number of permanent and temporary (seasonal) shelter beds available. So four years ago Gateway Community CRC responded to the need and agreed to open its doors and operate an Extreme Weather Shelter out of the gym in their building all winter long. For four winters they have had to bear the significant logistic burden of operating this vital ministry alone, but this year we will be leaning in to help, if only for a month to a month and a half.

While the shelter is in operation on our premises, it will continue to be operated by a dedicated team of staff who are paid by BC Housing, and volunteers from the Gateway congregation. But if any member of the Sevenoaks congregation is interested in getting involved as a volunteer in some capacity, please contact Pastor Brian at the church office.

**The Clearbrook Kiwanis
2021 Christmas Tree
Chipping Event**

Saturday Jan. 2, 2021 • 10am-2pm
at Seven Oaks Alliance Church on Gladwin Road

By donation. Cash, cheque or online at bccht.ca/clearbookkiwanis

DONATIONS OVER \$20 ELIGIBLE FOR A TAX RECEIPT.

This is a physically distanced event.

Supporting Kiwanis
Children's Cancer Program
at BC Children's Hospital

Season of Discernment Regarding Women Elders

On January 26 of this year we held a Special General Meeting for the purpose of adopting our new revised church bylaws. At that meeting a resolution was passed which calls upon the leadership of Sevenoaks to lead the congregation through a season of study, prayer and discernment regarding whether or not we want to change the provision in our Bylaws which says that our Elders must be men. No time frame was prescribed in that resolution, but ten months have passed and the Board would like to bring everyone 'up to speed' on when we expect that season of discernment to get underway.

At the monthly Elders' Board meeting in February it was decided that the season of discernment would commence in April, run over the course of several months, involve holding at least two large-scale day-long teaching and discussion sessions, and culminate with a vote on the issue at a second Special General Meeting in October. THAT plan was about to be rolled out when the pandemic hit - in mid March - and everything got shut down for several months.

In July we held a 'mail-in' Annual General Meeting at which a new Board of Elders was elected, and at the monthly Elders' Board meeting in September the new Board addressed the question of when and how to 'pick up the ball' on the matter of getting the called-for season of discernment going. The Board found itself to be of two minds:

1. On the one hand, the Board felt that it is important for the wishes of the membership to be honoured, and for the season of discernment to commence as soon as possible.
2. On the other hand, however, the Board was also concerned that as long as we are under a public health order which limits the size of our gatherings to 50 people at a time, it will be hard for us to hold large townhall-type meetings for the purpose of teaching and discussion. These kinds of large meetings can provide an opportunity for the various members of our church family with varying perspectives to listen to each other. And listening to each other even as we listen to the leading of the Spirit will be essential to creating a sense that we are involved in a process of discernment TOGETHER.

The end result was that the Board made a decision to defer the matter to their January meeting, which will take place on Thursday, January 28. Please mark that date on your calendars. We are all praying for an end to this pandemic, for an end to public health restrictions, and for the day to come when we are free once again to gather in whatever numbers we like. But we ask you to add to your prayers a prayer for wisdom for the Board of Elders, that they may know how to honour Christ and lead His church well, regardless of what circumstances may come.

NEW BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT

My second book, *Teach me to Number my Days*, is a collection of sermons, chapel talks, and other writings that span the last 24 years of my life. The title is based on Psalm 90:12 (NIV), "*Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*"

I hope that, just as God blessed people through these talks when they were originally presented, they will be a blessing to each and every person who reads them in the future.

The book is available in both paperback and Kindle format from Amazon, and from the Apple bookstore. Here's the link to the Amazon Canada page:

<https://www.amazon.ca/dp/B08NTQB2SX/>

Dave Jeffery (part of the Sevenoaks church family since 2006)



Making a Few New Year's Resolutions

One of the annual rituals associated with the arrival of each new year on January 1 is the making of 'new year's resolutions'. In a typical year a person might take stock of the year that has passed, identify ways in which he or she would like the new year to be better, and resolve to make a fresh start in doing some things to make that 'better year to come' a reality.

