

The Olive Branch



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SUNDAY READINGS

Sunday, December 27 1st Sunday of Christmas

Isaiah 61:10—62:3
Psalm 148
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:22-40

Sunday, January 3, 2021 2nd Sunday of Christmas

Jeremiah 31:7-14
Psalm 147:12-20
Ephesians 1:3-14
John 1:1-18

At this time, all worship services and activities are being conducted online, not by gathering, in the interests of the health of our members, our neighborhood, and the world around us.

Accent on Worship

Bishop Eaton's 2020 Christmas Greeting

We Are Never Alone

The room was spare and dimly lit. We sat on folding chairs in a circle—young Honduran women and some of us from the ELCA. We had come to Honduras to observe the work of AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities). This is the ELCA's strategy to help youth who have been forced to flee their home countries because of violence, abuse, extortion by gangs and extreme poverty. Amparo is the Spanish word for shelter or refuge. In this case, AMMPARO partnered with the Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonites to resettle returned migrants—those who had tried to seek asylum in the United States but had failed or had been denied and deported back to Honduras. One by one they told us their stories of fear and desperation. Not a one undertook the long and dangerous trek north on a whim. They told us about the abuse they had suffered, about family members who had been killed by gangs, about the inability to make a living because of the extortion by organized crime. They talked about the bitter sadness of leaving home and family, and the uncertainty of the future.

I remember one young woman in particular. She was pregnant when she tried to migrate to the United States. She had the baby somewhere along the way. She was far from home, mostly alone and desperately wanted her mother to be with her. None of this is what she had hoped for when she was growing up. Circumstances beyond her control had forced her into this new and strange existence. She and her baby were now back in Honduras—but not at home. Home was too dangerous.

Remember last Christmas? Remember all of the preparations, the travel to be with family? Remember the holy beauty of the Christmas Eve liturgy and receiving Christ's grace and forgiveness at his table? The shopping and Christmas caroling? The in-person gatherings? All that has changed. The pandemic hasn't forced us from our homes but into our homes, sheltering in place, isolated. Not together, but physically distanced. Not gathered with family and friends, but forced apart because of the threat of infection. Forced by circumstances beyond our control into this strange existence. Oh, there will be Christmas carols piped into grocery stores and other essential services, but they will be painful reminders of how life used to be.

We are reminded of the experience of the exiles in Babylon: "By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captives asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land" (Psalm 137)?

Accent on Worship, continued on page 5

*In the presence
of God.
Being the presence
of God.*

WEEKLY CALENDAR

Wed., Dec. 23

10 am – Staff meeting
5:00 pm – Y2 Confirmation
5:30 pm – Children’s Choir
6:30 pm – Y3 Confirmation

Thurs. Dec. 24–Sun., Jan 3

*Church offices closed
Staff returns Mon., Jan 4*

Sun., Jan. 3

2nd Sunday of Christmas
7 am – Worship at a Distance
9 am – Virtual Coffee Hour

Tues., Jan 5

Noon – Bible Study

Wed., Jan. 6

Epiphany of Our Lord
10 am – Staff meeting
5 pm – Y2 Confirmation
5:30 pm – Children’s Choir
6 pm – Vicar Committee
6:30 pm – Y3 Confirmation

Midweek Advent Worship: Final Week

Under normal circumstances, it is our practice to gather midweek during the seasons of Advent and Lent. This provides us with an opportunity for deeper contemplation and prayer together in these two introspective and preparatory seasons. For liturgy at home use in our pandemic-induced year of exile, for Advent we offer two forms of observing Advent between Sundays.

1. **An order for prayer in the home.** A brief order of prayer to be used in the home will be provided each week. A simple service of the Word, at the center of this rite are a Scripture reading reflecting the themes of the Sunday of that week, a second reading or poem connected to that Scripture, and an invitation to intercessory prayer. The rite is begun with the lighting of an Advent wreath, or even a simple arrangement of four candles, as the prayer begins. This is suitable for morning or evening prayer, or prayer at the dinner table, and could be used every day during the week if desired.

2. **An audio/video of the ancient prayer office of Compline** (Prayer at the Close of the Day).

