

**CHRISTMAS
2022**

CHURCH @ HOME

**staying connected with God,
each other, and ourselves**

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red deer lake
united church

Merry Christmas, friends!

As Christmas arrives, here's my hope and prayer for you.

I hope you don't just celebrate it. I hope you behold it. Which is to say, I hope you experience it.

Cause the thing is, Christmas isn't simply celebrating something that happened a long time ago. It's celebrating something that happens. It's the celebration of a truth and a reality that we get to experience right here and right now: God is here, with us and for us.

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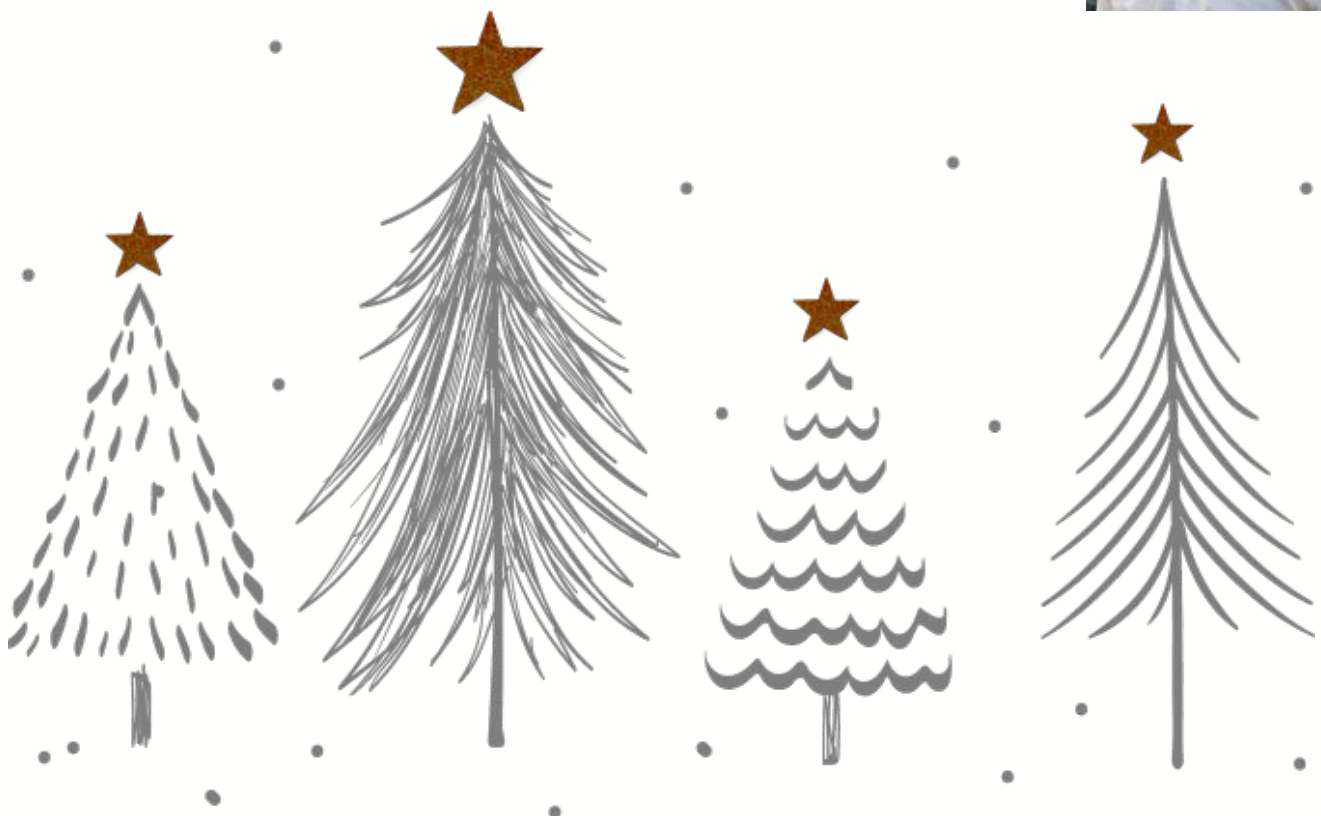
This is why we talk about things like hope, peace, joy, and love during Advent. Those are the things that come flooding into our lives every time we experience that news. This is why we make such a big deal out of it: it literally has the power to change our lives and our world.

The question is, will you let it? Will you say “yes” to getting caught up in the wonder and awe of it all and let that pull you into something new?

My hope and prayer is that you will find in these pages the courage and community to say “yes” and that you will, even if its just a teeny tiny bit, be abducted by the wonder and experience how God is with us because Christ has been born.

Know you are loved and may grace, and peace be with you,

n.



Christmas Blessings One and All, Dearest Friends!

This year is the very first Christmas with our new grandson and my toes curl with excitement at how special that feels in my heart. New life is born! I am also very aware that some of you face challenges of varying kinds, whether it be of the death of a Loved One, deteriorating health, loneliness or, like many of us, we feel troubled, unsettled and uncertain by our chaotic world. We can experience both kinds of feelings at the same time, can't we! That is why the Christmas season and the gift of Jesus, the birth of this sacred baby, a renewed radiance in the world brings such amazing hope and promise to each of us. It restores our sense of balance, comfort and security once again.

Let us immerse ourselves in this mystery, wonder and hope to elevate our hearts,



My deepest love and gratitude to all those who have offered their time, gifts, and hearts, in order to bring love and caring into your homes this past year. Please don't hesitate to let us know if you need some support to get through this Christmas Season, to make it a little bit more special for you.

As there will be no magazine or care package in January, we will resume once again in February.