The year 2020 has not been, however, anything vaguely like 'a typical year'. Putting together a list of ways in which we would all like 2021 to be better than 2020 is going to be a pretty easy task. The challenge is going to lie in the stark reality that so much of what has made 2020 a tough year, and so much of what could make 2021 a better year, lies outside of our control. The whole idea of making new year's resolutions is based on the idea of taking control of ourselves, of taking control of our own lives. What do you do when you realize that you don't actually have the ability to control what happens tomorrow?

Jesus has an answer to that question, but it's a hard answer to swallow. His answer is this:

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? So do not worry. Seek first my kingdom and my righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. (From Matthew 6:25-34)

Jesus' radical answer to our concerns about whether or not we are in control of our lives is "Don't worry. You are not in control of your lives right now, but you never were, and that's a good thing. Because I AM!"

If you are inclined to face the new year with any degree of uncertainty and anxiety, you may find it helpful to remember that the proper designation for the year that we are about to enter is 2021 A.D. "A.D." stands for "*anno Domini*," which is Latin for "*the year of our Lord*." The year ahead - like all of the years of our lives - belongs to the One to whom we all belong.

If you feel like you want to make a few resolutions to steel yourself for the year ahead, may we suggest that you resolve to spend 2021 living out the advice that Jesus has given us in the sermon on the mount. In particular, let us all resolve together that in 2021 we will

- seek to know Christ's Person more deeply in our hearts;
- seek to live out His Kingdom more constantly in our lives; &
- seek to be instruments of His Righteousness more actively in the world.

In this way, we will renew together our mission as a church, which has been and is "To Know Jesus & To Make Him Known."

Financial Update

Church family, in our last newsletter I gave a financial picture as of the end of week 47 and presented what we needed to end the year in the black. Many of you have responded with great generosity as you've given to the Lord. Thank you! Below is an update as we approach the end of 2020.

Here is where we stand as of **week 50**, 2020:

Needed for budget to date: \$999,912.50

Giving to date: \$947,466.88
(includes income from federal wage subsidy)

Shortfall: **\$52,445.62**

Budget 2020 (to end of week 52) \$1,039,909

Needed by year-end to make budget:
\$92,442.12

With only two weeks of the year to go it may still seem like a large climb but let me again add some context, as I did in the last newsletter, to help round out the picture:

- 1) As of the end of October our expenses were approximately **\$43,000** under budget. As of writing I don't have the November expense numbers but there's every indication that we'll still be significantly under budget.
- 2) In the last 2 giving weeks of 2019 we received almost **\$89,000**

Given 1) above, I'm confident that by year end we can remain under budget in our expenses.

Given 2) above, I'm confident we can close the gap this year and make it in the black.

Thank you again for your generosity and I ask that we all pull together, and ask the Lord how we each might be able to contribute to that goal.

Pastor Jamie

Donations must be received at the church office by **Dec 31** to be tax receipted for this year. As per Canada Revenue Agency, any donations received **Jan 1, 2021** or later, will be receipted in 2021, regardless of the date on the cheque.

There is a delay in electronic payments (bank payments and *Tithe.ly*) from when they are initiated to when they are received. Due to bank closures over the holidays, we cannot guarantee that any donations sent electronically after Dec 25 will be receipted in the 2020 tax year.

Financial Giving

Cheerful, sacrificial giving is part of our life in Christ, an act of worship to the living God & an expression of trust in Him. Your generosity helps us fulfill our vision of knowing Jesus & making Him known.

Online via *Tithe.ly*

Make a secure, one-time donation or set up a recurring gift to the church using *Tithe.ly*. Use a credit card & designate where you want your gift to go.

Online Banking

There are 2 ways to give through your financial institution's online banking site:

1. Bill Payment

Add **Sevenoaks Alliance Church** as a payee. Note your offering envelope number as your account number.

2. E-Transfer

Add **life@sevenoaks.org** as a payee. Enter the amount you want to give & make up a security question. Then be sure to send the security question answer for the e-transfer in a separate email to **life@sevenoaks.org** so that we can accept it.

Cheque

Make a cheque payable to **Sevenoaks Alliance Church**. Ensure that your name or offering envelope number is clear for tax receipt purposes. Place the completed cheque in an envelope & mail or bring it to the church office.

Thank you for supporting the ministry of Sevenoaks Church!

Contact Information

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Help us keep your information current.
Contact Tammy at the church office or
email ttoews@sevenoaks.org