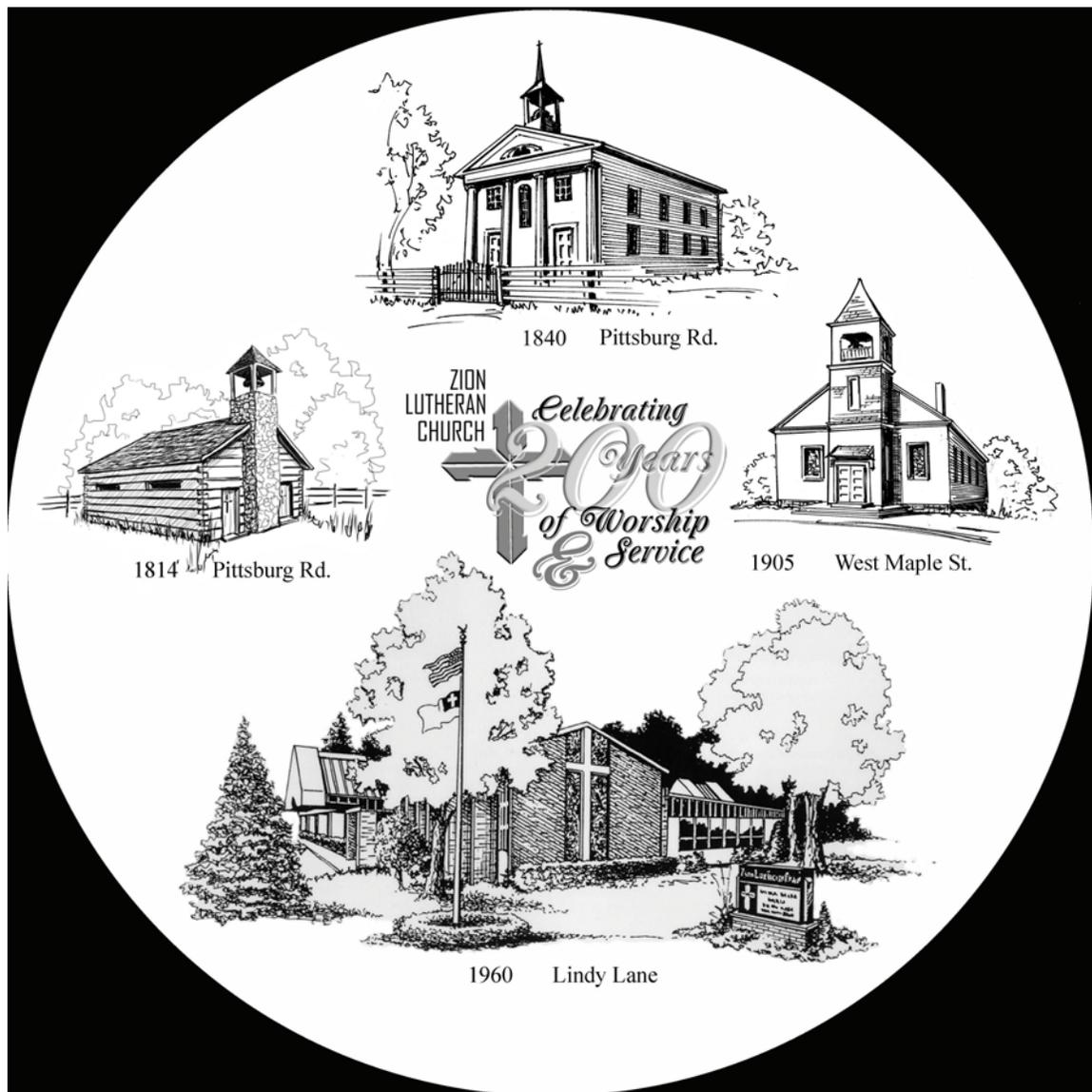

The Zion Herald

Proclaiming Good News

December 2013

Our Bicentennial



June 14, 1814 – June 14, 201
Still Growing in Love and Service by Grace

A WORD FROM THE PASTOR

Our Bicentennial Anniversary preparations continue this month with the production of our bicentennial commemorative plate. Brian Walters provided the artwork with a design that follows the narrative of the church buildings in which we worshiped over the course of two hundred years. It begins with the historic log cabin constructed in 1814 on Pittsburg Road. That building, which was used as a church and a school, was replaced after it burned down, with a second church built in 1840 on the same site, which is now North Canton Cemetery. There we remained until moving to West Maple Street in 1905, which then gave way to our present location on Lindy Lane, where we built the first phase of our present church in 1960.

