

Surprising God, so often hidden from our view, yet appearing in unexpected times and places, open our eyes to your salvation. Shed your light on this Christmas community. Unite us in this time of prayer and praise that we may grow in your likeness, be filled with your wisdom, and become the channel of good news to the world. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen!

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

With joyous praise, we return to you a portion of all you have given to us. May our giving exceed the demands of the law. You have invited us to sacrifices befitting our blessings. You have asked us to care for those less privileged. What we offer in these moments is a beginning. We will ponder again your amazing grace in granting us life, in offering the child Jesus to bring us back to you, and in giving us the name "Christian." Praise be to you, O God. Amen!

We Go Forth to Love God and Serve One Another

***CLOSING HYMN**

Go, Tell it on the Mountain

UMH 251 (vs. 1& 3)

***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)

The First Sunday After Christmas Day



**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 (No Sunday School)

11:15 AM at St. Croix Falls

CONTACT INFORMATION

Pastor Jenny Lee: jennlee1732@gmail.com

Youth Director Shayna Schmid: snsnyder@gmail.com

Parish Secretary Colleen Norenberg: centerlume2016@gmail.com

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

www.upperstcroixparish.org

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

Upper St. Croix Parish
Grantsburg: Central, Atlas, St. Croix Falls
December 31st, 2023
The First Sunday After Christmas Day

*Please stand if you are able.

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

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

Rejoice in God, who is our life and salvation.

Christ has come to make us heirs of God’s promises.

God commanded, and we were created.

We are children of the Most High.

Praise God from the heights of heaven.

Praise God, all people of the earth.

God opens our eyes to see the light.

We will be called by a new name.

Men and women, youth and aged,

Sing of God’s glory; shout your praise.

God has made us heirs of promise.

We will praise God’s holy name. Amen.

***DEDICATING HYMN** *O Master, Let me Walk with Thee*

UMH 430 (vs. 1 & 4)

OPENING PRAYER Unison

Faithful God, by whose Spirit all people and places become holy, lead us by that Spirit today. We have come to celebrate a birth that offers us rebirth. We have gathered that you might claim us as heirs, with Christ, of eternal life. Unite our hearts and minds in a chorus of praise, that the life of this church might be quickened, renewed, and refocused. May your faithful people become a crown of beauty in your hands. Amen.

CHILDREN’S TIME (G)

UMH 191 (vs.1)

Proclamation of God’s Word

***THE GOSPEL LESSON**

Luke 2:22-40

22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), 24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

29 “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word,

30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 a light for revelation to the gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

33 And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too.”

36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.

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

Thanks be to God. Amen!

SERMON

“Christmas Community”

Pastor Jenny Lee


We Respond to God’s Word

RESPONDING PRAYER Unison

JANUARY CHURCH MISSIONS



ATLAS

Mission committee chair: Peggy Frederickson

<p>INK JET RECYCLING PROGRAM:</p> <p>Atlas collects and recycles ink jet cartridges and cell phones year-round.</p> 	<p>LOAVES & FISHES NEEDS OUR ONGOING SUPPORT</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>In January we will be collecting hygiene kits for Polk County Foster Care. Deadline Sunday, January 28. There will be a sign-up sheet at church for people to sign up for items to donate.</p>
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GRANTSBURG

Mission committee chair: Deb Hammer

<p>BE A "BACK-PACK BACKER"!</p> <p>REMEMBER ... Every Sunday Is MAC 'N CHEESE SUNDAY!</p> <p>Supporting the Salvation Army's "Happy Kids Back-Pack Program"</p> 	<p>We will be collecting financial donations for the Grantsburg Food Shelf.</p> 
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ST. CROIX FALLS

Mission committee chair: Kate Murtaugh

<p>Food Shelf (Communion Sunday)</p> 	<p>Sailor Hat Offering:</p> <p><i>The Sailor Hat offering will go to support The Salvation Army!</i></p> 
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Thank you for your support!

