

St. George's Anglican Church

News from the Pews

Advent 2023



Christmas 2023: O Come, All Ye Faithful!

From the Rector

As I sit here planning our upcoming Christmas services where we celebrate the birth of Jesus in that “little town of Bethlehem,” my thoughts keep straying to the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas and all the suffering, loss, and heartbreak that is being experienced by both Israelis and Palestinians. It is overwhelming and it is hard not to feel despair over a geo-political conflict that has been going on for decades.

And then I try to refocus on the Prince of Peace, born in Bethlehem. And I remember what it was like a few years ago when I was on a bus bound for Bethlehem. I remember being absolutely thrilled that the security situation was such that it was safe for us to enter Bethlehem. Because for me, Bethlehem was the place that my childhood imagination created every Christmas Eve.

For me, Bethlehem was always some quiet little town, where everyone was polite, except for the cranky old inn keeper. And I was sure, the way a child can be so sure of something, that there was going to be this little barn, or at least the remains of a barn, and there would be this sign posted outside saying “Jesus was born here.”

However, the reality of modern Bethlehem shattered my peaceful childhood vision. For as you approach Bethlehem, you literally run up against the security fence – a 24-foot concrete barrier topped with razor wire that stretches as far as the eye can see cutting off Israel from the West Bank. Israeli soldiers armed with assault rifles patrol the perimeter and man the guard towers. A gigantic sliding steel door, like that on a boxcar, opens and closes to admit vehicles that have been cleared for entry. And beside that steel door, is a huge colourful sign proclaiming in English, Hebrew, and Arabic, “Peace be with you.”

At this point, our bus was not allowed to continue. We were then told to exit the bus and board a Palestinian



tour bus, driven and guided by Palestinians. And once we crossed through that barrier, it was as if we were in a different world. The homes are smaller and older, made from a pale yellow stone. Palestinian flags fly from every lamp post. Men and boys stood along the streets, tracking our bus with their eyes. Uncollected garbage and martyr posters are scattered on the ground.

Within minutes we arrive at Manger Square where we receive very explicit instructions to stay together, to keep moving, and above all, for our safety, not to engage in commerce or communication with the Palestinian vendors that immediately surround us after we step off the bus. Quickly following the guide, we crossed the cobblestone plaza in front of the Church of the Nativity and are ushered inside through a small stone entranceway that you have to duck through in order to enter.

The interior of the Church of the Nativity is cool and dark. Four rows of columns in an open nave lead to the main altar. There are no pews, just a collection of cheap folding chairs. But beneath the altar, down a set of worn limestone steps, is a small cave. Now in the vicinity of Bethlehem, today as it was 2,000 years ago, grottoes are used as livestock pens. Mangers are carved out of rock. And here, in this small cave under the floor of this ancient church is a silver star, marking the place where Jesus was born. Each of us, in turn, knelt down in front of the star, and together in this tiny little cave we sang, “O come, all ye faithful.”

Half an hour later, we were all back on the bus, off to do some shopping. But I was still in a daze. I was still trying to understand what it was that I had just experienced. I was struck by the transition from the silver star back to a world of security fences and suicide bombers. The Church of the Nativity seemed to be this sanctuary in the centre of one of the most contentious places on earth.

Now this past year has been challenging for many of us as we struggle with economic uncertainty and transition, the loss of loved ones, and the fear that comes from receiving difficult news in a doctor's office.

But I want to let you know that during difficult times, your parish continues to be a sanctuary for those who have great faith, and for those who would like to have more; for those who have been here often, and for those who have not been in a long time.

Because within this sanctuary, we continue to celebrate the sacred stories of our faith, and draw strength from the peace and presence of God. So please consider joining us for worship during this Christmas season.

On Sunday, December 10th and Sunday, December 17th, we will gather together at our usual times of 8:30am and 10:30am to celebrate Advent 2 and Advent 3 with eucharistic services.

Then on Sunday, December 24th, we will be offering a marathon of services. At 8:30 am and 10:30 am we will have services marking the Fourth Sunday of Advent. At 4 pm our Christmas Eve liturgies begin with a family service in which our young people will put on a Christmas pageant, along with carols and the celebration of the Eucharist.

Next at 7:00 pm, we will have a Community-oriented Christmas service with lots of carol singing, a couple of readings, and a short reflection. Finally, a traditional Christmas Eve service with the eucharist will open at 10:00 pm with a musical prelude, and then officially begin at 10:30 pm. On Christmas Day, we will also be offering a Eucharist at 10:30 am.