Darlene Milavickas and Carol Rossbach have been working hard on a series of poster board narratives, with pictures and props that tell the story of our history in greater detail. They presented the first building with the “keys to the church” on display inside a glass case in the Narthex. Then there was the second building with lots of photos and timelines that identified what was going on in America during those early years when the church was growing from its humble origins in New Berlin, Ohio. We started our bicentennial year back in June with a delicious (and profitable) prime rib dinner shared with our partners of old now at Zion United Church of Christ. We’ve enjoyed poster board narratives and “Name that Confirmand” old photograph contests. Now it is time to take in the beauty of our commemorative plate.

As you can tell from the graphic on the cover, this plate celebrates two hundred years with a picturesque presentation of our churches through the years. We plan to commission 100 of these plates. The price is \$35.00 per plate. We kept the price low so that no one will be able to resist the urge to purchase them. Since we are selling them at cost, we need to sell them all to recoup our expenses. We would like to use some as gifts for the guests who will visit us during a year when we celebrate Confirmation Reunions, a Faceted Glass Windows Dedication, Anniversary Services, and a Gala Prime Rib Dinner Bicentennial Celebration next June. So, if you would be willing to donate a plate (or plates) for this gifting purpose, that would be great. I guarantee that when you see the commemorative plate, you will agree that this will make a great gift, both for Christmas now and for the guests who will be honoring us with their presence next June!

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OUR ORDER FORM FOR ZION’S BICENTENNIAL COMMEMORATIVE PLATES

The plate is beautiful! The price is right! It’ll make a great gift, and I’d like to donate one, too!

I would like to purchase _____ plate(s) at \$35.00 per plate for a total of \$_____.

I would like to donate _____ plate(s) at \$35.00 per plate for a total of \$_____.

Name _____

Amount _____

(If you are paying by check, please make your check payable to *Zion Lutheran Church.*)

ZION'S ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

The First Sunday of Advent: Gathering as Families Welcome the New Year

- Sunday, December 1, 8:00 a.m.: Our Traditional Service, with the Senior Choir singing
- Sunday, December 1, 10:30 a.m.: Our Blended Service, led by Zion's Praise Team
- Sunday, December 1, 5:30 p.m.: Our First Advent Dinner hosted by the Chancel Guild
- Sunday, December 1, 6:15 p.m.: Choral Concert, *The Chorale*, Kent State Stark Campus

[Our First Sunday Evening Advent Service features a nineteen-voice choir, the Kent State Stark Chorale, which sings under the direction of our own Fred Locker. This will be a good way to get off to great start for a strong series of Sunday Evening Advent Dinners and Devotions.]

The Second Sunday of Advent: The Biblical Story of Hope and Fulfillment

- Sunday, December 8, 8:00 a.m.: Our Traditional Service, with the Senior Choir singing
- Sunday, December 8, 10:30 a.m.: Our Blended Service, led by Zion's Praise Team
- Sunday, December 8, 5:30 p.m.: Our Second Advent Dinner hosted by our Youth Leaders
- Sunday, December 8, 6:15 p.m.: Join Us for Chrismons & Zion's *Bicentennial Challenge*

[Our evening service will be a celebration of Youth at Zion. Our children tell the story of Christ's coming through Chrismons; then, all of us will join in a good, old-fashioned Youth Challenge.]

