



News From The Pews

Newsletter of St. James United Church

For unto us

a

child

is born



This issue:

MINISTRY MESSAGE

Celebrate together

NEXT CHAPTER

Looking ahead

MARY'S LAMB

A true story

MAGI GIFTS

Were they medicine?

FUTURE STRENGTH

Financial management



Welcome!

We are excited to announce that our newsletter has a new name. As we have transitioned entirely online, we have changed our approach from using the newsletter as a way to connect with people to providing information about the church and its members “from the pews.”

As we enter this joyful and hope-filled holiday season, we invite you to join us at St. James United Church for a time of connection, celebration, and community. Whether you are a longtime member, someone seeking a spiritual home, or simply looking for a place to share in the spirit of Christmas, there is a place for you here.

May this time of preparation and celebration remind us of the love we share, the compassion we offer one another, and the joy that grows when we gather as a community. We look forward to celebrating the season with you and welcoming the hope of Christmas into our hearts and our homes.

Wishing you peace, warmth, and blessings this Christmas season.

Sincerely,
Glen Warren, Editor

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Minister:
Rev. James Ravenscroft



@StJamesUnited



st.JamesUC



StJamesUCNL

WORSHIP WITH US!
SUNDAY, 11:00 AM



MINISTRY MESSAGE

Rev. James Ravenscroft

Once again, we prepare to celebrate the most wonderful time of the year. We call it that for many reasons – the beauty of coloured lights offsetting the long dark nights, the aroma of sugar and spice in freshly baked treats, time honoured songs piped into stores as we shop for presents, the anticipation of gathering with loved ones over the holidays. There is much that makes this time wonderful, and they all point to one factor – relationships.

That is the heart of this time, theologically too. What is it we celebrate in the birth of Jesus, but God’s desire to be in relationship with us. And not from a distance, but close, choosing to be one with us, one of us. That is what we lift up in the Christian teaching on Incarnation. As we read in John, Chapter 1. God, in Christ, the Word made flesh, dwells with us in love.

We get a sense of the depth of this love in the birth stories we read in Luke and Matthew. In these two sometimes conflicting tales of Jesus’ birth, each gospel writer highlights a way that God ensures everyone is included in their love. Luke focuses on economic inclusion as Jesus is born to impoverished parents, forced to relocate for a census at the behest of Rome, the child laid in a manger because it was their only option. Shepherds, effectively the working poor of that time, are the recipients of angelic greetings. Matthew, in contrast, is more concerned with religious and cultural inclusion. The recipients of the message are not Jewish, but foreigners from a far off land, drawn to visit the child when they notice a new star in the sky. They may worship differently than the family they visit, but they recognize the importance of Jesus’ birth. In both stories, it is a vulnerable child who reveals God’s presence.

**CHRISTMAS
GIVES US THE
OPPORTUNITY
TO PAUSE AND
REFLECT ON
THE IMPORTANT
THINGS
AROUND US.**

DAVID CAMERON





MINISTRY MESSAGE

James Ravenscroft

This Advent and Christmas, we are highlighting the importance of showing our love for each other in a number of ways. First, we are again collecting items for Stella's Circle as part of White Gift Sunday. See the end of this message for a list of items to bring to worship on December 7 or to drop by the office in the week prior.

We are also hosting a Blue Christmas service for the wider community. This service of quiet and reflection is scheduled for 7 pm on Tuesday, December 16. It is intended for anyone who finds this season challenging as they face loss of some kind, be it because of illness, strained relations, unemployment, or the death of a loved one.

Third, we are adding a third service on Christmas Eve. Like the monthly vigil for peace, this is a drop in service for anyone who needs some calm on Christmas Eve. You can pop in for five minutes or stay for the whole service. Beginning at 9 pm, this is a time of soft music, personal prayer and occasional readings from scripture as well as poetry.

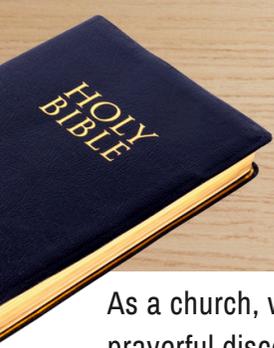
Finally, we plan once again to hold a family friendly potluck on January 4, Epiphany Sunday. Bring a dish that you associate with the holidays, wherever you may be from. As we share in food, we will also have fun with Epiphany focused crafts and activities, and once again share in King Cake. Whoever finds the token is sovereign for the day.