This service is the centuries old “bedtime prayer” of the Christian community. It is a 15- minute brief pattern of prayer intended for use just before extinguishing the lights at bedtime. An important dimension to this simple service is in its repetition – the more it is prayed, the more internalized it becomes. This audio/video can be used for prayer once or more each week at the close of your day during Advent. The service will not change during Advent except for an increase of the number of candles lighted on the wreath. The video consists solely of the candles of Mount Olive’s Advent wreath, and the words of the liturgy. Participants may prefer to light the candles of a home Advent wreath rather than viewing it on the video, using only the audio for the prayer office. The more often the service is prayed, you may join in as much as you’d like, or remain a participant through listening alone. For those who might wish to print a copy of the service (with music), a pdf below is provided. Our thanks to singers of the Cantorei for providing this worship aid for Advent. A link to the next week’s Compline liturgy will be sent each Saturday night with the brief order of home prayer, to be available throughout the coming week.

YouTube link for Compline, week of Advent 2: <https://youtu.be/mPkIVcxnfww>

[PDF of Compline service for printing](#)

Church Offices Closed Christmas Week

Church offices will be closed from Dec. 24 through Jan. 3, 2021. The Olive Branch has traditionally not been published during the week between Christmas and New Year and that will be the case this year, too.

Staff returns on Monday, January 4, 2021.

Stewardship News

Thank you everyone for your compassion and commitment to Mount Olive. We want to make the process of supporting our church financially easy and convenient for everyone. If you are okay with the delay in the deposit posting to your account, please feel free to continue sending your offering via US mail. If you would like, we have alternative methods for giving that you may want to consider:

• **Bill Pay:** You can set up a regular offering through your bank by calling and talking to someone or by logging in online. You tell your bank how much to send, how often and they will electronically transfer the amount. This service is most often free of charge and already used by many at Mount Olive.

• **Electronic Funds Transfer:** Set up a regular deduction from your bank account through the church's existing account with Vanco Services. Contact the church office to set this up and a form will be mailed or emailed to you. Complete the form and send it back to the church office either by US mail or via email.

• **Mount Olive Website:** You can donate by credit card through the church website. Visit our site www.mountolivechurch.org, go the very bottom of the home page and a "Donate" link is on the left. This method is good for one-time donations rather than recurring donations as the fees charged to Mount Olive per transaction are higher than the other two methods.

Devotional Booklets Available

The newest edition of *Christ in Our Home* (January-March 2021) have arrived in the church office and have been mailed to all who requested them last time.

If you would like this devotional booklet mailed to you, please contact the church office and we will send one out.

A Light in the Darkness Reflection

Light, Hope and Love for the Winter Ahead~ Connie and Rod Olson

As I was pushing the snow off the surface of the deck this winter, I thought about how many times friends brought light into our lives by paying a visit and sharing a cup of coffee with us.

The first time was in early May when the days had turned from cold into tolerable, from winter into spring. Our two granddaughters were on a break from school and they had asked if they could stop by. I jumped at the chance to get out fancy dishes and a tablecloth. There were also precious spring flowers starting to bloom. I picked a couple of little vases full and added them to the pretty table. The tea had been made, the scones were coming out of the oven and we waited in anticipation of our guests arrival. What a wonderful time we had and when they left we realized that we had been filled with their sunshine, with the joy of their presence in our lives.

Little did we know that this first tea party would be one of many throughout the summer. We invited Mount Olive friends....two at a time so that we could be socially distanced. If a stretch of good weather was before us, we invited people for every day of the week!

One of the most memorable times was when a friend from another parish came for coffee. She recently has been diagnosed with stage four cancer. She also has dementia so that her cancer diagnosis is not part of her understanding. She was so happy to be with us and that joy of life was truly evident in the short time she spent with us. Her husband also noticed it and asked if they could come again the next week. So they became regulars on the deck. Every time they were here we were uplifted by her enjoyment of the moment and her appreciation of nature. She gave us light and hope and love by her presence.

We hope that our parties on the deck have given us enough light to last through the dark winter ahead.



Year-end Contributions

In order to receive 2020 tax credit for your donations to Mount Olive, all contributions for this year must be **postmarked** no later than Dec. 31, 2020 (regardless of the date on the check).

The church offices will be closed during the week between Christmas and New Year this year. Your gifts can be dropped off at the Church office before the 24th, mailed - postmarked by the 31st or completed online!