The Third Sunday of Advent: Gathering as Families to Celebrate the Story

- Sunday, December 15, 8:00 a.m.: Our Traditional Service, with the Senior Choir singing
- Sunday, December 15, 10:30 a.m.: Children's Christmas Program, *Christmas by the Book*
- Sunday, December 15, 5:30 p.m.: Our Third Advent Dinner hosted by Church Council
- Sunday, December 15, 6:15 p.m.: An Evening Service with Readings and Special Music

[Our morning service celebrates the role of children in telling the story of Christmas, while our evening program features the many talents Zion enjoys with our Senior Choir and many others.]

The Fourth Sunday of Advent: A Festival of Carols from around the World

- Sunday, December 22, 8:00 a.m.: Our Traditional Service, with the Senior Choir singing
- Sunday, December 22, 10:30 a.m.: Our Blended Service, led by Zion's Praise Team
- Sunday, December 22, 5:30 p.m.: Our Fourth Advent Dinner hosted by the Men of Zion
- Sunday, December 22, 6:15 p.m.: Celebrating *Christmas Carols from around the World!*

[Our grand finale is a joyous delight. Plan to join us. You'll be glad you did; and so will we!]

Our Christmas Eve Schedule at Zion: Two Services – 6:00 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

- Tuesday, December 24, 6:00 p.m.: Our Family-Friendly Service, with special music by Zion's many talented members, plus our Christmas Carol Setting for Holy Communion
- Tuesday, December 24, 8:00 p.m.: A Traditional Choral Concert and Carol Sing for All
- Tuesday, December 24, 8:30 p.m.: Our Traditional Candle-Light Service, with Zion's Senior Choir singing, as well as our special Christmas Carol Setting for Holy Communion

CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS

Mark Votaw called our meeting of Council to order at 7:00 p.m. For the first time in a long time we had perfect attendance: Brian Milek (Vice President), Juanita Cignetti (Secretary), Dave Palumbo (Treasurer), Beth Shaheen (Resource), Cathy Harvey (Caring), Carol Rossbach (Worship), Todd Elsass (Property), Renee Keith (Learning), Vicki Givler (Parish Life), and Pastor Sherwindt. Devotions were offered by Brian Milek. We then approved the Minutes, discussed a good many reports, and adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Our Treasurer had more good news to share as we enjoyed yet another monthly surplus in November. Through 11 months, our year-to-date surplus now stands at \$3,787.68. We are confident that, with your support, we can make it 12 for 12 again this year in terms of monthly surpluses and a surplus for the year. Your generosity is invited. Please think of Zion as you consider those who will be blessed with your end-of-the-year giving. A strong December would go a long way in providing a good start to 2014.

FINANCIAL FACTS FOR NOVEMBER

November Income	\$15,433.70
November Expenses	<u>\$15,351.94</u>
November Surplus	\$ 81.76
Income thru November	\$203,228.41
Expenses " November	<u>\$199,440.73</u>
Surplus thru November	\$ 3,787.68
Food Pantry Fund	\$ 4,502.44
Zion's Youth Fund	\$ 9,561.55
The HVAC Fund	\$ 2,254.42
Bicentennial Gifts	\$ 18,100.00
Advanced Giving	\$ 4,500.00
Thankofferings-to-date	\$ 600.00

We thank you for your generous support!

MORE COUNCIL NEWS

Worship Ministry, Carol Rossbach: The Advent and Christmas schedules are set, complete with hosts for our four Advent dinners (see page 3). There will be two services on the Tuesday of Christmas Eve (6:00 p.m. & 8:30 p.m.), with a Choral Concert & Carol Sing at 8:00 p.m.). We'll have two services on Sunday, December 29th, at the usual time, 8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.

Learning Ministry, Renee Keith: The Tenth Annual Youth Missions Craft Show was a huge success. Our Sunday School Thanksgiving Service Project went well. Now it's on to Advent and Christmas. The Advent Giving Tree will invite Christmas gifts and dinners for the families we serve through our Food Pantry; and the Christmas Program will be another great one, *Christmas by The Book*.

