

St. Stephen's News

NEWSLETTER OF ST. STEPHEN'S UNITED CHURCH DECEMBER 2017
ststephensucqualicum.ca

What's in a Parable?

God is pretty tricky.

Recently a good friend passed on to me *Parables for Christmas*, a book written by John Killinger. As the title suggests, it is a retelling of some of Jesus' parables as Christmas-themed stories. Just as it was when Jesus first taught through these deceptively simple tales, the reader is likely to first laugh, and then pause as a new way of viewing reality begins to surface. For example, the Parable of the Yeast found in Matthew 13:33 becomes: "The kingdom of heaven is like food colouring, a few drops of which a mother took and put in her cookie dough, so that it coloured all the Christmas cookies."

Few would argue that the Christmas season within our culture has elements that appear to be at odds with what many of Jesus' followers, past and present, would suggest the message of Christmas might be. The busyness and commercialization do not connect easily

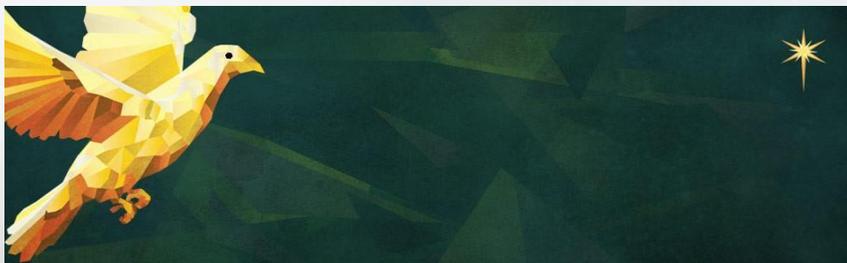
to the story of God coming to live with us as one of us. Then again, as was revealed in Jesus' coming to 1st century Judea, God comes to us as we are, not as we should be. Like a parable, God is mysterious and often so surprising. There is something cunning about the way God quietly appears in the frenzy of Christmas shopping and activity. Walking through the mall we hear all sorts of gentle reminders of Emmanuel, literally "God-with-us." Listen carefully and you'll hear the songs of the angels, "Hallelujahs" and "Glory to God in the highest" and "Christ the Saviour is born." Add to that some faithful believers who—coloured by the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives—and you might just see signs of the very Kingdom of Heaven. It doesn't take many.

As I said, God is pretty tricky.

~ Phil

Church Events

- Dec 3rd - Advent Begins
- Dec 3rd - Christmas Swim
- Dec 11th - 2pm UCW Candlelight Service
- Dec 17th - 10am Service & Children's Pageant
- Dec 19th - 5pm Community Meals Christmas Dinner
- Dec 19th - 6pm Christmas Songs & Stories
- Dec 24th - 10 am Service
- Dec 24th - 7pm & 9pm Christmas Eve Services
- Dec 31st - 10am Service



Operation Christmas Child (Christmas Shoeboxes)

Well, our Shoeboxes are on their way to Calgary for distribution in the Ukraine and Ethiopia! St. Stephen's contributed 42 Shoeboxes this year -a big thank you to everyone! In the Oceanside Community, thanks to the overwhelming support received from the churches, schools and individuals, 1021 shoeboxes were sent out with gospel messages to boys and girls throughout the world!

Did you know that shoeboxes :

- are delivered to children in over 100 countries around the world. The children live in war areas, poverty and all kinds of disasters.
- brighten the lives of children who've often never received a gift before. The shoeboxes tell the children that they are valued by not only their parents but by someone far away and by God.
- are a powerful expression of hope, joy and love.
- open the door to work with local leaders to address needs such as safe water and improved farming methods.



Before the shoeboxes are distributed, approval is obtained from the local leaders, parents and guardians to offer the children "the Greatest Gift", a colourful booklet in their own language, which speaks of God's greatest gift -Jesus. No recipients are pressured or obligated to accept this booklet that would be contrary to Christian ethos.

Visit Samaritan's Purse [impact stories](http://www.samaritanspurse.org) pages to learn more about the impact your gifts have on the lives of the children who receive them. www.samaritanspurse.org

New Floor in the New Year

In 1993 St. Stephen's built on an addition which includes the main hall, library and the small hall, classroom and offices downstairs. Since that time we have replaced the dishwasher, fridge, kitchen island, had some extensive repairs done to the washrooms, painted, installed sound buffers to the walls and replaced the sound system. We have been saving for capital projects over the past few years and have budgeted this as a 2018 project.