In these ways we highlight the importance of caring for and celebrating with one another. In this season we affirm God's drawing near to us through Jesus' birth, an act that draws us more deeply into relationship with one another, not just with people we know or are "like" us, but all people, across traditional dividing lines, held in God's love. This is what make this the most wonderful time of the year.

**EVERY GOOD
GIFT AND
EVERY
PERFECT
GIFT IS
FROM ABOVE**

JAMES 1:17





Our Next Chapter

A Transition, Not an End

As a church, we are entering an important and hopeful new season. We're calling it "The Next Chapter," a time of prayerful discernment as we explore what God is calling St. James to be and to do, right here, right now. This journey is rooted in faithful stewardship. We are all aware that our congregational demographics are different than they were 20 years ago, and so are the financial realities of maintaining our ministry and building. This isn't a reason for fear; it's a prayerful call to be wise and proactive, ensuring St. James can thrive. This is the "changed context" Rev. James mentioned, and the Spirit is inviting us to listen to it.

In a recent sermon, Rev. Ravenscroft offered a powerful framework for this journey. He reminded us that at this time of year, as leaves fall, the lectionary always points us toward "end times." It's a season of change that can feel unsettling. He drew a powerful parallel to the disciples, who were distressed when Jesus foretold the destruction of the temple—a "calamity" that felt like their world was ending.

But, as Rev. James pointed out, the true message was not about the ending, but about the promise: the Spirit would be with them, guiding them to look forward and embody Jesus' teachings in a new way, in a "changed context."

That is precisely where we find ourselves. For 67 years, St. James has been a beacon, living our mission to "belong, grow, and serve." Our ministry has never truly been about "these four walls," but about the lives we've touched: the refugee families sponsored, the community meals shared, the youth programs nurtured, and the inclusive welcome extended to all.

Now, as our context changes yet again, the Spirit is "still with us, inviting us to keep listening." This is the heart of our "Change@" initiative. It begins with a "listening phase," and we want to be clear: no preconceived decisions have been made.

This is not a top-down plan. It is a Spirit-led invitation to the entire congregation to listen—to each other, to our neighbours, to community partners like MUN and CONA, and to those "missing from the mosaic." We are prayerfully asking: Who in our neighbourhood needs our love? How can we best use all our resources, including our property, to serve the evolving needs of St. John's for generations to come?

This journey of change may feel big, but we walk it together, rooted in faith. As we begin this vital work of listening, we carry two key assurances:

This is a congregational process. Church members will have the final say on any major changes. This is a moment for faith, not fear. As Rev. James so powerfully concluded, "We're in a season of change. It's a transition, not an end. And the Spirit is with us."

Each of us is a piece of the mosaic that is St. James.

Stephen Pike 

SHARING OUR GIFTS

Much of the focus in Advent and Christmas is on gift-giving. We are out shopping for gifts, wrapping gifts, dropping off gifts for various charities, including at the church on White Gift Sunday, wondering what gifts we will receive on Christmas Day. It's a really joyful part of the holiday, but its purpose is more than just spreading joy. We share gifts because we want to show our love for others, to nurture our relationships, to deepen our sense of family, both given and chosen.

We often share more than material gifts. We share our time as we help each other decorate, run errands or clean house. We share our skills as we show someone how to bake gingerbread, teach a loved one about a family tradition, or knit a hat as a present. We share our love as we send cards and make phone calls. Again it is all about being family.

The same is true in our church family, as we share not only materially but share our time, our talents, our love with one another. When we do this, we are not just volunteering. That sounds optional but it really isn't. We are members of a family (this includes "adherents," people who have not officially joined the congregation but are very much part of its life and ministry) and so do what we can to support it. For some this means being part of a committee, for others it is helping with parts of the worship service, and others making phone calls, stacking some chairs, faithfully praying for the congregation.