Bicentennial Anniversary News: Two of the three proposals we passed at our Congregational Meeting had to do with the Bicentennial. We are applying for an Intern (again), which could add some excitement to the upcoming year. We also passed our Faceted Stained Glass Windows proposal, and have signed a contract with *Marchione Studios* to complete the process of designing, creating, and installing the windows around Easter. In the meantime, we have created a Bicentennial Gifts Fund to receive donations for the projects we have deemed to be "bicentennial gifts to ourselves". Presently, the Faceted Glass Windows project is one such gift, and the possibility of getting an Intern is another. There may be other projects that Council approves. We will keep the congregation informed about ways in which we can make our Bicentennial Anniversary a great celebration for us, while also involving some significant improvements for the building.

ADVENT DINNERS ARE HERE

Sunday Evening Advent Dinners are back!
The Chancel Guild starts us off with a special edition of soup and sandwiches on the First Sunday of Advent. Steve & Mary Jo Robbins have volunteered to take the lead in preparing Tortellini Soup with a variety of sandwiches, while others in the Chancel Guild provide desserts, drinks, along with everything else that will make for a light but terrific Advent dinner. Then comes the service, a service filled with special music, featuring a 19-voice choir from Kent State Stark Campus called *The Chorale*, which sings under the direction of Fred Locker. The dinner will be delicious, and the service outstanding. We look forward to having a great turnout this first Sunday evening in Advent. That's ***December 1st***.

Our Second Sunday Evening in Advent will focus on the Youth of Zion. Dinner is hosted by the youth, their families and leaders. Jeff Frank and Debbie Fox are leading the team that will surprise us with something extraordinary. Last year it was pulled pork. Let's see what they have for us this year. More importantly, this will be an opportunity to enjoy the youth in action. During the service, our youngest ones will help decorate the Christmas tree with Chrismons, while older youth tell the story of Christ's birth with Scripture passages that foretold the promise and described its fulfillment.

Keeping with this theme of promise and fulfillment, we will take up the challenge of how best to build a strong youth program that engages our younger families in the work of the kingdom and the ministry of the church. It should be fun and rewarding. Look for Mark Votaw to wow us with a Presidential Temple Talk in the morning, and for our leaders to move the ball forward in the evening.

ADVENT SERVICES, TOO!

The Third Sunday of Advent returns to a service that focuses on special music, with the Senior Choir leading the way. Jon & Barb Elsass will also be on hand to help as we enjoy the many vocal talents with which God has blessed us at Zion. The Church Council will follow the lead of Dave Palumbo in preparing what is our annual celebration of *Pasta Devitis Style*, which includes all the extras. Between the food, the fellowship, classic readings, beautiful music, seasonal hymns, this should be another welcome reminder of how letting faith be our guide helps us stay focused on the real reason for the season. Make it a point to say thank you to your Council and to the Senior Choir by lending the support of your presence as we come together for dinner and a service on the Sunday evening of ***December 15th***.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent is always our grand finale. Carole & Ron Singer lead our worship with an extravaganza of musical instruments from around the world, as we sing Christmas carols with roots in England, France, Poland, Norway, and Germany, with American classics and African-American spirituals, too. The service is unforgettable, and this year, the Men of Zion have pledged to make the dinner every bit as outstanding. Mark Votaw, Dale Jacobs, Tony Niesz, and Randy Cizek are conspiring to bring some Caribbean heat to our cold December nights. Needless to say, the food will be sensational, and the service, the full measure of what it means to *make a joyful noise unto the Lord!*

December brings four Sunday Evening Advent Dinners, along with four Sunday Evening Advent Services. Plan to make us part of your preparations for Christmas. You'll be glad you did; and so will we.

GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Sunday, December 8: Youth of Zion & their families host the Advent dinner, 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, December 8: Youth assist with our Celebration of Christmas Service, 6:15 p.m.

Saturday, December 14: Dress Rehearsal for Children's Christmas Program at a time TBA

Saturday, December 14: The Pizza Party and Giving Tree Gift Wrapping Party afterwards!

