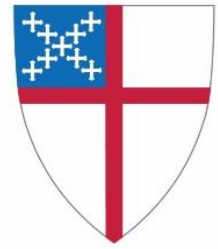




*St. Stephen's
Episcopal Church
Newsletter
December 2023*



Office manager: Email: marksowards@ststephensaz.org Phone: (520) 458 4432



From our Rector

Dear Friends

Wishing you a Holy Advent and Merry Christmas,

We slide into December following a wonderful Thanksgiving weekend of feasting, family, and friends. If you were not able to be with us for worship on Thanksgiving, please check out our video of the service. I took a moment to thank all of you who are part of our St. Stephen's family for all that you do as cheerful givers to God, to each other, and to the church.

Now we enter into our Advent season... a time of waiting expectantly and as our Advent devotional booklets suggest... a time of Holy Listening... a time to pause and listen for what God may be saying to you at this time of your lives... A time to slow down, quiet down, and listen for God... We can get so busy with all the preparations, the decorating, the shopping, the buying, the wrapping, the baking, etc... that we may not be listening... A friend once described her listening for God to being like when all we had was AM radio and you had to fiddle with the tuning dial to get your radio to come in clearly ... turn a bit to the left, now back to the right, trying to get rid of as much static as possible and hear more clearly the program... remember those days? Listening for God can be similar... we have to try to eliminate the static ... the other noises that interfere with hearing God clearly... So, I invite you this year to pay attention to the noise around you... is it part of the message from God or is it static? What can you do to reduce the static and pay closer attention to God's message for you?

Peace on Earth and Good Will Towards All People,

Rev. Allison Cornell

Christmas Worship Services Schedule: Because Christmas Eve falls on the same day as fourth Advent, we will have the following schedule for our worship on the weekend of December 23-25: Saturday 23rd Dec. at 5pm will be 4th Advent. There will NOT be a morning service on Sunday Dec. 24th. Christmas Eve service will be Sunday Dec. 24th at 5pm. Christmas Day service will be Monday Dec. 25th at 10 am with a modest brunch in the Parish Hall following the service.



Blue Christmas – A service for remembering those we love who are no longer with us to celebrate the holidays. Saturday December 16th 5pm. We remember those who have died this year: Margaret - Andy Anderson's daughter, Tim Jr - son of Tim and Deb Ash, St. Stephen's members Phyllis Fortenberry and Maryhelen Henthorn, Doris Millard's gentleman friend Bill, Danny – Sandra Calhoun's friend and neighbor, and May Sowards – Mark's Mom and Nick's Grandmother. If you are feeling the loss of someone close to you, we encourage you to join us for a special service to remember them and honor their place in our hearts and lives. We will provide a safe space to cry a little, share a little, let go a little and heal a broken heart a little.

Staff Christmas Bonus: It is our tradition at this time of year that we collect donations towards the staff to provide them with a Christmas bonus. This will go to our sexton Deb Ageton who cleans the church weekly, Doreen our accompanist on piano and organ for our music, and Mark our parish administrator who takes care of our office responsibilities, our website, and our technology on campus. Please give to our staff that they might have a little extra for the work they do for our church. You may give through the website, in an envelope marked "Staff Xmas Bonus", or in the Rector's Discretionary basket in December.

Candy Cane Legends: There are many legends and religious beliefs surrounding the humble candy cane. Many of them depict the candy cane as a secret symbol for Christianity during a time when Christians were living under more oppressive circumstances.



It has been claimed that the cane was shaped like a "J" for "Jesus" or turned the other way as a shepherd's crook for the Good Shepherd Jesus. That the red-and-white stripes represented Christ's blood and purity. The three red stripes were also said to symbolize the Holy Trinity and the hardness of the candy represented the Church's foundation on solid rock. As for the candy cane's peppermint flavor, it represented the use of hyssop, an herb referred to in the Old Testament.

However, no historical evidence exists to support these claims, although some will find them pleasant to contemplate. As noted earlier, candy canes weren't even around until the 17th century, which makes some of these claims improbable.