The what we do is less important than the why. Like at home, in school, in our workplace, we pitch in as part of a faith community because we care about the people we are with and the reason that we are together. We are engaged in our shared life and want to see the congregation and everyone part of it thrive. This is a gift we can share not just this Advent and Christmas but all year long.

James Ravenscroft



Mary's Lamb

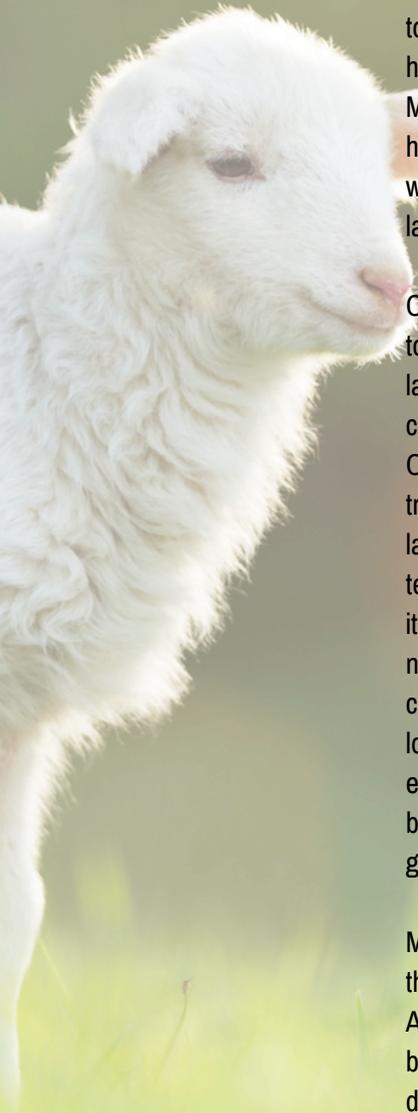
Submitted by Barbara Butt

The nursery rhyme you sang as a child was based on a real 9-year-old girl who saved a dying lamb—and accidentally made history. "Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb..." You probably sang it in kindergarten. Maybe you sang it to your own children. But did you know Mary was real? And so was her lamb? This is the true story behind one of the most famous nursery rhymes in history.

In March 1815, on a cold morning in Sterling, Massachusetts, nine-year-old Mary Sawyer was helping her father with chores in the barn. They discovered that one of their ewes had given birth to twin lambs overnight—but something was wrong. One lamb was healthy and nursing. The other had been rejected by its mother and was lying in the straw, barely breathing, too weak to even stand. Without its mother's care and milk, the tiny creature was dying of cold and hunger. Mary's heart broke at the sight. "Can I take it inside?" she begged her father. Her father shook his head. "No, Mary. It's almost dead anyway. Even if we try, it probably won't survive." But Mary couldn't bear to watch the lamb die. She pleaded with her father until he finally relented—though he made it clear he thought it was hopeless. When they returned to the house, Mary's mother agreed to let her try. Mary wrapped the freezing lamb in an old garment and held it close to the fireplace, cradling it in her arms through the long night. She didn't know if it would make it to morning. The lamb was so weak it couldn't even swallow at first. But Mary refused to give up. By morning, against all odds, the lamb was standing.

Over the next few days, with Mary's constant care—feeding it milk, keeping it warm, nursing it back to strength—the little creature recovered completely. And then something magical happened. The lamb, whom Mary had saved from death, became utterly devoted to her. It recognized her voice. It came running when she called. And everywhere that Mary went, the lamb truly was "sure to go." One morning before school, Mary called out to her lamb as she was leaving. The lamb came trotting over immediately. Mary's mischievous older brother, Nat, grinned and said, "Let's take the lamb to school with us!" Mary hesitated—she knew it was against the rules—but the idea was too tempting. She agreed. She tried to smuggle the lamb into the one-room Redstone School by hiding it in a basket under her desk, hoping it would stay quiet. For a while, her plan worked. The lamb nestled silently beneath her seat as the lesson began. Then Mary was called to the front of the classroom to recite her lesson. As she stood and began to read aloud, the lamb suddenly bleated loudly and leaped out from under her desk, following Mary to the front of the room. The classroom erupted. The students burst into laughter at the sight of a fluffy white lamb wandering the aisles, bleating and looking for Mary. Even the teacher, Polly Kimball, "laughed outright"—though she gently told Mary that the lamb would have to go home.