Sunday, December 15: The Children's Christmas Program at the 10:30 Service (only)

Sunday, December 29: There will be No Youth Sunday School Classes this morning!

PRE-K THROUGH THE SIXTH GRADE

This December we will combine our Sunday School lessons with practice for this year's Christmas program. We will involve all of our youth – including those in the Confirmation Class and the High School Class – with many different roles. We will have speaking parts for those children who are interested, along with other non-speaking roles to round out our program. This year's program is entitled *Christmas by The Book*. It tells the traditional Christmas Story, starting with the Scriptures prophesying the coming of the Messiah, and continuing through the birth of Jesus. Much of the narration and dialogue from the play is taken directly from the Scriptures, offering a description of the first Christmas as taken from the Bible. There is no doubt that all of us will enjoy this wonderful Christmas Story told through words and music with a cast of great kids.



The majority of the Sunday School hours on December 1st, 8th, and 15th will be spent preparing for this program, which will be performed at the 10:30 a.m. service on Sunday, December 15th. We will have our dress rehearsal, our annual Christmas Pizza Party, and the wrapping of the Giving Tree gifts on Saturday, December 14th, at a time still to be determined, once we're able to check with everyone's schedules. There will be no Sunday School on Sunday, December 29th. We will resume our normal Sunday School schedule at 9:15 a.m. on Sunday, January 5th.

A FEW WORDS OF THANKS TO OUR YOUTH AT ZION

Thank you to all of our youth for the great job they did decorating this year's Thanksgiving bags for the Siffrin Homes in our community and our Food Pantry families. Youth from ages 3 through 18 beautifully decorated about one hundred grocery bags for this project this year. We would also like to thank all of the Sunday School kids and leaders who donated money to help buy four turkeys and some cranberry sauce to help fill the bags. The youth and Sunday School staff would also like to thank the leaders and volunteers of Zion's Food Pantry and Clothing Closet for all of their time and hard work in making such a big difference in the lives of many who are in need. You are all greatly appreciated!

MORE GREAT NEWS FOR ZION'S YOUTH

CHRISTMAS IS A SEASON OF GIVING

The Youth will again sponsor the Giving Tree this Christmas season for several families in our community who are in need. The Giving Tree (located in the Narthex) has tags with gift suggestions for these families. We are also hoping to help **all** of our pantry families by giving them Christmas dinner. So we have placed tags on the tree for a \$25 donation for Christmas dinners in addition to the gift tags. Please take one (or more) of the tags, purchase the item and bring the gift, **unwrapped** with the tag attached, to church by the date listed at the bottom of the tag, which is Friday, December 13th.



The youth will be getting together on Saturday, December 14th, after rehearsal, to have pizza and then wrap the giving tree gifts so they can be delivered to the families before Christmas day. Please help our youth help these families have a Merry Christmas and feel God's love through this great service project.

As an added treat for our pantry families, the youth and their families are being asked to donate boxes of "kid-friendly" cereals (like Fruit Loops, Lucky Charms, or Apple Jacks), canned vegetables, and canned soup (other than tomato soup) to help these families as they are home over the holiday season together. These items can be placed in the red wagon in the Narthex or given to your child's Sunday School teacher.

Thank you for all your support! The Zion family is a truly wonderful family of loving and giving people. This especially rings true during the holiday season; and we are so grateful for everything that everyone does!

YOUTH TO HOST ADVENT DINNER ON DECEMBER 16

Advent has arrived along with our wonderful Sunday Evening Advent dinners and services. On Sunday, December 8th, the youth will host the Advent dinner. We are planning a delicious dinner with Italian as our theme. It could be lasagna, or a spaghetti casserole; and we will finish everything off with lots of great desserts! We will be contacting the youth and their families about donating items for dinner, and helping to set up, serve, and tear down for that dinner. Dinner starts at 5:30 p.m. So we will need all of the youth at church by 4:15 p.m. to get ready. This is always a great dinner and we appreciate everyone's help to make it happen!