TODAY'S SERVICE VOLUNTEERS

Ministers

All God's People

Pastor Jenny Lee

Central -Grantsburg

Pianist

Toni Koons

Liturgist

Volunteer Needed

Acolyte(s)

Willow Nyland

Counter

Volunteer Needed

Cleaning

Sandra Erickson & Charlie Glonek

Snow Removal

Volunteer Needed

Atlas

Pianist

Sharon Asp

Liturgist

Colleen Adams-Schween

Usher

Sue Olson

Cleaning

Volunteer Needed

Sunday School

(No Sunday School)

St. Croix Falls

Pianist

Sharon Asp

Liturgist

Kathy Gionis

Usher(s)

Lynn Hanson

Money Counter

Peter Gionis

Bell Ringer

Karen Sciacca

Flowers

Karen Sciacca



Breakthrough Prayers:

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

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 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: First Sunday After Christmas Day
God bless you!

Worship Service Schedule

12/31: 9:00 am Grantsburg with Zoom
10:00 am Atlas (No Sunday School)
11:15 am St. Croix Falls

1/1: New Year's Day
1/3: 5:30-8:00 pm Junior Youth Gathering
1/7: Blessing Service-all leadership shall be presented!

**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

Josie Grimes

1/1



Next Sunday (January 7th)

“Blessing Service”-all leadership shall be presented!

VOLUNTEERS

Central -Grantsburg

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

Atlas

Pianist	Sharon Asp
Liturgist	Sue Olson
Usher	Cheryl Olson
Cleaning	<i>Volunteer Needed</i>
Sunday School	Colleen Adams-Schween
Communion	Sue Olson

St. Croix Falls

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

Upcoming Events-Mark Your Calendar

1/1	Happy New Year
1/7	New Year-Blessing Service
1/10	UMW/Senior Youth Gathering
1/13	UMM Gathering
1/12	Youth Family Worship & Game Night
1/14	SCF Fellowship Meal / Atlas Fellowship Week



December 31st, 2023
Luke 2:22-40

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



“Christmas Community”

I want to start with something funny I found on an internet site. A Sunday school teacher of preschoolers was concerned that his students might be a little confused about Jesus Christ because of the Christmas season emphasis on His birth. He wanted to make sure they understood that the birth of Jesus occurred a long time ago, that he grew up, etc. So he asked his class, “Where is Jesus today?” Johnny raised his hand and said, “He is in heaven.” Mary was called on and answered, “He’s in my heart.” And Robert, waving his hand furiously, blurted out, “I know! I know! He’s in our bathroom!!” The whole class got very quiet, looked at the teacher, and waited for a response. The teacher was completely at a loss for a few seconds. He finally gathered his wits and asked Robert how he knew this. And Robert said, “Well, every morning my father gets up, bangs on the bathroom door, and yells “Jesus Christ, are you still in there?!”

We had a fantastic Christmas season. We decorated the churches beautifully, and lit the colorful lights at the church, our homes and on the streets. We waited for Christmas and then celebrated Baby Jesus’ birth with our Christmas Program. Perhaps some of you had a new experience being a part of the Christmas Eve service. I appreciate all our Sunday school and youth teachers, who made these Christmas program happen, and all of you who willingly joined in on the participatory dramatic theater at the Christmas Eve service. So, now, where is Jesus, who came to us as a baby with fancy decorations and colorful lights? I wonder if perhaps we may have put Jesus in the box with all the old Christmas decorations.

Let’s think of Christmas: Why we celebrate Christmas day. The word “Christmas” is a compound word made up of two words, “Christ” and “Mass.” In other words, “Christmas” means that “worship Christ.” Therefore, there should be a confession that we worship Christ in celebrating Christmas Day. We, who celebrated and worshiped Christ during the Christmas season are a “Christmas community.” In other words, we are a community worshipping Jesus Christ. You perhaps, have heard that we are a faith community. Yes, we are. But in more detail, we are a Christmas Community, rather than a faith community because we may name other religious communities a faith community as well. We, Christians, are a unique community, worshipping Jesus Christ. You know, the word “Christian” also comes from people who follow “Christ.”

