

**SHARING OUR JOYS AND CONCERNS**

*After each prayer request:  
Pastor: Lord, in your mercy,  
All: Hear our Prayer.*

**PRAYER SONG**

**UMH 487**

*This is our prayer. This is our prayer, O God!*

**THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**INVITATION/PRESENTATION OF OUR TITHES AND**

**OFFERINGS**

**\*DOXOLOGY**

**UMH 95**

**\*PRAYER OF DEDICATION** Unison

In our unworthiness, O God, may we yet bring worthy gifts to honor the Messiah. May the brokenhearted be led to enriching new celebrations. May the lowly among us come to know their true worth as persons chosen by you to do great things. By your mercy, may the hungry be fed not only with bread but also with opportunities to feed others. We give ourselves as your servants, for no gift is complete without personal commitment. Thank you, God, for expecting great things of us. Our spirits rejoice in the coming of our savior. Amen!

***We Go Forth to Love God and Serve One Another***

**\*CLOSING HYMN** *O Come, All ye Faithful* **UMH 234 (vs. 1&2)**

**\*BENEDICTION**

**Pastor Jenny Lee**

**\*POSTLUDE**

**Toni Koons (G)/Sharon Asp (A & SCF)**

Worship resource "led by Love" by Lavon Bayler

 **Upper St. Croix Parish  
United Methodist Church**

The 2023 Parish Ministry Theme:  
"Fill My House" (Luke 14:23)

**Third Sunday of Advent/Christmas Program (A)**



**Grantsburg-Central**  
Since 1897



**Atlas**  
Since 1887



**St. Croix Falls**  
Since 1859

**SUNDAY SERVICES:**

**9:00 AM at Grantsburg with Online Zoom Service  
(9:15 AM, Sunday School)**

**10:00 AM at Atlas (Sunday School Christmas Program)  
No Service at St. Croix Falls (joining to Atlas Service at 10AM)**

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

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**Parish Secretary Colleen Norenberg:** [centralumc2016@gmail.com](mailto:centralumc2016@gmail.com)

**Parish Office:** 715-463- 2624 **St. Croix Falls Office:** 715-483-9494

[www.upperstcroixparish.org](http://www.upperstcroixparish.org)

<https://www.facebook.com/UpperStCroixParishUMC>

**Upper St. Croix Parish**  
**Grantsburg: Central, Atlas, St. Croix Falls**  
**December 17th, 2023**  
**Third Sunday of Advent**  
**Christmas Program (A)**

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\*Please stand if you are able.

**\*PRELUDE** Toni Koons (G)/ Sharon Asp (A & SCF)  
**\*ADVANT SONG** TFWS 2090 (vs. 3)  
**\*LIGHTING THE THIRD CANDLE**

**WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**  
**PASSING OF THE GREETINGS**

*“Peace be with you”*

*(Waive your hands at one another)*

**We Celebrate New Life in Christ**

**\*CALL TO WORSHIP** Responsive

God is in our midst; do not fear.

God rejoices to renew our lives in steadfast love.

**God gathers us for this time of worship.**

**God claims us and promises us a home.**

Trust in God who is our strength and life.

Give thanks to God, the source of our salvation.

**We will sing praises and exalt God’s name.**

**With joyous shouts, we will tell of God’s glorious deeds.**

Rejoice in God, whatever your circumstances.

Remember the good fortune God has shared with you.

**We will not worry as we seek God’s peace.**

**We open our hearts and minds to God’s leading. Amen.**

**\*DEDICATING HYMN** *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*  
UMH 240 (vs. 1 & 2)

**OPENING PRAYER** Unison

Loving God, we rejoice in this season of anticipation as we remember your promises and look forward to ways that you reveal yourself to us. May your presence be real to us in this hour. Strengthen us for victories over temptation, for renewal of our love for you and one another, for leadership and service in your church. We give thanks that you have called us into the

community and commissioned us to make a difference in the world. Equip us here for the tasks you set before us. Amen.

**CHILDREN’S TIME (G)**

**UMH 191 (vs.1)**

**Proclamation of God’s Word**

**\*THE GOSPEL LESSON**

**John 1:6-8;19-28**

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

19 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” 20 He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” 21 And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” 22 Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” 23 He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ” as the prophet Isaiah said.