The youth will also be helping with the Advent Service on Sunday, December 8th, which starts at 6:15 p.m. following dinner. We will be doing our Chrismons Service, and will need help with the readings and we will need children to carry and hang the Chrismons on the Christmas tree.



**Zion's Sunday School Staff would like to wish all
of our families a very Merry Christmas and
a Peaceful and Happy New Year!**



THANKOFFERING SUNDAY

We celebrated Thankoffering Sunday on November 17th, when a good number of women participated in leadership roles in our worship services. Some sang with the Senior Choir, others with the Praise Team. Some served as Readers, Intercessors, and Assisting Ministers, while others served behind the scenes with the Chancel Guild, or as Ushers, or planners. We thank them all: Juanita Cignetti, Corlene Coulter, Barb Elsass, Jane Fairman, Debbie Fox, Connie Frank, Elaine Fidler, Sue Geib, Joyce Gibeaut, Vicki Givler, Helen Heller, Beth Heller, Savannah Heller, Marissa Keating, Miriam Keating, Linda Lancashire, Mary Jo Robbins, Carol Rossbach, Jayne Schrader, Beth Shaheen, Carole Singer, Janet Slease, Laura Thompson, Betty Tracy, Suzanne Walters, Lorraine Weinman, and Linda Zumkehr. We also want to thank everyone who offered their support for the work and witness of the women of the church. We are happy to announce that we have collected \$600 with our Thankofferings, all of which will go to support the *Women of the ELCA* and their many ministries throughout the church and around the globe.

We were blessed with two special guests, Dave Zastawny, and his wife Lisa, from *Thrivent Financial for Lutherans*, who brought donuts, cookies, and good news about the many ways Thrivent would like to support the life and ministry of our church. We learned that Zion can receive \$200 a year from *Thrivent* if we appoint 8 advocates, who are awarded \$25 each in Thrivent Choice dollars every year for helping us find ways for Thrivent to help us. Thank you, *Thrivent*; and thank you, Linda Lancashire, Carl Geib, Betty Tracy, Stella Smiley, Cindy Burzycki, Carolyn Elsass, Betty Boettler, and Pastor Sherwindt for being our advocates!

THE WOMEN OF ZION

The date for the *Chancel Guild Christmas Dinner* is set for Tuesday, **December 10th**. Our hostesses this year are Susan Heyard, Shirley Cary, and Betty Tracy. The evening begins with a Social Hour at 5:30 p.m., and dinner is served at 6:00 p.m.

The women of Zion meet for their *monthly Bible study* on **Tuesday, December 17th**, in Resource Center at 9:30 a.m. Our study follows the faithful witness of women in the Biblical narrative, and this month the focus shines on Miriam, the older sister of Moses. In one sense, the theme of this session, given the season, speaks to mothers and grandmothers everywhere as we review the saving of the baby Moses on the Nile and celebrate the birth of the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. The stories of Moses and Jesus are stories of babies in danger, who, with God's protection and some unlikely heroes – a Pharaoh's daughter and three Magi – grow up to do God's work, leading God's people through the two signature events of the story of salvation, namely, the Exodus and the Empty Tomb, which proclaims the salvation that is ours with the Good News of Resurrection! But before we get to Easter, let's enjoy Christmas, and Advent, when we meet on the third Tuesday, December 17th, at 9:30 a.m. in the Resource Center. Our Bible study is entitled *Miriam, A Loving Protector*. Exodus 2 is a great place to begin, and joining in a lively discussion with the Women of Zion is the best place to wind up! See you there.

Speaking about joining the women of Zion, the *Comfort Givers* can use your company this month. They meet on December 12th and 26th, at 9:30 a.m. in Luther Hall. As the old saying goes, many hands make work light. Yours are just the hands we're looking for.