Accessed from <https://www.thoughtco.com/history-of-candy-canes-1991767> on November 26 2023.

Where did the Christmas Tree tradition begin? The origins of Christmas trees appear to be rooted in present-day Germany during the Middle Ages.

In 1419, a guild in Freiburg put up a tree decorated with apples, flour-paste wafers, tinsel and gingerbread. In "Paradise Plays" that were performed to celebrate the feast day of Adam and Eve, which fell on Christmas Eve, a tree of knowledge was represented by an evergreen fir with apples tied to its branches. Flanders finds documentation of trees decorated with wool thread, straw, apples, nuts and pretzels.

The oldest Christmas tree market is thought to have been located just over the southwestern German border in Strasbourg in Alsace (which was back then part of the Rhineland, now in present-day France), where unadorned Christmas trees were sold during the 17th century as *Weihnachtsbaum*, German for Christmas tree. Flanders says the "first decorated indoor tree" was recorded in 1605, in Strasbourg, decorated with roses, apples, wafers and other sweets, according to her research.

Demand for Christmas trees was so high in the 15th century that laws were passed in Strasbourg cracking down on people cutting pine branches. Ordinances throughout the region of Alsace limited each household to one tree in the 1530s.

How Christmas trees got popular in U.S.: References to Christmas trees in private homes or establishments in North America date back to the late 18th century and early 19th century. Flanders mentions a reference to a pine tree in North Carolina in 1786. In 1805, a school for American Indians run by Moravian missionaries sent students "to fetch a small green tree for Christmas." Similar examples pop up in the first half of the 19th century in the Midwest and further West, such as the German immigrants in Texas who decorated trees with moss, cotton, pecans, red pepper swags and popcorn.

But the image of a decorated Christmas tree with presents underneath has a very specific origin: an engraving of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and their children gathering around a Christmas tree, eyeing the presents underneath, published in the Illustrated London News in 1848. The premier women's magazine in America back then, Godey's Lady's Book, reprinted a version of the image a couple of years later as "The Christmas Tree."



Accessed from <https://time.com/5736523/history-of-christmas-trees/> on November 26 2023.

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- **Advent devotional books to use in your daily prayers are available for you on the back table of the church.** Sat and Sun adult forum will discuss the weekly reflections and share our own thoughts. Wednesday worship at 9:30am will also use the reflection for their homily/sermon time.
 - **Community Christmas Concert** – Dec 1-2, Friday and Saturday at the United Methodist Church doors open 6:30pm. Come hear three of our community choruses as they present a variety of Christmas themed choral pieces to celebrate the season. Tickets are \$10 in advance or at the door. Free will offering to support the Warrior Healing Center which assist veterans with the help they need.
 - **First Friday Film Night** – December 1st in the Education Bldg we will conclude Season 3 of The Chosen with episodes 7-8 and a soup dinner. Come watch with us and have a short discussion about the showing following. Bring your own beverage and invite a friend.
 - **A Christmas Carol at the Community Theater in the Sierra Vista Mall** – Get into the seasonal spirit through this Charles Dicken's classic story of Christmas spirit changing Scrooge's heart. Shows run weekends Dec 15 to Dec 30th.
 - **Second Saturday Supper**- December 9th we will dine at the Sierra Grille in Hereford at 6:30pm for a time of fellowship and feasting. Please join us and bring a friend!
 - **New Women's Lectionary in use during the coming year:** Bishop Reddall has approved for our use a new Lectionary that explores some of the lesser known or used Scripture passages in the Bible that highlight women's stories and also has a translation that tries to express God's name and character in more neutral ways.
 - **The Church Office will be closed between Christmas and New Years Day.** You can still call and leave a message or send an email if you have an urgent need to contact Rev. Allison or the church office. We will be monitoring those communications in case of emergency. After hours (7pm to 7am), please call Rev. Allison at her home number: 520-335-2436, her cell phone is turned off at night.