Mary, embarrassed but smiling, led her lamb outside to wait in a shed until school ended. She thought that would be the end of it—a funny story to tell at dinner. But someone else was watching. Among the visitors at the school that day was a young man named John Roulstone, a college-bound student staying with his uncle, the local minister. He was charmed by the sight of Mary's devoted lamb following her into school.



Mary's Lamb

The next day, John rode his horse across the fields to the little schoolhouse and handed Mary a slip of paper. On it, he'd written three simple stanzas:

"Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went,
The lamb was sure to go.
It followed her to school one day,
That was against the rule.
It made the children laugh and play,
To see a lamb at school..."

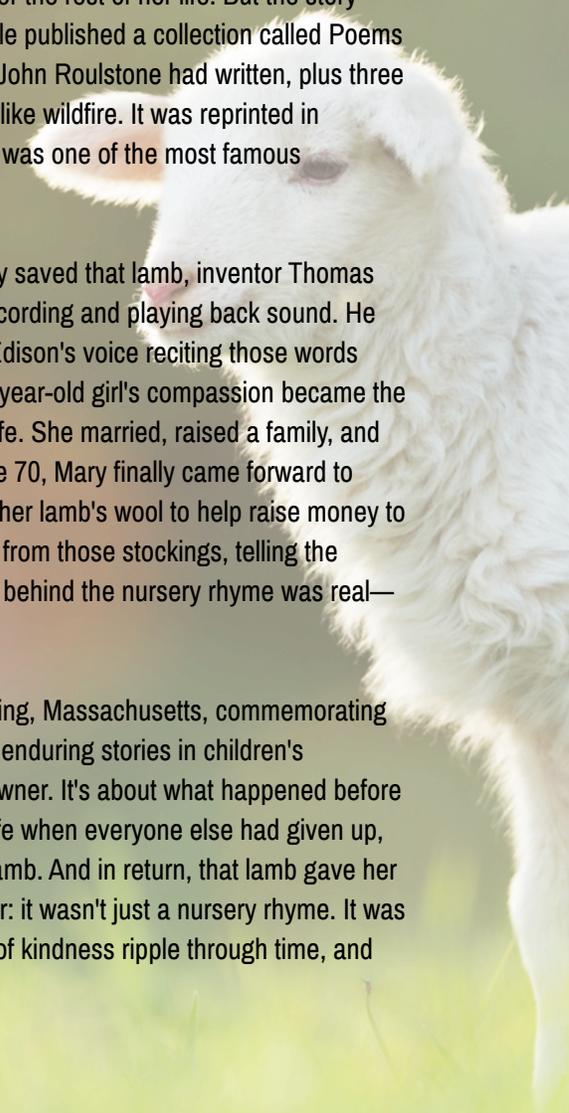
Mary treasured that piece of paper. She kept it for years, along with the memory of the lamb she'd saved. The lamb lived to be four years old, bearing three lambs of her own before she was accidentally killed by a cow in the barn. Mary's mother saved some of the lamb's wool and knitted stockings for Mary, which she treasured for the rest of her life. But the story doesn't end there. In 1830, a well-known writer and editor named Sarah Josepha Hale published a collection called *Poems for Our Children*. Among them was a poem called "Mary's Lamb"—the same verses John Roulstone had written, plus three additional stanzas with a moral lesson about kindness to animals. The poem spread like wildfire. It was reprinted in schoolbooks across America. Children everywhere began singing it. By the 1850s, it was one of the most famous children's poems in the country.

But here's where it gets even more remarkable: In 1877, nearly sixty years after Mary saved that lamb, inventor Thomas Edison was testing his brand-new phonograph—the first machine ever capable of recording and playing back sound. He needed something to recite to test if it worked. He chose "Mary Had a Little Lamb." Edison's voice reciting those words became the first audio recording in human history. The poem that began with a nine-year-old girl's compassion became the first sound ever captured by technology. As for Mary herself, she lived a long, quiet life. She married, raised a family, and rarely talked about the famous poem until she was an elderly woman. In 1876, at age 70, Mary finally came forward to share her story publicly when she donated the stockings her mother had made from her lamb's wool to help raise money to save Boston's Old South Meeting House. She sold autographed cards tied with yarn from those stockings, telling the world: "I am the Mary. This is my lamb's wool." People were astonished. The woman behind the nursery rhyme was real—and she was still alive.