ZION'S FOOD PANTRY

“We believe we are doing more than handing out groceries. When a visitor comes to us for a hand up, we meet them with a bag ... a bag full of groceries, of course, but also with a small dash of hope that things will be better soon. Our smiles and our support are free, just like our groceries, to those in need.” This is the introduction you will find at the website of the Stark County Hunger Task Force, one of our many partners with whom we find the resources we need to reach out to our neighbors through the ministry of our Food Pantry & Clothing Closet.

We are so grateful for the partners that help us serve, which include the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank, the Parkview Dinner Club, the *Koinonia Class* at Community Christian Church, Zion United Church of Christ, Trinity Baptist, Giant Eagle on the Strip, Northminster Presbyterian Church, Congregational UCC. We are also grateful to all of you, our members & friends, who support us with your time, your talents, your treasures, and a turkey or two when needed.

Our *Great Turkey Give-away* was another great success, for the 13th consecutive year, with 65 turkeys, along with all the fixings, given to the families we serve through the Food Pantry, and another 32 to the families we serve through the Siffrin homes. We had a lot of help on Tuesday, November 19th, and we extend a big *Thank You* to Cathy Harvey, Dan & Linda Wilson, Chris & Peg Thomas, Steve & Mary Jo Robbins, Bob & Linda Lancashire, Richard Zumkehr, Josh Roan, Donna Roan, Don Roan, Dottie Jones, Peggy, Muhlenkamp (and Jonas & Sophia), the Sunday School kids, the Sunday School staff, Debbie Fox, Pastor Sherwindt, along with everyone who gave anonymously. We could not do this without you. God bless you all!

SOME DATES TO REMEMBER

A Prayer for Christmas: Child of Bethlehem, which means House of Bread, Man of Jerusalem, which means City of Peace, you have loved us without limit or condition, in our greatness and in our misery, in our folly and in our virtue. May your hand be always upon us, and may your heart be within us, so that we, too, may become bread for the needy and peace for the world; in Jesus' name. Amen



OUR CHRISTMAS POINSETTIA TREES:

We have again resurrected our Poinsettia Trees, actually, raised them from storage in the basement, and we need your help to make sure that members buy enough poinsettias to fill our Poinsettia Trees for Christmas Eve. The cost is \$10 per poinsettia plant. We plan to have them in the Sanctuary on display at worship on December 22nd. Order forms are available in our Sunday bulletins, or call the Church Office with your interest. We will need to have your orders in by Wednesday, December 18th. Your generosity is invited and appreciated. Thank you for your interest.

LOOKING BACK: A BICENTENNIAL MOMENT

Back when we were about to celebrate our 190th Anniversary, we asked Nancy Meuschke to help us remember our past, and she responded with a letter we called *Peace and Pieces from Nancy Meuschke*. I thought it might be timely to recall some of those recollections again.

“The call [to Pastor Meuschke] arrived while serving Grace in Castalia. It was approached with ‘Mom’s upstairs packing, while Dad’s downstairs praying.’ Pastor believed in THE CALL! He filled out no papers; we visited you and prayed. With our call was the knowledge that Pastor Ruth was retiring and Pastor would be called for *Number 1*. The *powers that be* knew, although it had not been announced. Blair Woodside was the Council President and always did a super job. He had his right hand helper, Marge.

“We saw Interstate 77 begun and completed, Belden Village begun, swamped, and completed. There was a diner, movie picture show, Gross’ Hardware, Hoover’s, Hummel’s, Portage School, the Junior High, a little YMCA, and every church was small. Oh, yes, there was a bowling alley as we came into town, and Strouble’s, but we never did get there. The only fast food place was Arby’s on Cleveland Avenue in Canton. Our first meal there – after unpacking and preparing food for about 50 people, coming from out of town for the installation – and Darrell wanted a hot dog!

“We had moved into a recently acquired home on 7th Street. Mr. Mohler, the fire chief, was one of our neighbors. The Gibeaut’s, Woodside’s, and Dague’s were on our way to church. Brian Woodside and Dan Dague were our first visitors, moments after the van arrived. Thus began a super adventure with the youth of Zion. Buddies Alex and Bidlack and all their friends joined us. Susan Moore hung in as we adventured from one activity to another. We had hard working sponsors, and with 50-plus young people, our core of youth leaders was there for many years.

