



Good News from Zion

Connecting People with God's Grace

December 2025

A Message from Pastor Kat

God's Transformational Power

This Advent, we get to hear wonderful poetry from the book of Isaiah. We hear how God is able to beat swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks. We hear how God makes a new shoot spring forth from what had appeared to be a dead stump. We hear how God causes streams and green growth to spring up from what was once dry and deserted wilderness.

These beautiful images remind us that even where all hope seems to be lost, nothing will be impossible for our God. This is a powerful message for those of us living in a world where it is easy to look around and see only despair, suffering, and conflict. It may seem like evil has the upper hand, but we hear from Isaiah that from instruments of death God creates instruments of life, from dying plants God creates new growth, and from the driest cracked earth God can bring forth springs of water that cause new life to blossom.

God's Nature Transformed

In Advent, we await Christ's coming – even as we recognize the real and felt evils of the world that seem to work against God's desire for abundance and justice. On Christmas, we celebrate a surprising turn of events: God comes to save us in the form of a helpless infant. God, the creator of the universe, comes to us in the form of a human being: to be with us, to know our experience, to show us an overflowing love.

This Advent and Christmas, I pray you are given space to mourn the ways of the world as well as encouragement to lift up your eyes and see that our salvation has come in the person of Jesus Christ.

In Christ,
Pastor Kat



Church Council Highlights

The Church Council met on November 20th. Highlights from that meeting are below.



- Two families were approved for church membership—Amy Mahoney, and Christa & Mani Choy with their children Ellie & Andrew.
- The Finance committee presented the council with the version of the proposed 2026 budget that will go before the congregation at the special meeting on December 7th. There is a projected deficit of \$24,596.
- Pastor Kat is planning a year-long adult confirmation class that will begin in early 2026.
- Advent Midweek Gatherings will be held at the CEB on December 3rd, 10th, and 17th.
- Council approved two donations of \$500 from the Endowment Mission Outreach Fund. One to the Open Cupboard Food Pantry and one to Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center.
- Sunday School attendance continues to average 25-35 kids per week. There is renewed enthusiasm at the high school level with lots of potential for new growth!
- Care packages will be sent to Zion's college students on December 8th, after being prepared and decorated on December 7th by our Sunday School students.
- The Social Ministry committee collected over 1,600 pairs of shoes for Soles 4 Souls.
- The Women of Zion Thanksgiving Dinner was a big success, with many new attendees this year.
- An updated job description for the Director of Music position was shared with the council. The search committee has had their initial meeting and will gather again in December.

Thank you to:

- * John McAleer for his participation in the Sunday School Military Recognition service project.
- * Pastor Kat for her leadership of the All Saints Day Sunday School event.
- * Jeff Livingston, Bonnie Stanski, and Angela Sztuk for their assistance with the All Saints event.
- * Sandy Matsen, Maisie Ronaldo, Cindy Rupprecht, and Bonnie Stanski for covering various roles during the Sunday School hour.

The next meeting of the Church Council is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Thursday, December 18th. Meetings are open to all. If you would like to attend an upcoming meeting, please let the Parish Office know and we will send you the link to join.

Special Meeting of the Congregation — December 7th

On December 7th there will be a Special Meeting of the Congregation at 9:45 a.m. at the church. The purpose of the meeting is receive a presentation from the Finance committee about the 2026 proposed budget and to elect 2026 council members.



Christmas Eve at Zion

Worship Services will be held at the church at 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.

The 5:00 p.m. service will feature the ringing of the Handbell Choir, and music at the 8:00 p.m. service will be offered by the Parish Choir.





Youth & Family Ministry at Zion

by Jaime VanNostrand

During the month of November, Youth and Family ministry at Zion has focused on GRATITUDE as our faith formation theme. We've explored this theme in our learning, our service, our fellowship, and even in the songs we sing as we gather each week!

On Sunday, November 2nd, Pastor Kat led an All Saints themed All School Event for kids of all ages. During this event students learned about the many saints whose lives of faith have shaped our shared community. They discussed a saint of our past, Bal-tus Pickel, and a saint from Zion's recent history, Peggy Eppley. The kids learned that God's saints can be found all around the world and that each of us is among them!