Gifts of stock, minimum required distributions from retirement accounts, or other financial assets can be made to Mount Olive through our Thrivent Brokerage Account. Please email treasurer@mountolivechurch.org and instructions can be communicated to you or your financial advisor. These must be completed by December 31 for 2020 tax purposes.

Thank you!

Marking Epiphany in the Home

January 6 is the Festival of the Epiphany, when the Western church remembers the coming of three sages from the East to welcome the Christ child. This was the heralding of the coming of the Christ for all people, all nations. One family or community tradition for celebrating Epiphany is to make a Kings cake. Any pound cake or Bundt cake with an almond hidden inside will work. Whoever finds the almond in their slice of cake becomes Queen or King for the day and does secret kindnesses for the others in the household. In France, the day is celebrated with a cake called Galette des Rois (<https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1019114-galette-des-rois>), in Spain, with Roscon, and in Mexico, Rosca des Reyes. Here is one recipe: <https://www.kingarthurfLOUR.com/recipes/three-kings-cake-rosca-de-reyes-or-rosca-de-reyes-recipe>.

To prepare your home for Epiphany consider making straw stars or folding origami stars (look online for simple instructions) and hanging them from the ceiling or windows. Make one star larger than the others. Hang it in a central place, or over your creche. If you have a creche with free-standing figures, move the three sages to the stable. Or light many candles, to celebrate the Light of the World.

Another old tradition for Epiphany is the blessing of the home. With a piece of chalk, mark the year, the letters "C M B" and four crosses above the lintel of the doorway into the household [20 + C + M + B + 20]. The letters stand both for the traditional names of the three sages (Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar) and also for the words, "Christus Mansionem Benedicat," "May Christ bless this house," which are said as the lintel is inscribed. The following prayer may be said: "God of heaven and earth, you revealed the Christ to all nations by the guidance of a star. Bless this home and all who dwell in it. Fill us with the light of Christ, that our love for each other may go out into the world for all. In Christ's name we pray, Amen." For more on Epiphany, go to <http://fullhomelydivinity.org/>, click on Traditions and in the left sidebar, click on Epiphany.

Weekly Worship Emails

If you have been regularly receiving the weekly email on Sunday mornings with worship information and links, and you've noticed that for the past week or two you haven't been receiving them, take a moment to check your junk mail folder. Several people with comcast.net email addresses did not receive their Sunday worship email this past weekend in their inboxes, but later found the email junk/spam folders.

Remember, you don't need an email to access the liturgies as all of our online worship materials can also be found on the church's website home page: www.mountolivechurch.org. Just click on the first box, "Worship Online."

Final Bible Study in Session to Conclude January 7

The Thursday Bible study series on Romans was scheduled to end December 17. However, instead of last Thursday, the final session will be held after the New Year, on **Thursday, Jan. 7**. The time of the study is 6:00 p.m., and should last about 90 minutes. The reason for this is the session may end up needing to be split into two for content, and if that happens, then it will be more helpful to have it Jan. 14, rather than starting before Christmas and ending after.

The link to join the meeting on your computer or tablet is: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/342516141>
It's also possible to join by phone – please consider it if you aren't comfortable with video chats. The phone number (just call it at the time of the meeting) is 1 877 309 2073. When you call in, you'll be asked for an access code. It is: **342-516-141**.

No Noon Bible Study on December 29

Regular link to the Tuesday Noon Bible Study: copy and keep

The link for the Tuesday noon Bible study will be the same every week. Copy this text and print it off or keep it on your desk for easy reference each week.

To join from your computer, tablet or smartphone:

<https://tinyurl.com/y4qs46v5>

You can also dial in using your phone:

United States: +1 (646) 749-3112

Access Code: 179-693-565

New to GoToMeeting? Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts:

<https://tinyurl.com/y274v5rs>

Accent on Worship, *continued from page 1*

I told the young Honduran woman about another young woman who was forced to leave home because of a government decree. She, too, was pregnant and made a long and difficult journey. She, too, was far from home and without her mother when the baby came. She had to find shelter wherever she could. This wasn't what she had hoped for when she was growing up. Circumstances beyond her control had forced her into this new existence.