From our Reverend Deacon



My last sermon to you was about waiting and being prepared. Well, in that same line of thought, I have found a lovely prayer to share with you this Advent. The words are the English translation from the Latin text of O Magnum Mysterium, a responsorial chant song sung at the Daily Office (Matins) service on Christmas Morning: O GREAT MYSTERY! And wonderful sacrament! that animals should see the new-born Lord lying in a manger! Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy to bear CHRIST THE LORD, ALLELUIA! “

May God’s Grace be with you all, my friends in Christ’s name,
Rev. Deacon Dottie g.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcNwSIGAQE> (You’ll need to copy and paste this into Google to hear it and see the translation

From our Treasurer Ann Roth



Stewardship

The bumper sticker/poster that has hung over my desk for the last 15 years reads: “The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason for Hope.” It is a quotation from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. I have always heard it as a call to Pay it Forward. Ever since I got involved in the United Religions Initiative 26 years ago, my husband has jokingly called me a “Hope Pusher.” Too many younger people now see nothing to hope for. We have one of the highest percentages of suicide this country has ever seen

Part of that is simple Trust. The world has moved so fast that parents could barely keep up, much less envision the kind of world these people would be living in. The old forms are breaking down. The old shapes no longer fit. The dark side of life is being exposed by the Light being shined upon it.

St. Stephen's may have a core of old patterns holding here, but we also represent an amazing potential for the current lives being lived, the future understanding of what may come. The fact that you are sitting here tells me that you grasp at least a part of what is going on. I went to see May Sowards one day while she was at Haven. She asked "What's happening in the World?" I said, "World's going to Hell." She laughed, and then we talked about some of the news. We talked about a lot of things.

I have known for a long time that the Almighty has a sense of humor. How I wound up dealing with your finances now is one of His jokes on me. With the agreement of the Vestry, Rev. Allison and I have been busy shifting funds these past weeks. Money that was left in Trust to St. Stephen's is being moved into investments that will yield better interest to the future. Money that was loaned by the Diocese has been moved into Certificates of Deposit that will also yield better interest. If we ever need to pay that back to the Diocese, we can release those funds as they mature.

Dottie Wilder left a chunk of money to fund the maintenance of this huge window behind the altar. That is a Trust in the future. People have paid to be held in our Columbarium for as long as this building exists. That is a Trust in the future. Our Trust now is not just to keep St. Stephen's alive and functioning, but to bring some Hope to the generations ahead of us. The forms and patterns of historical religion may not work for them, but they do not yet know WHAT their patterns will be. Until they take that Journey and come back with something to tell us, all we can do is hold in Trust.

If you have children and grandchildren of your own, then you know about moving forward in trust. You cannot know what those grandchildren will choose to do with their lives, but you know their lives are precious. I never had children of my own, but a number of young people have adopted me. The little girls in Karachi call me Grannie. The orphanage in Guinea is my way of Paying it Forward. The building is going up, and they hope to move in by Christmas. Those kids will have an education and a future.

November has been our Stewardship month here. Over the weeks we have tried to bring you the message that what you give here is not just staying here. Week by week, the Gratuities that land in the Discretionary Fund go out to those in need in our town. The money that you pledge helps us create a functional budget so we can keep the lights on, keep the doors open, pay the Wi-Fi bill. All of that. We have been able this year to replace the floor in this room, to repave the parking lot, to put up new lighting, and now to put new gutters on the building. That money was carefully kept in Building Maintenance fund for such work. Going forward, we still need to pay salaries, pay bills, and continue our connection with Sierra Vista's needs. What you pledge is not set in cement. Life has to be flexible. But there are cards on the table by the door, and we need to have a good idea of what our budget will look like. As of Tuesday's Vestry, meeting, things were looking VERY hopeful – so thank you to all of you who have turned in your pledge.