On the 9th, our service project was focused on Military Recognition. The day began with a veteran from our own congregation, John McAleer, talking to the kids about time in the military and what service means to him. Then the kids made cards for active-duty service members to be included in care packages sent out by the congregation. Finally, after discussing the military's practice of awarding medals for exceptional service, the kids made medals for people in their lives who embody values like kindness, service, honesty, and thoughtfulness.



On November 23rd, we connected the incoming mentor/mentee cohort at a matching event during the Sunday School hour. This event gave these new mentor/mentee pairs a chance to get to know each other through fellowship and service. After a time of guided discussion, the group participated in social ministry's annual Thanksgiving Meal Pack event!

There is also much to look forward to in the month ahead! On Sunday, December 7th, students of all ages will gather to prepare cards and care packages to send to Zion's college students as they prepare to take their finals and wrap up their semesters.



On Sunday, December 14th, students will meet at the church to prepare and rehearse this year's Christmas pageant! The pageant will be presented the following week on December 21st during the 10 a.m. worship service.

On December 28th, Sunday School will break for the holidays before returning on January 4th to kick off a new calendar year in Youth and Family ministry.

Prayer Shawls Available at the CEB

On a rack in the Great Room at the CEB, you will see a display of prayer shawls (pictured on the right). These shawls were created by hand with prayers of love and hope by a dedicated group of Zion crafters. Please feel free to take one for a loved one or for yourself.



Update from the Parish Life Committee

We are celebrating the start of the Advent season on Sunday, December 7th at the CEB! Join us for Advent Parish Night from 4 - 6 PM as we do crafts, go caroling, and enjoy snacks (please bring something to share!). RSVP via the sign-up link emailed from the Parish Office by Wednesday, December 3rd.

In the works for next year is a trivia night, a trip to Grounds for Sculpture, Parents' Night Out, and country line dancing. If you have any ideas for fun things we can do as a group, please contact Cindy Rupprecht at cindyrupprecht@gmail.com.

Greening of the Church — December 6th

All are invited to come help the Worship & Music committee with the greening of the church on December 6th at 1 p.m., as we prepare for Christmastime worship services. Christmas treats will be provided!



Advent Parish Night — December 7th

Join friends from Zion at the CEB at 4:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 7th for Advent Parish Night. We will enjoy crafts, caroling, and refreshments as we celebrate the season together! Please sign up via the link that was emailed from the Parish Office. If you are available to help with this event, please contact Cindy Rupprecht at cindyrupprecht@gmail.com.

Women of Zion Cookie Exchange — December 10th

Come join us as we wait with anticipation for Christmas. Plan to attend the Advent Midweek Gathering led by Pastor Kat at 6:30 p.m. in the CEB Conference Room, and then come down to the Great Room at 7:30 p.m. for a time for fellowship. After we sample the wares, we will prepare Christmas cookie boxes to share with Zion shut-ins and our friends. All are welcome. Please bring two dozen cookies for the festivities! And sign up via the link emailed from the Parish Office.



Lunch Bunch — December 11th

Zion's lively group of retirees meets for lunch on the second Thursday of each month. On December 11th we will gather at Spain 92 in Raritan at 12 p.m. Please see the sign-up link emailed from the Parish Office to reserve your place at the table.

Christmas Pageant — December 21st

Join us for a single service of Communion Worship on December 21st at 10 a.m. as we enjoy the presentation of this year's Christmas pageant. Come celebrate the season with us!



Service of Hope and Light — December 21st

Join us at Califon United Methodist Church for a "Blue Christmas" service on December 21st at 7 p.m. This is a time for those who might be finding the holiday season difficult to receive comfort in worship and community.

The Giving Tree

The Social Ministry committee is sponsoring the Giving Tree this year in partnership with SAFE in Hunterdon. This organization provides hope and support for survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

In lieu of wrapped Christmas gifts, we will be donating gift cards that can be used by SAFE's clients to provide for their basic needs. Please choose an ornament from the tree at the church or CEB and deliver your gift card to the box next to the tree no later than December 14th. To learn more about SAFE in Hunterdon, please visit their website at www.safeinhunterdon.org.



Open Cupboard Food Pantry

Did you know that Open Cupboard accepts donations of clothing and household items? These may be dropped off at the Thrift Shop in the Greyrock Plaza in Clinton. The items are sold at the thrift shop and proceeds are used to purchase food items for the pantry.



