

January 7, 2021

What's New? Was gibt's Neues?

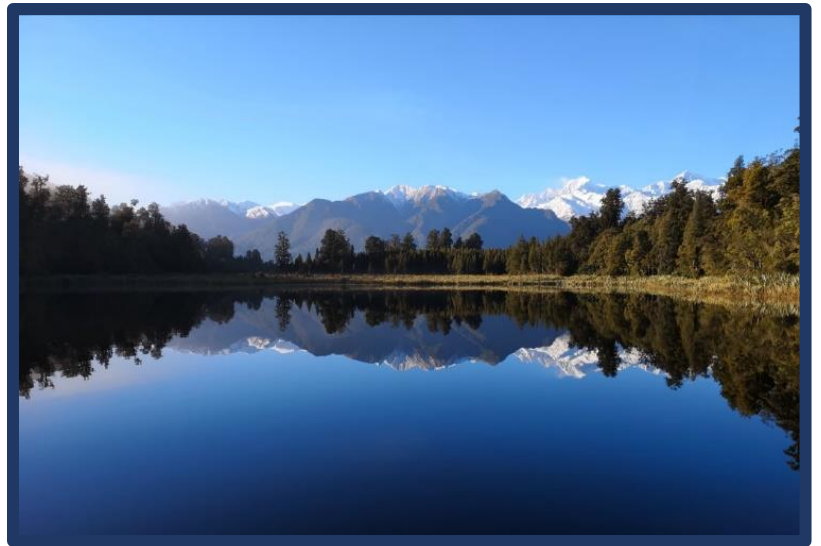
For the week of Week of January 3rd, 2021

(sent out a little later than usual this week)

A (almost) Bi-Weekly Update about What's Going on at and around
St. Matthew's during the Pandemic

Dear Members and Friends of St. Matthew's,

Have a blessed New Year! Of course we don't know what this year will bring (the last year taught us that nothing can be taken for granted). There will be more of the same we experienced this past year: lockdowns, physical distancing, and other precautions as we continue to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. We may not worship in person for quite a while longer. But there is hope: vaccines are being distributed. Hopefully by late summer or fall, all who want to receive immunization will have been vaccinated, and the spread of this disease, which has wreaked so much havoc, will be slowed down significantly.



What can we do in the meantime? We should continue to pray: for all those affected by the Coronavirus. For those who are ill, those who are dying, those who are grieving. For those who have been plunged into economic hardship because of the shutdowns. For those on the frontlines: physicians, nurses, hospital personnel, first responders, and those working in morgues and funeral homes.

And we can continue to do our part to protect and serve our neighbors and flatten the curve: stay home as much as possible. Keep our distance from others. Wear our masks. And reach out to others in sensible ways: pick up the phone and call, arrange a Zoom meeting, write an email or an old-fashioned letter. We may be in this for a while, but we are in this together – and with God.

Pr. Kerstin Weidmann

Epiphany Reflection by Pr. Weidmann:

‘The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness -- on them light has shined.’ Isaiah 9:2

We are now in the season of Epiphany, literally the season of ‘appearance’ and things that are brought to light. On January 6th, the feast of Epiphany itself which in German speaking countries is also known as ‘Heilige Drei Könige’, (the Three Holy Kings), we encounter the bright star that leads the magi to the child Jesus. But then throughout the entire season, we encounter the symbol of light – we hear about things that are brought to light. In essence, it is a season of hope that things can be turned around.

What is hope? Is it simply the vague feeling that everything will be alright somehow? That God will take care of things, no matter how much we as human beings mess up?

Maybe. Although I’d say that this understanding of hope involves a lot of denial and plain wishful thinking.

There are images in the Bible about hope that go a little deeper than that. ‘The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness -- on them light has shined.’ These well-known words are from the Book of Isaiah. Beautiful words, words that give hope.

But most of the prophecies in the Book of Isaiah (about 95% if not more) are about gloom and doom, God’s judgment for the people of Israel because of their disobedience against God. And the Kingdom of Israel is in a precarious situation: The Assyrian Empire to the northeast seeks to colonize its territory. Assyria invades and sacks the Kingdom of Israel and leads many of the people into exile in the year 722 B.C. The northern kingdom of Israel – the area that a few hundred years later will be known as Galilee – ceases to exist – which is traumatic for the people.

Yes, this is a people who walks and lives in deep darkness, there is gloom and doom – but on them, the light of hope shines. God is at work. Turn around, says Isaiah, and God will turn to you. Isaiah doesn’t pretend that everything is a-o-kay. He sees the darkness, he experiences the darkness, he prophecies gloom and doom – but at the same time he sees a path for the future. It is God’s path – but human beings need to be willing to walk it.

We all know that a lot is awry in this country and the world right now. We don’t know what this year will bring. But as long as we are willing to listen to God’s voice and heed the call to seek new ways, hope is at work.

And so let’s listen to another word from Isaiah: ‘Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.’ (60:1) May this be a year we let our light – God’s light - so shine and give hope to the world.

In Memoriam: Marianne Kress

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of Marianne Kress on January 3rd. Please keep her family in your prayers. Plans for a memorial service via Zoom are pending.

Update: In-Person Worship Services and Events at St. Matthew's

All in-person worship services at St. Matthew's have been canceled until further notice.

Sunday Online Worship Services

St. Matthew's will continue to make recorded worship services available every Sunday by 10 a.m. on our website (www.stmatthews-sf.org) and our Facebook page ('Matthew Lutheran') until further notice.

If you'd like to receive a link to St. Matthew's worship services in your email inbox every Sunday, please let us know by sending a request to office@stmatthews-sf.org.

Congregational Meeting via Phone on Sunday, February 21st at 11 a.m.

Mark your calendars: on Sunday, February 21st at 11 a.m., St. Matthew's will conduct its annual meeting **as a phone meeting**. In due time, you will receive a notification with what number to call in order to participate in this meeting.

We will keep the meeting short. The main order of business will be to approve a budget for the year 2021. The annual report will be sent to you ahead of the meeting.

Continuation of Phone Services on Thursdays

Since we will not be able to worship in our sanctuary in the foreseeable future, Pr. Weidmann will continue to offer brief worship services with communion over the phone on Thursdays at 10 a.m. Please contact her if you would like to participate. 925-330-2289 or pastorweidmann@stmatthews-sf.org.

Irregular Office Hours

We continue to offer irregular office hours during the ongoing pandemic. Our office administrator, Angie Holt, usually is in the office on Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. You can reach Pr. Weidmann at any time: 915-330-2289 or pastorweidmann@stmatthews-sf.org.

Continued Financial Support of St. Matthew's Ministries

We want to thank everyone who has supported St. Matthew's financially during the past months. Please continue to send in your contributions!

Pr. Kerstin Weidmann's Contact Information

You can reach Pr. Weidmann via her cell phone (925-330-2289) or via email (pastorweidmann@stmatthews-sf.org).

**We want to wish everyone a blessed (and better)
New Year!**

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