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, “Why, then, are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” 26 John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, 27 the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal.” 28 This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

This is the word of God for the people of God.

**Thanks be to God. Amen!**

**SERMON (G)**

*“Who Are You?”*

**Pastor Jenny Lee**

**CHRISTMAS PROGRAM (A)**

**See Insert**

**We Respond to God’s Word**

**RESPONDING PRAYER** Unison

God of our rock and redeemer, whose messengers appear in strange places and unexpected times, keep us from missing the voices in the wilderness that speak your Word. Whether of warning or assurance or challenge, your message is one we would not ignore. May we, like John, help to prepare the way that our world may become a more wholesome and welcoming place for all people. Amen!





**TODAY'S SERVICE VOLUNTEERS**

**DECEMBER CHURCH MISSIONS**

**ATLAS**

Mission committee chair: Peggy Frederickson

<p><b>INK JET RECYCLING PROGRAM:</b></p> <p>Atlas collects and recycles ink jet cartridges and cell phones year-round.</p> 	<p><b>LOAVES &amp; FISHES NEEDS OUR ONGOING SUPPORT</b></p> <p>Requested items: cooking oil (smaller and larger), mayonnaise, sugar 4# size, bar soap, dish and laundry soap. Personal products for men and women.</p>	<p><b>Mitten Tree</b></p> <p>We will collect mittens, scarves, hats, gloves, etc. for the Loaves &amp; Fishes Food Pantry.</p> 
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**GRANTSBURG**

Mission committee chair: Deb Hammer

<p><b>BE A "BACK-PACK BACKER"!</b></p> <p>REMEMBER ... Every Sunday Is MAC 'N CHEESE SUNDAY! Supporting the Salvation Army's "Happy Kids Back-Pack Program"</p> 	 <p>We will be collecting financial donations for Christmas for kids through interfaith Caregivers of Burnett County.</p>
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**ST. CROIX FALLS**

Mission committee chair: Kate Murtaugh

 <p><b>Food Shelf</b> (Communion Sunday)</p>	<p><b>Sailor Hat Offering:</b></p> <p><i>The Sailor Hat offering will go to support Buying Christmas Food Gift Cards for Families in Need!</i></p> 
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**Ministers**

**All God's People**  
Pastor Jenny Lee

**Central:**

Pianist  
Liturgist  
Acolyte(s)  
Fellowship  
Counter  
Cleaning  
Sunday School  
Snow Removal

Toni Koons  
Barbara Loomis  
Willow Nyland  
Paulie Kratchmer  
**Volunteer Needed**  
Sandra Erickson & Charlie Glonek  
Barbara Loomis & Jenni Stedman  
**Volunteer Needed**



**Atlas:**

Pianist  
Liturgist  
Usher  
Cleaning  
Sunday School  
Fellowship

Sharon Asp  
Sue Olson  
Colleen Adams-Schween  
**Volunteer Needed**  
Christmas Program  
Potluck

**St. Croix Falls:**

No service at SCF. Instead, they will join the Atlas Christmas Program at 10:00 am at Atlas UMC. If you need a ride, please contact Ad Council members.



**Breakthrough Prayers:**

Please pray for those who are in need, the sick, and the loss of loved ones, and for God's peace for all over the world!

Thank you for your support!

## PLEASE NOTE:

- 1) **An Online Zoom Service is scheduled for this Sunday at 9:00 am at Central.**  
The link will be posted on our parish website and Facebook page.  
Click the LINK to Join Zoom Meeting  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84147808460?pwd=SDZleFNubmEvaDBlcytTRzVxMFIIZz09>  
Phone: +1 312 626 6799,  
Meeting ID: 841 4780 8460, Passcode: 568271
- 2) Our Sunday Sermons are on the website at [upperstcroixparish.org](http://upperstcroixparish.org) under Sermons!
- 3) You may watch a recorded video of the service on our parish Facebook page.  
<https://www.facebook.com/UpperStCroixParishUMC>
- 4) We will also send you a weekly bulletin and written sermon through post mail and email. If you have any questions regarding the mailing weekly materials, please contact our parish secretary, Colleen Norenberg.