Mary Sawyer died in 1889 at age 83. Today, a statue of her little lamb stands in Sterling, Massachusetts, commemorating the day a nine-year-old girl's compassion for a dying animal created one of the most enduring stories in children's literature. The lesson of "Mary Had a Little Lamb" isn't just about a pet following its owner. It's about what happened before that—about a little girl who refused to let a helpless creature die, who fought for its life when everyone else had given up, who showed that kindness and determination can create miracles. Mary saved her lamb. And in return, that lamb gave her immortality. The next time you hear someone sing "Mary had a little lamb," remember: it wasn't just a nursery rhyme. It was a true story about a real girl who taught us that compassion matters, that small acts of kindness ripple through time, and that sometimes the gentlest hearts change the world.

Mary Sawyer: 1806-1889

The girl who saved a lamb—and created a legend.



BUT WAIT, THERE'S MYRRH...

We are familiar with the story of the birth of Jesus and gifts given by the three Magi: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Were the gifts of the magi meant to save Jesus from the pain of arthritis? It's possible, according to researchers at Cardiff University in Wales, who have been studying the medical uses of frankincense.

Since the early days of Christianity, Biblical scholars and theologians have offered varying interpretations of the meaning and significance of the gold, frankincense and myrrh that the magi presented to Jesus, according to the Gospel of Matthew (2:11). These valuable items were standard gifts to honour a king or deity in the ancient world: gold as a precious metal, frankincense as perfume or incense, and myrrh as anointing oil. In fact, these same three items were apparently among the gifts, recorded in ancient inscriptions, that King Seleucus II Callinicus offered to the god Apollo at the temple in Miletus in 243 B.C.E. The Book of Isaiah, when describing Jerusalem's glorious restoration, tells of nations and kings who will come and "bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord" (Isaiah 60:6). Although Matthew's gospel does not include the names or number of the magi, many believe that the number of the gifts is what led to the tradition of the Three Wise Men.

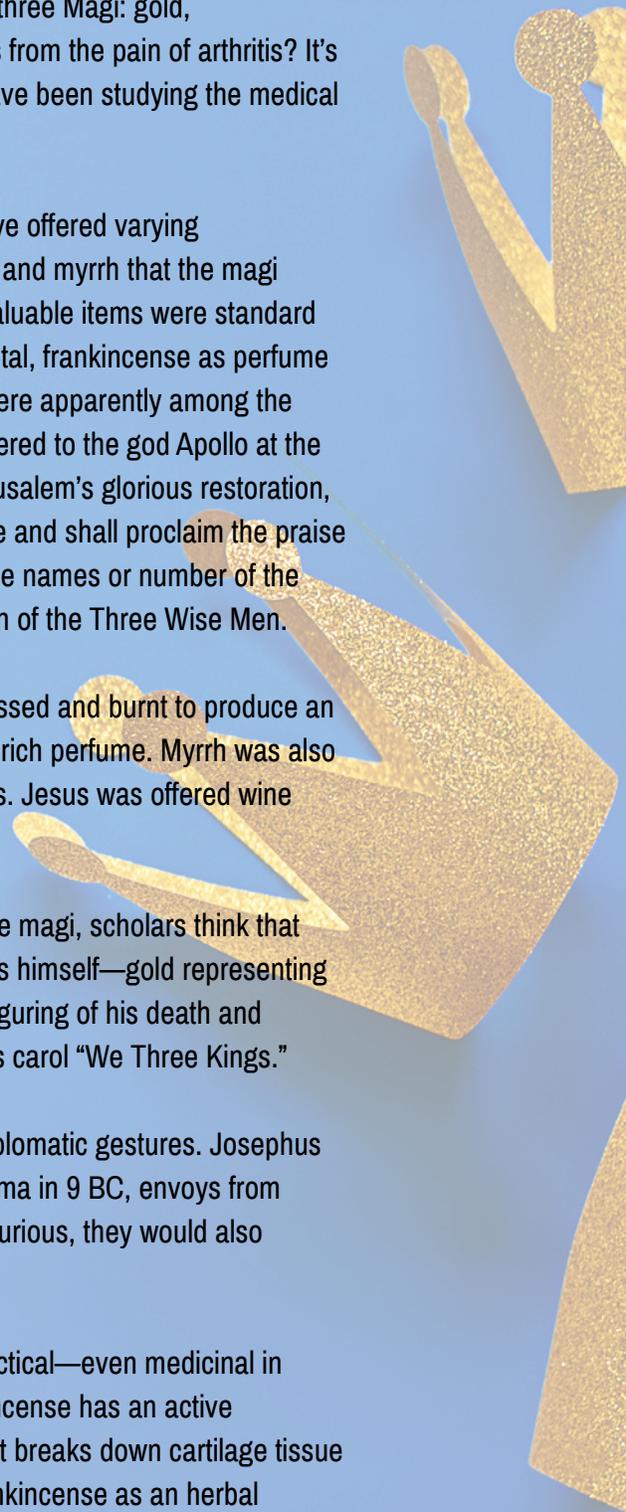
Like frankincense, myrrh was made from a gum resin, dried and compressed and burnt to produce an aromatic smoke. In addition to the fragrant smoke, it was also used as a rich perfume. Myrrh was also used to treat conditions ranging from battle wounds to skin inflammations. Jesus was offered wine mingled with myrrh as a painkiller at the crucifixion.

