

# The Petra Press

## Newsletter of the Williamstown Lutheran Church

Stephen Sweyko

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December 2025

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### Pastor's Corner

Blessings in the name of our risen Lord.

You'd miss it if you weren't paying attention. I've been a fan of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" for as long as I can remember, particularly the movies. And I used to think that I had seen them all, that is until I looked on IMDb which listed 230 versions of the story going back to 1901. I remember watching Alistair Sim as Ebenezer Scrooge in Black and White. Then there's been Albert Finney, George C. Scott, and my favorite, Patrick Stewart. There's been cartoons and take-offs of the story including, "Scrooged" with Bill Murray, "A Mickey's Christmas Carol," and who can forget "A Muppet Christmas Carol." I have friends who, as a family tradition, eat their Thanksgiving turkey, duck, or goose, and then retire to the TV room to watch "A Muppet Christmas Carol."

For all of the mentions of Christmas (even though "Christmas" is short for "Christ" "Mass," the church's celebration of the birth of Jesus), there is not a mention of Jesus in Dickens' entire story. I've got a copy of the book in electronic format and did a search for "Jesus" and "Christ" and found zero instances. The birth of Jesus is not the point of Dickens' story. But in the movies, Jesus sneaks in anyway and in the strangest places. As much as the world might try, you can't have Christmas without Jesus.

You'd miss it if you weren't looking for it. In the Patrick Stewart version, after Ebenezer wakes up and buys the turkey for Bob Cratchit, he hears singing. It's Christmas morning and people are in church celebrating the Christ Mass. And so, he goes in and joins in with the congregational singing. And there he hears the Good News, the Gospel, of Christmas:

God rest ye merry, gentlemen.

For Jesus Christ our savior was born upon this day.

To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray.

O Tidings of Comfort and Joy, Comfort and Joy. O Tidings of Comfort and Joy.

Dickens wrote "A Christmas Carol" in 1843. The world was trying to have Christmas without Jesus even then. Nothing has changed much since. The secular world would have us focus our Christmas attention on the presents, the decorations, and the food. Even the word "Christmas" is offensive to some. Some people get very uncomfortable if you say to them, "Merry Christmas."

But try as they might, you can't have Christmas without Jesus. And that's because we Christians are proclaiming the birth of our Savior. We sing so loud that they can't help but hear us. That's why we joyfully celebrate the birth of Jesus. And in Jesus Christ, God has blessed us, everyone.

See you in church!

In Christ,  
Pastor Stephen Sweyko

## Poinsetta Sign Up

There is a sign up sheet by the mailboxes in the narthex, please include your name and indicate in *memory of* or *in honor of* on the sheet. . Donations of \$10.00 per plant will be appreciated. The poinsettas will be purchased and delivered to the church in time for Christmas Eve Service. Thank you.



Thank you to everyone contributing boxes and items to Operation Christmas Child 2025. And thank you to Wendy Bailey for organizing, collecting and delivery of the boxes. Approximately 15 boxes were collected. If your box was not returned in time, please hold it for next year.

See the end of this newsletter for additional information on how Operation Christmas Child works.



### **MID-WEEK ADVENT SERVICES**

**Mid-Week Ssrvices:**

**December 10 @ 7:00 p.m.**

**December 17 @ 7:00 p.m.**



### **CHRISTMAS SERVICES**

**Youth Christmas Service:**

**December 21 @ 10:15 a.m.**

**Christmas Eve Service:**

**December 24 @ 5:00 p.m.**

**Christmas Day Service:**

**December 25 @ 10:15 a.m.**

**Adult Bible Study**

**Sunday mornings @ 9:00 a.m.**

**Church Services**

**Sunday mornings @ 10:15 a.m.**

Children's Sunday School  
December Potluck

Sunday mornings @ 11:30  
Sunday December 28 after service

## Jesus was Born on Christmas

*Author Unknown*

Jesus was born on Christmas,  
on a very holy night,  
and in the sky above Him,  
shone the very brightest light.  
All of the heavenly angels,  
Sang a song to praise His name.  
They told the lowly shepherds,  
so, they left their sheep and came.  
From the east the wise men roam,  
bringing precious gifts to share.  
Riches for the King of Kings,  
to show the Savior that they care.  
Now we celebrate His birthday,  
in our hearts and every day.  
Jesus in your humble manger,  
Your true love is here to stay.

## Confirmation

On November 16 and November 30, our congregation rejoiced as five of our young people affirmed their baptismal promises through the rite of **Confirmation**. Surrounded by family, friends, and the church community, they publicly declared their faith and commitment to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Confirmation is a milestone in the life of faith. It is not the end of the journey, but a new chapter, one where each confirmand takes personal responsibility for their spiritual growth and service in the world. Through study, prayer, and fellowship, these young people have prepared to say “yes” to God’s promises and “yes” to the calling of Christian life.

We give thanks for:

- Their dedication in learning and growing in faith.
- The support of parents, family who have walked alongside them.
- The guidance of Pastor Swayko who nurtured their understanding of Scripture and the catechism.
- The joy of seeing the Spirit at work in their lives.
- As a congregation, we celebrate this important step and pledge to continue supporting them in their journey. May their confirmation remind us all of the promises we made at our own baptisms and renew our commitment to live faithfully each day.
- Let us keep these five young people in prayer, encouraging them as they grow deeper in faith, hope, and love. Truly, these two Sundays are days of joy for our church family!

Confirmed on November 16: Zac Prestridge, Simon Skalecke, and August Baril.