## This Week's Calendar:

Today: Third Sunday of Advent/Christmas Program (A)  
God bless you all!

### Sunday Worship Services:

- |        |              |   |
|--------|--------------|---|
| 12/17: | 9:00 am      | Grantsburg with Zoom (9:15am, Sunday School)                            |
|        | 10:00 am     | Atlas (Christmas Program & Potluck)                                     |
|        | No Service   | St. Croix Falls will join Atlas for their Christmas Program & Potluck   |
| 12/17: | 10:00 am     | Christmas Program & Potluck (A)   |
|        | 1:00 pm      | Gary Bohn's Visitation Swedish Church in Trade Lake                     |
|        | 3:00 pm      | Gary Bohn's Celebration of Life Service at Swedish Church in Trade Lake |
| 12/19: | 6:30 pm      | Ad Council Meeting (G)  |
| 12/20: | 1:00 pm      | Advent Craft Group Gathering - <i>Making Quilt Blankets</i> (G)         |
|        | 6:00-8:00 pm | Youth Gathering (G)   |

**PLEASE NOTE: WHEN WRITING A CHECK PLEASE MAKE IT PAYABLE TO YOUR INDIVIDUAL CHURCH. WHEN THE OFFERING IS MAILED IN WE ARE THEN ABLE CREDIT THE APPROPRIATE CHURCH. THANK YOU!**

## THIS WEEK'S BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

Kim Wheeler	12/18
Patrick Grimes	12/18
Brody Woltz	12/19
Brittney Woltz	12/22
Charles & Mary Lou Wright	12/23



## Next Sunday (December 24th): Christmas Eve Service

### VOLUNTEERS



#### Central at 7:00PM

Pianist	Toni Koons
Liturgist	<b>Volunteer Needed</b>
Acolyte(s)	Willow Nyland
Counter	<b>Volunteer Needed</b>
Cleaning	Sandra Erickson & Charlie Glonek
Snow Removal	<b>Volunteer Needed</b>

#### Atlas at 4:00 PM

Pianist	Sharon Asp
Liturgist	Sue Olson
Usher	Colleen Adams-Schween
Cleaning	<b>Volunteer Needed</b>

#### St. Croix Falls at 10:00 AM

Pianist	Sharon Asp
Liturgist	Kathy Gionis
Usher(s)	Lynn Hanson
Money Counter	Peter Gionis
Bell Ringer	Karen Sciacca
Flowers	Karen Sciacca

## Upcoming Events-Mark Your Calendar

**12/24**

### **Christmas Eve Service**

**10:00 am at St. Croix Falls UMC**

**4:00 pm at Atlas UMC**

**7:00 pm at Central UMC Grantsburg**



12/25-12/27 Korean Clergy and Family Christmas Retreat at Wisconsin Dells

12/27 Youth Christmas Program  
(All Parish Youth are welcomed!)



Pastor Jenny Lee, Ph.D.  
Upper St. Croix Parish UMC

December 17th, 2023  
John 1:6-8, 19-28

## **“Who Are You?”**

I want to start with something funny I found from on an internet site: A little girl asked her mother, “Where did people come from?” Her mother answered, “God made Adam and Eve, and they had children, and that’s how all humankind was made.” A couple of days later, she asked her father the same question. Her father answered, “Many years ago, there were monkeys, which the human race evolved from.” The confused little girl returned to her mother and said, “Mommy, how is it possible that you told me that God created us, and Daddy said we came from monkeys?” Her mother answered, “Well, dear, it is very simple. I told you about my side of the family, and your father told you about his.”

How about you? Did your side come from God or from monkeys? Today, I want to talk about “who we are.” In other words, “What is our identity?” We lit the third Advent candle today, which is a symbol of joy. We hope Jesus brings us joy and that our lives are always joyful. The scripture the First Thessalonians 5:16-18 tells us, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Also, Philippians 4:4 says, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” According to the scriptures, “Be joyful” and “rejoice always” are God’s will for us. However, there are questions: How can we rejoice always? How can we give thanks in all circumstances? If we believe God is with us and makes things happen for us, we can give thanks in all circumstances and always rejoice because we have a strong supporter.