In addition to the honour and status implied by the value of the gifts of the magi, scholars think that these three were chosen for their special spiritual symbolism about Jesus himself—gold representing his kingship, frankincense a symbol of his priestly role, and myrrh a prefiguring of his death and embalming—an interpretation made popular in the well-known Christmas carol "We Three Kings."

Throughout the ancient Middle East, gifts were given and received as diplomatic gestures. Josephus records how, when Herod completed building the city of Caesarea Maritima in 9 BC, envoys from many nations came to Judea with gifts. The gifts would not simply be luxurious, they would also represent the finest produce from the country of origin.

Still others have suggested that the gifts of the magi were a bit more practical—even medicinal in nature. Researchers at Cardiff University have demonstrated that frankincense has an active ingredient that can help relieve arthritis by inhibiting the inflammation that breaks down cartilage tissue and causes arthritis pain. The new study validates traditional uses of frankincense as an herbal remedy to treat arthritis in communities of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, where the trees that produce this aromatic resin grow. Did the magi "from the East" know of frankincense's healing properties when they presented it to young Jesus?

Glen Warren

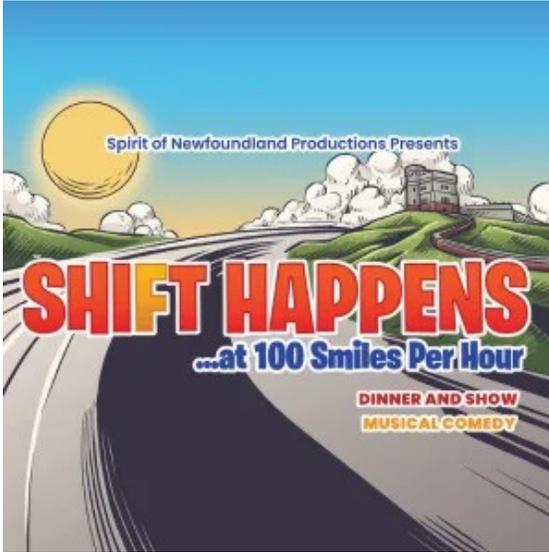


UPCOMING EVENTS

JOIN



AT SPIRIT OF NEWFOUNDLAND FOR



FEB 26
7:00 PM

A THREE-COURSE DINNER THEATRE
GOWER THEATER, 208 GOWER STREET
TICKETS \$120
PLEASE PURCHASE IN ADVANCE
709-745-2871 - OFFICE@COWANHEIGHTSUNITED.CA