That young woman was Mary and the child was Jesus. Precisely in our distress, in our dislocation, the Lord shows up. Emmanuel—God with us—makes his home in the very places we find foreign or isolating. The young Honduran woman, and all of us, can find hope because of the birth of Mary's child. There is no God-forsaken place and we are never alone— not in hospital rooms, or sheltering in place, or Zoom calls or on dangerous roads. Many of us will not be physically home for Christmas, but we are truly home in Christ.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Virtual Coffee Hour

Join fellow Mount Olive friends and members for an hour of physically distanced socializing! There will be weekly video chat meetings using Google Meet **every Sunday from 9-10 am (9-9:30 for the kids' room)**. You can join by video on a smartphone or computer, or you can join by phone to participate in the informal conversations. It has been wonderful to see familiar faces and catch up with each other.

There will be four meeting rooms, now with one room dedicated for the youngest of the Mount Olive family - "Cupcakes & Cookies"! You can feel free to move between them to mingle with others as you'd like. The meeting links are below (the names of the snacks are just for fun-- join whichever one you'd like). If you join with a computer, you don't need to install anything or have an account, but if you'd like to join on a phone or tablet, you will need to install the Google Meet app and log in with a Google account. If you have questions about how to join feel free to call Katie Krueger at 419-344-2727 or email katherinerkrueger@gmail.com.

Coffee & Tea

<https://meet.google.com/snm-zssf-dni>

(US) +1 407-545-7381 / PIN: 641 572 935#

Meeting code: snm-zssf-dni

Summer Sausage & Cheese

<https://meet.google.com/act-expn-hat>

(US) +1 402-509-7747 / PIN: 151 809 692#

Meeting code: act-expn-hat

Cupcakes & Cookies - Kids' room

9:00-9:30 a.m.

<https://meet.google.com/vep-nyof-fzz>

(US) +1 216-930-8951 / PIN: 766 845 823#

Meeting code: vep-nyof-fzz

Book Discussion Group

The Mount Olive Book Discussion group will meet virtually on the second Saturday of each month until we can meet again in person.

The January 9, 2021 book will be *No Picnic on Mount Kenya*, by Felice Benuzzi.

We are using the GoToMeeting platform. Just click on the link below. If you prefer, you may join by phone.

Join the discussion from your computer, tablet or smartphone: <https://tinyurl.com/y4knn7o3>

You can also dial in using your phone.

United States (Toll Free): 1 866 899 4679

United States: +1 (571) 317-3116

Access Code: 998-208-989

Thank you!

Many thanks to the people of Mount Olive for the generous Christmas gifts we received, and for all your kindness and support throughout the year! You are Christ to us in so many ways, and we are deeply grateful for you in our lives.

Blessings and peace to you all in this new year in God's care!

— The staff of Mount Olive: Jim Bargmann, Andrea Bonneville, David Chervien, Joseph Crippen, Cha Posz, and James Wilkes.





Mount Olive Lutheran Church

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Cantor – [David Chernien](#)

Vicar – [Andrea Bonneville](#)

Coordinator of Neighborhood

Ministries - [Jim Barymann](#)

Administrative Assistant – [Cha Posz](#)

Sexton – [James Wilkes](#)

Shining the Light: Illuminating Impact - December 21

This year has been long but the light we share in Christ is upon us. Here in the Crosby- Gutierrez household we have been grateful for the light and life that we have received from our Mount Olive community. The kids have received notes, cards and letters from so many of you at Mount Olive over the past few months. Those letters have made all of us smile and brought unexpected joy to life in quarantine. Thank you for your care and shining a little light into our lives.

Sunday was the fourth in our Advent journey and Monday the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year, the darkest day. As of yesterday and everyday moving forward we will gradually receive more and more light. This is most welcome as the Minnesota winter sets in. We will share and revel in the light this week with the birth of the blessed baby Jesus. What a gift we have in Christ and through our Mount Olive community.

As the year comes to a close and we reflect on the year and anticipate changes for 2021, I invite you to also contemplate what is possible in the life and work of Mount Olive. How will you participate in our life together in the sharing of your time, talent and treasure?

If you haven't made a pledge before, please consider doing so. For those who pledge, we thank you! If you pledge or not, we ask that you prayerfully consider what your financial commitment will be to our ministry together at Mount Olive and how it will illuminate the impact of our shared work.

To complete your pledge go to: <https://forms.gle/WdsrJ7suvCfoTWJR8>