As we did last Sunday, today’s scripture also talks about John the Baptist. Many people were curious about who John was because they had never seen prophets whom they had learned about from the Old Testament or heard about baptism before. Some wondered if he was the prophet, Messiah, or Elijah. Elijah was the greatest prophet in Israelite history, who performed many miracles and who did not die but was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). Israelites believed that Elijah might come back as the Messiah because he didn’t die. So, some suspected that John might be the returned Elijah. John the Baptist’s ministry was a big sensation for the people, making people change their worldview with “Jesus as the center.” John the Baptist was very famous as the Gospel of Mark describes, “people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him.” However, John never forgot that God sent him with a mission to point to Jesus Christ, and he lived his whole life for that mission. The political and religious leaders sent people to John to ask if he was the Messiah God promised (John 1:19). John said to them, “I am not the Messiah.” They asked him again, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” People asked him repeatedly, “Are you the prophet?” He said, “No.” “People asked him again, “Who are you? Let us get an answer for those who sent us.” He answered, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord as the prophet Isaiah said.” The Gospel of John says who John was at 1: 6-8: “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.” John the Baptist knew who he was. Then, he fulfilled his mission, baptizing people.

We can imagine why people were confused about whether John the Baptist was the Messiah. Some people used to compare him to Jesus, who had more disciples and who baptized more people (John 4:1).

However, John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to follow him (John 1:35-37). He said, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). For people's question, "Are you the Messiah?" he answered, "I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." At that time, the slaves untied their master's sandals. The masters did not bend their waists to untie their sandals for their dignity. John the Baptist used the metaphor from their culture to be less than the enslaved person to Jesus. John the Baptist stood firmly in the faith with his mission.

We need to know who we are and what our missions are as John the Baptist did. Furthermore, we have to fulfill the mission. The Gospel of John says he "was a man sent from God. He came as a witness to testify to the light so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify to the light" (John 1:6-8). We are also sent from God to our family, our workplace, our community, and our country to be a witness of love for God. Jesus says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). Our mission is to love one another as the disciples of Jesus Christ. Do you think you know your identity and live by it daily?

I learned about a prophet who knew himself and his mission. But he avoided his mission because he did not like it. His name is Jonah. He was sent from God to go to Nineveh. God wanted to save the people of Nineveh through Jonah. But Jonah hated the people of Nineveh who needed to be saved. He went down to Joppa, running away from God. Finally, he got on a ship toward Tarshish. God sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. People asked him who he was and what happened to him to determine why the crisis came to them.

Jonah said to them, "I am a Hebrew and worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." He knew about God very well. He was proud of himself that he was a Hebrew, who worship God. Proudly and confidently, he said to them, "I worship the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the land. But I ran away from God." How could that happen? How dare a person who worships the Lord run away from God? These terrified them. How could he escape God, who made the sea and the land? They could not understand how he, who worshiped the Lord, ran away against God. They prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, do not let us die because of this person. This is in your plan." Jonah knew about God as the Creator, himself as one of the chosen people, and of his mission. However, he ran away to avoid his mission against God's wishes.

How about us? In this Advent season, are we acting like Jonah or John the Baptist? We say, "We are Christians, and we worship the Lord. But, let us think of ourselves. Are we ignoring what the Lord wants us to do? John the Baptist made the people's arrogant minds and stubborn hearts soft, showing humility and sincerity so that they may believe in Jesus Christ. He fulfilled his mission, trying not to be an obstacle to the way of the Lord. He pointed to Jesus Christ, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." And he denied himself, "I am not the Messiah. I am not Elijah. I am not the prophet. I am not worthy to untie his sandals." He did profound self-denial even though he could have accepted honor and authority from many people. He lifted Christ higher and was thoroughly humble by himself.

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, asked people at one of his sermons, "Are you an almost Christian?" He said, "Almost might be 99%, but not one hundred %." In other words, almost Christian is not one hundred percent Christian. We should consider whether we pretend to be Christians or live a Christian life every day. An example is this: Some of you may know I enjoy playing ping-pong. While playing ping-pong, if someone's ball misses the table, we say, "It's almost there." But we know "almost" means not getting a point. Who are you? Are you almost Christian or an honest Christian? Thanks be to God! Amen!