Three quotes were received for flooring options and the flooring that is believed to be the best for the hall is a vinyl with fiberglass core product

with the look of natural wood plank. It is waterproof, easy to care for, durable, and comes with a 15 year commercial warranty. The local supplier is also offering us a generous discount on the cost. The work will begin on Monday, January 29th and we hope to have as little disruption as possible. The Town of Qualicum Beach has donated the use of the Community Hall that week so Community Meals can continue! Thanks to the town for their generous support! We are looking forward to a nice new floor for all our community groups and our church family to enjoy for years to come!

Multi-generational Art Project

Beginning December 3rd join in this fun, multi-generational art project as together we will colour a huge 2 ft x 6 ft banner to decorate the church for Christmas! The banner will be on a table in the hall during coffee time. EVERYONE is welcome to sit and do some colouring. Our goal is to have it finished by Christmas Eve.

You Are Invited!

St. Stephen's Christmas Swim

Sponsored by St. Stephen's Kids' Church

FREE Swim – fun for all ages!

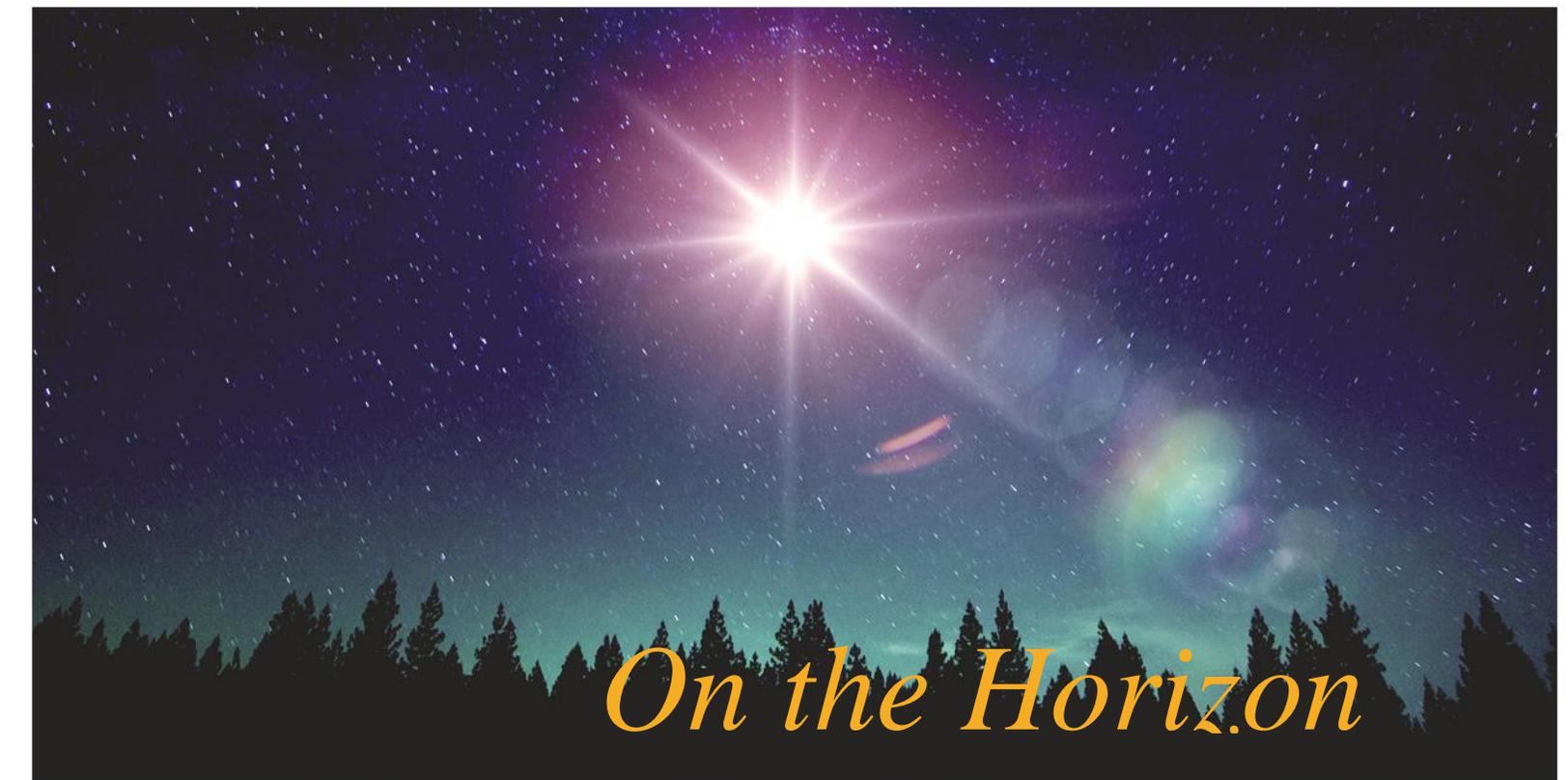
Sunday, December 3rd 5 – 6:30 pm

(swim 5 – 6 followed by snacks)

Ravensong Pool

Pool games and toys available



A night sky with a bright star in the center, surrounded by a forest silhouette at the bottom. The sky is dark blue and purple, with many small stars and a few larger, colorful nebulae. The forest is dark green and black.