Sunday
March 15



Concert

High Tea
& Fashion
Show

Saturday
May 9

**RUMMAGE
SALE**

**SATURDAY
JUNE 6**



In Canada, KAIROS Canada is leading the campaign in collaboration with Citizens for Public Justice, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada, and the Office of Religious Congregations for Integral Ecology and The Canadian Council of Churches. Together, we are mobilizing communities of faith and conscience to demand:

- Debt cancellation for unjust and unsustainable debts.
- Global financial reform to prevent future crises.
- A debt resolution framework within the United Nations that is transparent, binding and fair.

Join us in signing the [Jubilee 2025 Petition!](#) Our goal is to collect 100 thousand signatures in Canada and 10 million worldwide by the end of 2025. Every signature strengthens the call for transformative change!

A Quiet Christmas

“Silent Night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright.” Those opening lyrics of a much-loved Christmas carol capture what many of us long for, even if just for a few moments in this festive time. The reason for some is that Christmas is hectic, stressful too, leaving them in need of a place of quiet and calm. For others, it is a lonely time, especially if they are far from home and missing family and friends, leaving them wanting some place where there will be a listening ear. And for others still, Christmas is a reflective time, one that beckons them to spend time in contemplation.

It is for these reasons and more that we are adding a third service to our Christmas Eve schedule. Set for 9:00 pm, this is a drop-in service. This is a reflective service of soft music, flickering candles, occasional readings, personal prayer at multiple “stations” dotted around the space. There will be a few people present to welcome participants as well as to spiritually “hold” the space so that it stays calm and quiet, Rev. James among them in case someone needs a friendly face and a listening ear.

There is no need to stay for more than you need to. If ten minutes is all you need, or can spare, drop in and listen to some music, reflect on a reading, stop at one of multiple prayer stations to help ground your Christmas. Or if you want to take the full 90 minutes, that is fine as well. This is more a prayer time than a worship service, shaped to fit your needs.

Mark this holy night with quiet and calm.

“A Quiet Christmas”: December 24, 9:00-10:30 pm.



Strengthening Our Future

2025 marks the 67th anniversary of St. James United Church, an amazing accomplishment when one stops to think and reflect on everything that has happened since the congregation was formed in 1958. We took the opportunity to come together and celebrate 67 years on Friday, November 21. The evening was full of lots of fun, fantastic food and great fellowship.

As 2025 comes to an end, and we look forward to 2026, our focus is drawn to our ever-evolving financial condition. As a congregation, we have many things to be thankful for and are looking to the future with a positive attitude. In October, news would have been shared around the formation of a strategic planning committee. This committee has been tasked by the Board to gather information that will be crucial to planning our longer-term path forward. Taking a longer view in parallel with managing the here and now is a very healthy way to not only manage the challenges we have before us but also ensure that we are ready to take full advantage of the many opportunities that we have as well.

Everyone who is involved with the day-to-day management and governance of our church has done an excellent job in ensuring funds available are used as efficiently and effectively as possible. As an example, we enter the final three months of 2025 with a bottom line that is \$40,000 ahead of where we were this time in 2024. This has come about through a mix of higher revenues and strong expense management. Collections are \$19,000 higher than in 2024, which is an indicator that we have a solid congregational base. Overall, expenses are lower by \$7,000 as compared to 2024, an indicator of responsible financial management.

While we have many things to celebrate from our financial position in 2025, we still remain in a deficit position. In addition, we will face some new challenges in 2026 with the loss of one of our largest tenants, a gap that we will be working towards filling as quickly as possible. Also, we occupy an aging facility that we are working hard to maintain, but which we know will eventually require an injection of capital at some point in the future.

While our strategic planning committee completes its work, it is crucial that we work toward growing our congregational base as well as striving for even more engagement from all members of our congregation so that we can continue to meet the needs of the here and now.

2025 has been a year which has seen us trend in the right direction, albeit with a lot more work to do. I am very confident that we will overcome our challenges in 2026 and continue to trend in the right direction. However, in order to do so, we will require even more help and engagement from our congregation to ensure we have the opportunity to celebrate many more anniversaries in the coming years!