“We did all-night lock-ins – with a streaker! – all night ping-pong, retreats at Atwood, exchanges with the youth at Kidron, taco parties, pizza parties, Seder dinners, hayrides, sledding parties at Danner’s with music and chocolate chip cookies and hot chocolate, chili suppers after Christmas Caroling at the parsonage after the Angel Tree was up, backward progressive parties, Cain’s and Le Beau’s always shared their homes and goodies. Mr. Himes shared a room in his home to store papers from one drive to the next. Between those and the window washing of the church windows (with glass-wax, ugh!) the kids were very self-supporting, and active, active, active. It was great!

“At one time we had youth from Hoover, Lake, Jackson, Massillon, Perry, two Akron schools, Glenwood, Oakwood, and Timken. We worked together and challenged their loyalty. We were loyal Hoover fans as the Hummel’s presented us with season tickets each year. The coach, Don Hertler, was an active Zion fella, and many of our youth were players, too. We were in the top row and never moved down. Many ballgames Pastor’s name came over the loud speaker – a birth, death, illness, police station, or hospital and away he went and we walked home! Most Fridays we had pizza before or after the game: ‘Seven days without pizza makes one weak’ was the motto.....”

LOOKING AHEAD: THE ARRIVAL OF ADVENT

With the arrival of Advent, Matthew takes the lead in telling the story of Jesus' birth. Matthew places his story of Jesus neatly between two bookends that proclaim what Jesus' birth and Jesus' life mean for us. At the very beginning of the Gospel narrative in Matthew 1:23 we learn that our Savior's name is "Immanuel, which means '*God is with us*'." Then, with the last text in Matthew 28:20, this promise is reaffirmed. "Lo, *I am with you* always, even to the end of the age." God is present with us ... in the flesh ... and through the Spirit ... to the end of the age.

"If you build it, they will come," was the promise in the movie *Field of Dreams*. More important than tourists coming to see a baseball diamond was the builder's father, who came to play with his son as they had done years earlier. It was a story with heart and feeling. That's what we will want to capture with each of the Sundays in Advent. Our heavenly Father sends his Son, not because he wants to recapture the past – a past with Jesus that was lost – but because he wants to give us a future that means life for us and joy to the world.

This is the message that the texts in Advent are trying to tell us. Our First Lesson on the Second Sunday of Advent is a classic text from Isaiah 11, which prophesies of "a shoot from the stump of Jesse", who would establish a peaceable kingdom, where the lion shall lie down with the lamb: "The spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord." (11:1-2) When we get to the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Isaiah 7 will reinforce this promise in announcing that "a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." (7:14)

This, of course, is the bookend with which Matthew begins his story, and with this connection between Isaiah 11 and Isaiah 7, we can look ahead to the arrival of the end of the age, when Jesus "will rule with righteousness for the poor and will judge with equity for the meek of the earth." (Isaiah 11:4) Matthew is careful to help us connect the dots between prophecies of the Messiah's birth and the promise this offers for the future that will be ours.

When it comes to connecting the dots between prophecy and fulfillment, Matthew is the master. I ran across a reference to mathematician and scientist Peter Stoner, who was working with around 600 students to calculate the probability of just eight Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in a single individual. The probability was one chance in ten to the 17th power, which is a 1 with 17 zeroes after it. But the number of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus is closer to 48; and the probability of these prophecies being fulfilled in a single individual is one chance in ten to the 157th power, which is 1 with 157 zeroes after it!

As it turns out, that one person, according to Matthew and the Old Testament prophecies around which he organized his Gospel, is Jesus Christ. Perhaps as we hear Matthew's Gospel again this year, we will think of this when we sense the awe and wonder with which simple shepherds and the wandering wise men fell to their knees and worshiped this child who is Christ the Lord! It is, indeed, a gift that we should be among those who have seen the love and life of the one, true, and living God manifest in this Babe born in Bethlehem.