On the Horizon

It was some 2500 years ago that the Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously noted that no one ever steps in the same river twice.

Transition and change are normal and expected parts of living. Knowing that, what are some of the transitions that we know are on St. Stephen's horizon? Well, we know that in February 2018, Dianne is scheduled for an interview with BC Conference of the United Church to consider her for ordination. God willing, she will be ordained in June! Some have reasonably wondered what kind of change that may be for us, asking if she will be required to leave to lead a church elsewhere. The answer is no. Dianne will be ordained into to her current job right here at St. Stephens and she has no plans to move.

You may have heard a rumour that Phil is retiring. Indeed he is and his retirement is set for June of 2020. The Board has already embarked on the planning process for what comes next. We will be conducting a needs assessment for St. Stephen's, a process designed to encourage lots of input from the congregation. In many cases like this, the procedure would often involve a transitional minister, but we have been advised that the transitional work may be

done while Phil is still here. We are hoping to engage some professional consulting to get us through this transitional period smoothly and efficiently.

To identify the elephant in the room, won't the newly-minted Reverend Collery just take over? The answer to that is complicated. It will in part depend on the job description we all come up with over the next 2 years, on whether Dianne feels called to apply for that job, and on what we together determine to be the best way for us to continue to do God's work going forward.

While all of this change may be a bit unsettling for some, we have every confidence that God has an awesome plan for us. We are simply to prayerfully work our way through this process and follow His leading. It will be exciting to see the plan unfold and to join in on what is next for this little part of God's kingdom.

From the staff and Board Elders of St. Stephen's, we wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas!

Right Now Media

Early this year the church purchased a congregational subscription to Right Now Media, a huge online video library covering a wide range of topics related to our faith. Several people have been enjoying the materials available and every couple of weeks we post program reviews on our website that have been reviewed by our librarian. Videos have also been used in our church-wide studies. Are you interested in checking it out but not sure how? Here's help!

How do I get access?

Contact Dianne Collery at dcollery@shaw.ca and she will arrange to have an email sent to you with your own free password. Follow the directions in the email to gain immediate access to the site.

How do I watch the programs?

You can view the programs on your computer, your tablet, smartphone or even on your television (if you have the ability to stream content through a smart tv or Apple tv or similar technology).

What's available?

Videos on Right Now Media cover a whole host of topics including: books of the bible, parenting, marriage, leadership, biblical finance, recovery, work, inspiration, small group studies, outreach, the character of God, people of the bible, biographies & documentaries, short films and holidays.

In addition, there is a whole section just for kids featuring over 2000 episodes of biblically based videos and sing along shows divided into categories for kids of all ages.

Christmas Outreach

If you're looking for ways you can give this Christmas, here are a few suggestions:

Community Meals is looking for donations of good quality, warm socks, toques, scarves and mitts to give away at the Christmas dinner on December 19th (Donation box in the foyer).

December 3rd is White Gift Sunday so gifts of **non-perishable food and money** are being collected for the local food bank. If possible, please put in a white bag or envelope. Food can be placed under the Christmas Tree in the sanctuary.

We are collecting **QF Turkey Vouchers** to be used for the Community Meals Christmas Dinner and to include in the food hampers being put together for clients of the Family Resource Association.

If you are looking for an alternative to traditional Christmas gift giving, there is a catalog of "Gifts With Vision" located on the rolling Information Booth in the hall.

"The Wonder" A Christmas Pageant for Children

If you would like to help out with the Christmas Pageant on December 17th, there are a number of ways you can get involved. Contact Denise at denise_cormier@live.ca

December 24th

December 24th is a unique Sunday this year. While it is known by all as Christmas Eve, for us in the church, it is also the 4th Sunday of Advent. We will have one morning worship service at 10am where our eyes will be on Mary and the angel Gabriel, getting ready but not quite at the stable to celebrate the birth of Jesus! That will happen during our evening services at 7pm and 9pm. It's a full day, so come, let us adore Him!

Invitations for Christmas Eve services will be available soon to give out to your friends and family.