It is my prayer that you will experience God's peace, presence and joy that your sanctuary can provide during the Advent and Christmas seasons, and that you will be moved and inspired by our worship. I look forward to seeing you all and I wish you and your family a blessed and merry Christmas.

Yours in Christ,
The Rev. Victor Kischak Pastor, Priest & Rector

Christmas Service Schedule

Sunday, December 24 - Christmas Eve

8:30am Advent 4 (BCP)

10:30am Advent 4 (BAS)

4:00pm Family Service with Pageant and Communion

7:00pm Community Service with Readings & Carols

10:00pm Musical Prelude

10:30pm Traditional Christmas Eve Service with
Communion

Monday, December 25 - Christmas Day

10:30am Holy Eucharist (BAS)



Save the Date

February 25, 2024 - Vestry

April 7, 2024 - Soup & Buns Lunch

April 20, 2024 - Rummage Sale

Wardens' Report – A Season for Reflection

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven..." - Ecclesiastes 3:1

A lot has happened since Victor, our rector, took charge exactly this time last year! We've been through a full year of seasons, and all that brings with it in the Church.

Victor arrived just in time to start off Advent with a Christmas Market and celebrated Christmas with activities like a Children's Pageant and a candlelight service. Despite the snow, many participated in the "Coldest Night of the Year" walk to show solidarity with Hope House.

As Lent and Eastertide unfolded, the "Holy Grounds" cafe became a great new venue for coffee, cookies and conversation. During the summer, we sipped "Lemonade on the Lawn", enjoyed a couple of carillon concerts and the choir embraced a casual vibe. Our parish family grew with new members, including our musical director, Jeff Enns.

Behind the scenes, challenges arose with our beautiful but aging building, from burst water pipes to the need for new windows. Our Church School underwent a makeover to better serve over a dozen young participants.

Amidst farewells to dear friends and the joy of welcoming newborns through baptism, we actively engaged with contemporary issues. This included supporting the Royal City Mission to feed the hungry and aiding a new Syrian refugee family on their path to entering Canada.

Throughout, Victor consistently emphasized Christ's teachings – to love our neighbors and God. His sermons, delivered with multimedia and unconventional tools like chainsaws and leaf blowers, blended history, spirituality, and practicality. Even his Children's Focus garnered interest from both adults and children.

His resonating words, "those that you love and those that you should love," inspired action beyond the sanctuary. Victor's unique blend of spiritual insight and hands-on engagement has left a lasting impact on our journey, and we look forward to what Year two will bring!

As the Advent and Christmas seasons unfold, may blessings abound for you and your families, ushering in a joyful start to the new year!

Giesela Goetz, Bruce Carrick, Laura Keller, Paul Deacon, Rani Varkey




St. George's Pub Night



Newcomers' Lunch

Saturday Night Suppers



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Treasurer's Report

The amount received in October from Identified Givers is on par with October last year at \$23K. However, year to date givings is \$30K higher than last year continuing the trend we have seen. Total income is also up over \$40K YTD from last year mainly due to parking revenue. However, we are 83.3% through the year and only at 69.4% of the budgeted income.

On the expense side, Maintenance costs continue to be high with most costs higher than last year and many over the annual budget with gas costs being well over last year and budget. Expenses for Office & Accounting are on par with last year and on budget. Building Recovery Costs - Other Users (shown in our budget as a negative expense rather than as income) is up from last year as rentals increase; however, we are well short of the \$30K goal for this line at only 50% 10 months into the year. Overall total expenses are up \$45K from last year and at 92.3% of the total budget for the year.

Our Expenses over Revenue is higher than last year by \$6K at -\$144K.

How can you help?

The best thing you can do for St. George's is to make regular, generous offerings to the church. You might consider Pre-Authorized Giving if you haven't already. Simply fill out the form (download it from our website or contact the office for one) and your gift will come directly out of your bank account. No more having to remember an envelope every Sunday!

Other ways to donate include:

- Mail a cheque to the church
- Drop off cash or a cheque at the church during business hours (call ahead)
- By e-transfer to bookkeeper@saintgeorge.ca
- On our website using a credit card

	Actual Jan - Oct 2023	Actual Jan - Oct 2022	Budget 2023
Total Revenue	\$266,591	\$227,317	\$382,850
Total Expenses	\$410,433	\$365,445	\$444,109
Net Revenue	-\$143,843	-138,128	-\$61,259