Current items needed: cereal (sweetened & unsweetened), canned fruit, baked beans, canned soup, paper towels, toilet paper, shampoo & conditioner, body wash/soap. **ShopRite Gift Cards are always welcome!**

Faith Kitchen Update

At Faith Kitchen on November 6th a busy crew of Bonnie Stanski, John McAleer, Cindy Rupprecht and Christine Clark served 64 plates and 74 takeaways to 97 hungry guests. It's always heartwarming to hear the many thank you & God bless you's. A meal of chicken, rice, salad & bananas (with seconds and extra takeaways for family) was much appreciated!



On November 15th Saturday's Faith Kitchen volunteers of Cindy Rupprecht, Ken & Liz Degen, Kathryn Koch, and Jeff & Helen Livingston served a much appreciated meal of pulled pork sandwiches, Mexican rice and beans, fresh green salad and cookies to 31 sit down guests and 70 take out meals. Rebecca Melick's donation of 2 cases of apples was a huge hit with our guests as well! As always, thank you Zion for supporting this much needed ministry.



Alternative Giving

Alternative Gifts are still available for purchase at the CEB and at the church. Below are descriptions of the four charities we are supporting this year, selected by the Social Ministry committee.



\$10 - Popcorn Park Animal Refuge



All manner of animals are assured of a lifetime of all-encompassing care and genuine affection at the Popcorn Park Animal Refuge, located in Forked River, NJ. Each of the 200 animal rescue stories are unique, however most were in need of a safe haven from a dangerous or life-threatening situation. For the past 48 years, the seven-acre refuge has functioned under the auspices of the Associated Humane Societies. The animals receive specialized veterinary care, enrichment activities, socialization with visitors, and the companionship of caregivers. Visitors will meet a variety of animals, including farm animals, tigers, lions, wildlife, monkeys, reptiles and two bears - sisters Bonnie and Maryann. As a nonprofit organization, the refuge welcomes donations in a variety of ways: through membership in the Zoological Society, by making purchases for the benefit of the refuge of items on their wish list and for foods specific to each breed, such as monkey munchies. The Wildlife Club enables a family to sponsor an animal and learn its' name, age and profile called My Story. More information can be found at www.AHScares.org/popcorn-park.

\$15 - Harbor of Hope

For those seeking a welcoming homelike setting where compassion and camaraderie prevail, for those who are healing from trauma (as domestic violence, sexual abuse or divorce), for those who are immigrants, and for those who identify as LGBTQIA+, Harbor of Hope offers a safe and supportive space in Flemington, NJ. Their programs encompass services for all ages, from playgroups for children to teen homework helpers to adults enjoying the meditation room. The Giving Room provides nonperishable food, toiletries, and basic needs. A twice-monthly support group guides women navigating the family court system. Together with a community liaison, Harbor of Hope advises immigrants as they move through the immigration process. In addition to providing in-house activities, the staff sponsors ongoing community events such as the weekly "Come Learn English!" classes. More information can be found at www.harborsofhopenj.org.



\$20 - Patrick's Pals



Parents of children with multiple disabilities have unique challenges in striving to provide the best adaptive equipment and therapies to improve their children's quality of life, physical well-being and day-to-day functioning. Upon receiving a denial from their insurance company, some parents find the costs involved to be prohibitive. Patrick's Pals Foundation recognizes that these parents need life-changing solutions for their children and young adults and fortunately has an impressive expertise in adaptive equipment and therapies. Hippotherapy, specialized wheelchairs and communication boards are three examples, plus there are other innovative methods to accommodate the unique needs of special needs children. The foundation provides technology grants to upgrade communication devices in specialized schools, and partners with hospitals treating multiply-disabled children. More information can be found at www.patrickspals.com.

\$25 - ELCA Good Gifts - Safe Water Program

Lives are transformed when water becomes clean and safe. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) recognizes 2.2 billion people worldwide do not have access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation. Contaminated water results in life-threatening waterborne diseases, such as cholera, diarrhea, dysentery, hepatitis H, typhoid, and polio. A child dies every 90 seconds from disease. Women and girls spend up to six hours a day fetching water. Families struggle with economic hardships. The ELCA Safe Water Project utilizes a spring box which taps into underground spring water and protects it from the contamination of surface run off and animal intrusions. With clean water, families are healthier, mothers can work, girls go to school, and family income increases because of healthier crops and less money spent on medicine. More information can be found at [www.ELCA.org/good gifts \(safe water access\)](http://www.ELCA.org/good gifts (safe water access)).