Confirmed on November 30: Samantha and Shelby Hensel

May God Bless you.



Simon, August, Zac and Pastor Swayko



Samantha and Shelby

## ☀ Advent and Christmas

Advent invites us to wait in hope, trusting God's promise: *"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light"* (Isaiah 9:2). Each candle lit reminds us that Christ's light is breaking into the world. At Christmas we rejoice that *"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:14), and the angels proclaim *"good news of great joy for all the people"* (Luke 2:10). May this season renew our faith, deepen our joy, and send us out to share Christ's light with others.

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."* — Romans 15:13



*Thank You*

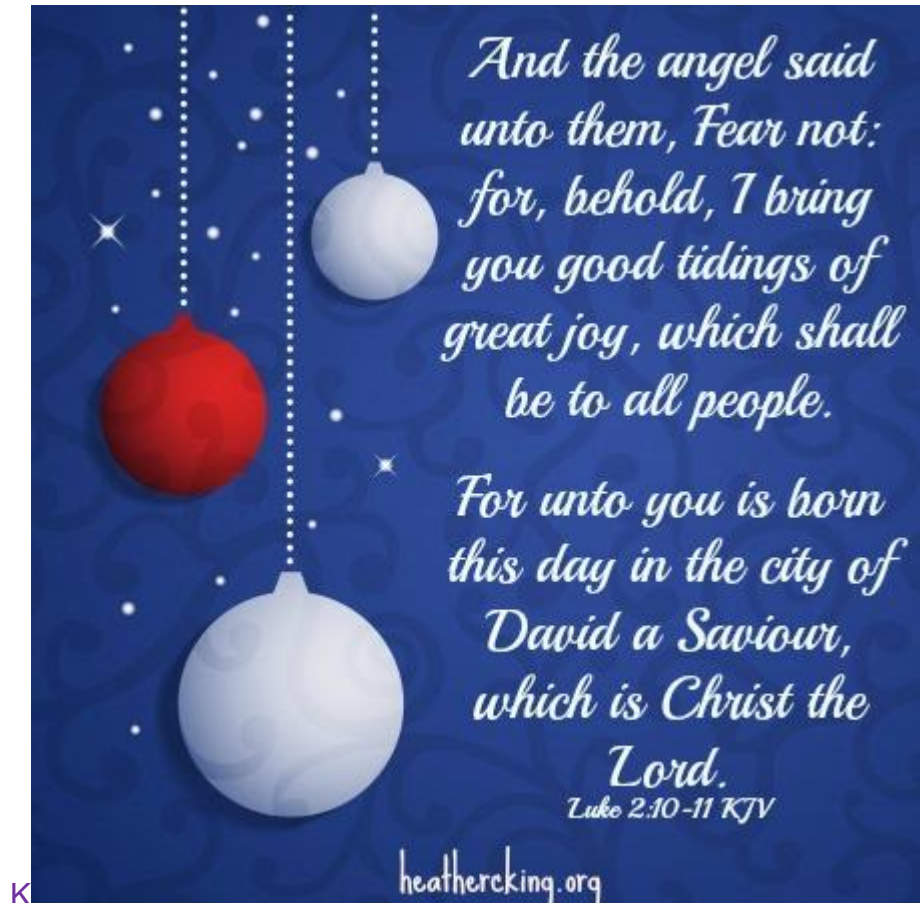
**Thanks to Gabe Lamson & Alex Merritt for their time and effort in harvesting a beautiful tree for our church!**





The deadline for the January 2026 Newsletter is Friday January 9, I would appreciate stories, articles, pictures, etc.

Thank you to Pastor Swayko, Emma Laughlin, Kim Prestridge, Sheila Walther, Wendy Bailey and Barb Curriers for your contributions to this newsletter. Kathy L.



## Operation Christmas Child: Where Your Shoebox Goes

Every year, our church joins millions of believers worldwide in packing shoeboxes for **Operation Christmas Child**, a ministry of Samaritan's Purse. These simple gifts—filled with toys, school supplies, and hygiene items—carry the love of Christ to children in need across the globe.

### What Happens to Your Shoebox?

- **Collection:** Families and groups pack shoeboxes with personal gifts.
  - **Processing Centers:** Volunteers carefully inspect each box to ensure items are safe and meet customs regulations.
    - Prohibited items (like liquids, food, or war-related toys) are removed.
    - If something is taken out, a small replacement item may be added so the box remains full.
  - **Shipping:** Shoeboxes are sealed and shipped to more than 100 countries.
  - **Distribution:** Local churches and ministry partners hand-deliver each shoebox to children, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.
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- **Clearing Up a Common Myth**
  - Some online videos have suggested shoeboxes are “dumped out and repacked.” This is **not true**. Each shoebox remains intact as packed by the donor. Only unsafe items are removed, and the rest of your gift is delivered just as you prepared it.

**Samaritan's Purse is *not* a Baptist church organization. It is a nondenominational evangelical Christian humanitarian aid ministry.**

### What Samaritan's Purse Is

- **Founded in 1970** by Bob Pierce, later led by Franklin Graham (son of Billy Graham).
- **Mission:** To provide spiritual and physical aid to victims of war, natural disasters, disease, famine, poverty, and persecution worldwide.
- **Nature:** It is a **faith-based humanitarian organization**, not a church denomination.
- **Affiliation:** While Franklin Graham is associated with the evangelical tradition, Samaritan's Purse itself is **nondenominational** — meaning it is not tied to Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, or any single denomination.