Whether you are paying it back for the goodness life has given you, or paying it forward for the Hope of what may be, we thank you for keeping this place alive as a beacon of the Light that people still need. Anne Roth

December Lay Ministry Teams Schedule

**NOTE: If you are unable to serve at the appointed time and day, you are responsible for finding a replacement.
Please notify Robin of substitutions.**

Saturday 2nd			
LEM – Robin StClair	Lector – Sandra Calhoun	Alter guild – Robin StClair	
Saturday 9th			
LEM – Jeff Speer	Lector – Robin StClair	Alter Guild – Jeff Speer	
Saturday 16th			
LEM – Tim Holsonback	Lector – Jeff Speer	Altar Guild – Tim Holsonback	
Saturday 23rd 4th Advent			
LEM – Jeff Speer	Lector – Tim Holsonback	Altar Guild – Jeff Speer	
Saturday 30th			
LEM – Tim Holsonback	Lector – Jeff Speer	Alter Guild – Tim Holsonback	
Sunday 3rd			
LEM – Nancy Rae	Lector – Wilma Swartz	Alter Guild – Nancy Rae	Deacon - Dottie Gutwein
Sunday 10th			
LEM – MJ Mahland	Lector – Doris Millard	Altar Guild – Deb Ash	Deacon - Dottie Gutwein
Sunday 17th			
LEM – Nancy Rae	Lector – Ann Crandall	Altar Guild – Nancy Rae	Deacon - Dottie Gutwein
Sunday 24th Christmas Eve			
LEM – Robin StClair	Lector - Peggy Brown	Alter Guild – Robin StClair	Deacon - Dottie Gutwein
Sunday 31st			
LEM – MJ Mahland	Lector – Wilma Swartz	Alter Guild – Deb Ash	Deacon – Dottie Gutwein

Arizona Winter

There's nothing like an Arizona winter sky,
clouds billowing and flashing against a jet
blue sky.

Beauty unfolding from the heavens right before
our eyes.

Claiming their just due, clouds fill themselves
with moisture, then pour it over our Arizona
desert, ending a drought of fifteen years.

(9: 48 a.m. - 12/18/08)

RoseAnn V. Shawiak

Dear Readers, I came across this poem today and thought I would share it with you. It's one of the reasons I love living here in Arizona. I'm looking out of the window behind my desk and marveling at the sight. If you find a poem, quotation or an inspirational story you'd like to share, please send it by December 18th to have it printed in the January newsletter. Have a Blessed Christmas. Diane. (dianepyancey@gmail.com)

December 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 9.30 am Spoken Service With Holy Communion	2	1 Friday Film Night The Chosen - Series 3, episodes 7&8 5.30pm	2 5.00 pm Spoken Service with Holy Communion
3 10.00 am Choral Service with Holy Communion (Live Stream)	4	5 Bible Study (Proverbs) 5 pm Via Zoom	6 9.30 am Spoken Service With Holy Communion	7	8	9 5.00 pm Service followed by Supper at La Sierra Grill 6.30pm
10 10.00 am Choral Service with Holy Communion (Live Stream)	11	12 Bible Study (Proverbs) 5 pm Via Zoom	13 9.30 am Spoken Service With Holy Communion	14	15	16 5.00 pm Spoken Service with Holy Communion
17 10am Choral Service with Holy Communion (Live Stream)	18 Newsletter Articles Due For January Issue	19 Bible Study (Proverbs) 5 pm Via Zoom	20 9.30 am Spoken Service With Holy Communion	21	22	23 5.00 pm Spoken Service with Holy Communion
24 Christmas Eve 5pm Choral Service with Holy Communion (Live Stream)	25 Christmas Day 10am Service followed by brunch in the Parish Hall	26 Bible Study (Proverbs) 5 pm Via Zoom	27 9.30 am Spoken Service With Holy Communion	28	19	30 5.00 pm Spoken Service with Holy Communion
31 10.00 am Choral Service with Holy Communion (Live Stream)						



Carol Dockter	December 21st
Rosemary Snapp	December 24th
Sherril O'Neil	December 25th
Elizabeth York	December 29th