Brad Hollett



◆ Celebrate the joy of Christ's birth

CHRISTMAS EVE

Church Services

Wednesday, December 24

4:30 PM - FAMILY CHRISTMAS

7:00 PM - CANDLELIGHT CHRISTMAS

9:00 PM - CONTEMPLATIVE CHRISTMAS

ST. JAMES UNITED CHURCH

Mark Your Calendar

DATE	TIME	SUNDAY/STYLE	LEADER	MUSIC	SPECIAL INFO	FELLOWSHIP	
Nov 30	11:00 am	1 st Sunday of Advent	James	Senior Choir	World AIDS Day (Dec. 1)	Coffee/tea	
Nov 30	3:00 pm	Wild Light Spiritual Oasis	James		Fluvarium Parking Lot		
Dec 3	6:30 pm	Taizé Prayer	James				
Dec 7	11:00 am	2 nd Sunday of Advent	James	Quartet	Communion; White Gift	Coffee/tea	
Dec 7	7:30 pm	InsideOUT LGBTQ Circle	TBA				
Dec 10	5:30 pm	Silent Vigil for Peace/Justice			Drop in format		
Dec 13	5:30 pm	Tapestry Potluck & Worship	Shared				
Dec 14	11:00 am	3 rd Sunday of Advent	James	TBA	Baking Spirits Bright	Luncheon	
Dec 16	7:00 pm	Blue Christmas	James	TBA			
Dec 20	7:00 pm	Wild Light Spiritual Oasis	James		Winter Solstice/Yule		
Dec 21	11:00 am	4 th Sunday of Advent	James	Senior Choir	Primarily choral service		
Dec 21	7:30 pm	InsideOUT LGBTQ Circle	TBA				
Dec 24	4:30 pm	Family Christmas	James	Young Adults			
Dec 24	7:00 pm	Candlelight Christmas	James	Senior Choir	Communion		
Dec 24	9:00 pm	Contemplative Christmas	James	Pre-recorded	Drop in any time between 9 & 10:30 pm		
Dec 28	11:00 am	1 st Sunday of Christmas	TBA	Guitar Group			
Dec 31	10:00 pm	Watch Night Service	Service led by St John's Methodist Church. Everyone welcome.				
Jan 4	11:00 am	Epiphany(ish) Sunday	James	Senior Choir	Communion	Ep. Party	
Jan 4	7:30 pm	InsideOUT LGBTQ Circle	TBA				
Jan 7	6:30 pm	Taizé Prayer	James				
Jan 10	5:30 pm	Tapestry Potluck & Worship	Shared				
Jan 11	11:00 am	Baptism of Jesus	James	TBA		Coffee/tea	
Jan 14	5:30 pm	Silent Vigil for Peace/Justice			Drop in format		
Jan 18	11:00 am	2 nd Sunday after Epiphany	James	TBA		Luncheon	
Jan 18	7:30 pm	Inside OUT LGBTQ Circle	TBA				
Jan 25	11:00 am	3 rd Sunday after Epiphany	James	TBA	Burns Night	Coffee/tea	
Jan 25	3:00 pm	Wild Light Spiritual Oasis	James		Anticipating Candlemas		
Feb 1	11:00 am	4 th Sunday after Epiphany	James	TBA	Commun., Black History	Coffee/tea	
Feb 1	7:30 pm	InsideOUT LGBTQ Circle	TBA				
Feb 4	6:30 pm	Taizé Prayer	James				
Feb 8	11:00 am	5 th Sunday after Epiphany	James	TBA	Black History Month	Coffee/tea	
Feb 11	5:30 pm	Silent Vigil for peace/Justice			Drop in format		
Feb 14	5:30 pm	Tapestry Potluck & Worship	Shared				
Feb 15	11:00 am	Transfiguration Sunday	James	TBA	Burning of Palms	Luncheon	
Feb 15	7:30 pm	InsideOUT LGBTQ Circle	TBA				
Feb 18	6:30 pm	Ash Wednesday	James		Imposition of Ashes		
Feb 22	11:00 am	First Sunday in Lent	James	TBA	Communion?		