The first Christmas Community had, as we know very well, three Wise Men, shepherds, and angels. According to the Gospel of Matthew, the three Wisemen (Magi) came from the east. The scholars say, “They must be rich and intelligent.” The reason they thought this was that they had traveled from the east, which was far from Jerusalem, and spent their time, energy, money, and passion to see baby Jesus, the Messiah. And, they must have been foreigners in Israel. On the other hand, the scholars say that the shepherds were the poorest of the poor, uneducated people at that time and native Israelites. They, whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated, foreigner or native to the region, they came to baby Jesus through the guidance of angels or stars, having one goal, which was worshipping Jesus Christ. Even though they were very different, they had the same goal (vision) for their journey. The same goal to worship Jesus Christ led them to a Christmas Community. They gathered at a barn in Bethlehem, Israel, and worshiped Christ with the hope of seeing the Messiah, who brings a better world.

Then, the second Christmas Community is in today’s scripture. Mary and Joseph brought Baby Jesus to the Temple by the Law of Moses. During the exodus journey from Egypt, experiencing the firstborn son’s death, which was the last disaster out of ten, Israelites believed every firstborn belonged to God. Since that time, they brought their firstborn to the Temple and gave God the sacrifice of their firstborn required by Law. Jesus

was born into a Jewish family, which kept the Law of Moses, and he was blessed at the Temple by the Law. At that time, we found the second Christmas Community, who were Simeon and Anna. Simeon was an old man in Jerusalem, who was waiting for Israel's consolation from the colony of Rome. He received an answer to his prayers that he might see the Messiah before he died, and He would release them from their oppression and suffering. He came to the Temple by the Holy Spirit and worshiped Baby Jesus Christ. He praises the Lord, "I see the Messiah as you have promised." The other is Anna. We may assume she was an old lady, perhaps over one hundred years old because she had been married for seven years, and had been a widow for eighty-four years. She stayed at the Temple while fasting and praying. She was a female prophet. The second community that worshiped Jesus Christ had Simeon and Anna, who were male and female, and were righteous and holy. Their same goal was to wait for the Messiah, praying throughout their whole life.

Now, think about all of us! Who are you? Why are you here? We are also very different, varying in ages, cultural backgrounds, family histories, faith journey stages, education, and faith experiences. Why are we here at the same church? For what reason? Yes, we are here to worship Christ. Even though we are full of diversity like the first and second Christmas Communities, we have the same goal which is to worship God and follow Jesus Christ. We are here because we are a Christmas Community.

I went to the Korean Clergy and family retreat at Wisconsin Dells last week. At the retreat, we had several speakers who gave lectures. One of them, I would like to share with you. A-Hyun Lee, a professor of Garrett Evangelical-Theological Seminary, gave a lecture, entitled "Leading Together: Nurturing Communal Care by Unleashing "Group Dynamics" in Cross-Racial and Cross-Cultural Ministry." According to her, every group has cross-racial or cross-cultural dynamics, whether we recognize it or not, in appearance. Then, every group has stages of forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Listening to her lecture, I imagined our parish ministry and where our parish ministry is. I want you to think about where we are in our ministry.

I was appointed to this parish in 2019. I felt our parish was grieving for the two former pastors. I respected the time you needed to grieve your former pastors, although it delayed forming/reforming our ministry, it was important. Then, the Pandemic hit, and of course, it affected our parish ministry. Before we reached the forming/reforming stage, we had a storming stage in our ministry, losing members, and shutting our doors. However, the storming stage led us to the reforming stage. Through the Pandemic, we made a bandage for the three churches, which is reforming as a parish ministry, worshipping together via Zoom and at outdoor services, then we reaffirmed that we are one parish. The new norm, as one parish, led us to supporting one another. We came together to support Atlas church and the Vacation Bible School (VBS) program. You all did an excellent job working together!

Now, what are we going to do? Is it enough? According to Professor Lee, after performing, it goes toward adjourning or moving forward depending on our vision. If we develop the same vision or goal as the first and second Christmas Community, we may move it forward. Otherwise, it is time to adjourn our ministry. What do you want to happen? It is your choice.

Let's keep the Christmas Spirit, which is excitement, expectation, hope, visioning, passion, and brightness always, and move forward together, expecting what is next for our ministry, and expecting God to lead us. Thanks be to God. Amen!