Wishing you a Very Merry Christmas filled with Infinite Radiance and wonder, and a New Year blessed with hope, renewal, and love,





A Christmas Blessing

May the Angels in their beauty bless you.
May they turn toward you streams of blessing.
May the Angel of Awakening stir your heart
To come alive to the eternal within you,
To all the invitations that quietly surround you.
May the Angel of Healing turn your wounds
Into sources of refreshment.
May the Angel of the Imagination enable you
To stand on the true thresholds,
At ease with your ambivalence
And drawn in new direction
Through the glow of your contradictions.

May the Angel of Compassion open your eyes
To the unseen suffering around you.
May the Angel of Wildness disturb the places
Where your life is domesticated and safe,
Take you to the territories of true otherness
Where all that is awkward in you
Can fall into its own rhythm.
May the Angel of Eros introduce you
To the beauty of your senses
To celebrate your inheritance





As a temple of the holy spirit.
May the Angel of Justice disturb you
To take the side of the poor and the wronged.
May the Angel of Encouragement confirm you
In worth and self-respect,
That you may live with the dignity
That presides in your soul.
May the Angel of Death arrive only
When your life is complete
And you have brought every given gift
To the threshold where its infinity can shine.
May all the Angels be your sheltering
and joyful guardians.

by John O'Donohue



CHRISTMAS EVE - A SERMON BY REV. NICK

So, the other week I took our dogs to the dog park and a bunch of us were hanging out as our dogs played and somehow, we ended up talking about the strangest Christmas presents we ever received.

Like not bad presents, but weird presents.

Presents that make you check the label to make sure you opened the right one.

Know what I mean?

Yeah, we were talking about those kinds of presents.

One of the people there, a vegan, talked about how they once got an Everything Meat Cookbook.

Another said how they got a set of those decorative spoons from places she'd never ever been before.

Someone else said they once got a kids' car seat ... despite the fact they don't have kids.

And get this,
and this is the best part,
every one of those presents was from their parents.

And we were laughing about these and then someone said,
"I mean, I'm not even sure what Christmas even means anymore."

Now I half expected the universe to be all Debbie Downer and go "WOOOOW WOOOO"

but instead of it being a conversation killer,
it actually got us talking even more.

Everyone sharing stories about what Christmas means to them,
a lot like what we heard people doing earlier.

But instead of it being a conversation killer,
it actually got us talking even more.

everyone sharing stories about what Christmas means to them,
a lot like what we heard people doing earlier.

As I headed home that night,

I was thinking about all those answers and remembered this story someone
once told me.

It's a story about this veterinarian who was at church on Christmas Eve when
he got a call from a farmer who had a cow who was having trouble giving
birth.

Knowing it must be serious to force a call on Christmas Eve the vet
snuck out of the church and headed to the farm.

By the time he knocked on that farmer's door,
he could tell by the look on her face that he might be too late.

The cow,
he discovered,
was having a breeched birth,
which means the calf was coming out butt first instead of headfirst,
and the mother,
exhausted and in a pretty bad way herself,
seemed like she was giving up.

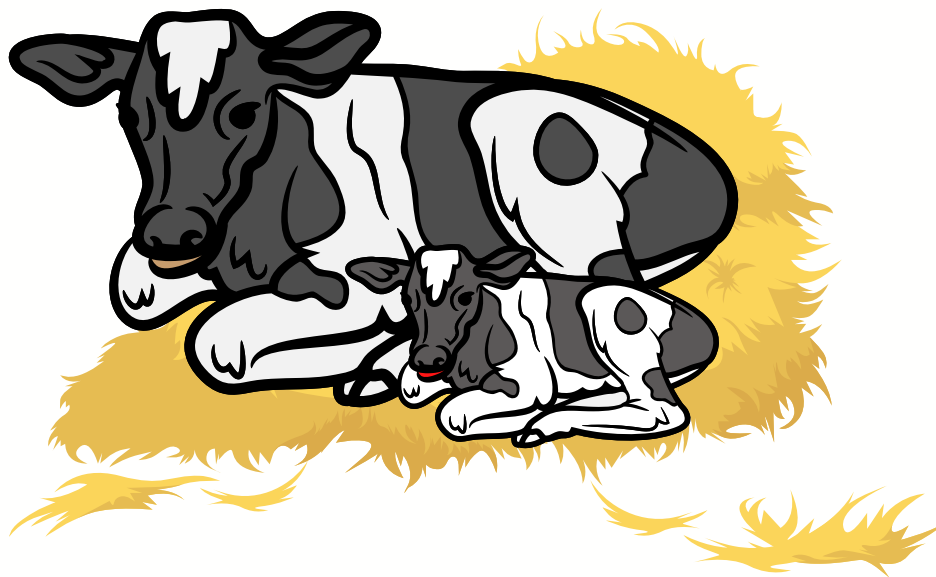
But the vet,
having come all that way and definitely not wanting to go back to church
went to work.

Now here's the thing about delivering cows,
as you would discover if you ever chose,
unwisely,
to YouTube it: its messy, loud, and sweaty work.

After three hard hours of working with the cow,
the vet was finally able to birth the baby ...
but as he laid the calf down on the straw,
he could tell the calf wasn't breathing,
he was scared he didn't work fast enough,
and that the calf was going to die,
but then,
just as he was about to collapse in defeat,
the mother nuzzled the baby,
and he began to breath,
eventually getting up to his feet,
alive and well.

Talking about the night later,
both the vet and the farmer would say that in that moment
everything in the room changed.
They'd say it was then that the barn,
once full of chaos, fear, and anxiety
was suddenly full of peace,
light,
hope,
and life.

//



Now I didn't really know why I was thinking about that story when I left the park that night.

But as I think about it now,

it's gotta be because

to really get at what Christmas means,

to get at why it all matters,

to get why we celebrate it,

we need stories like that one just as much as we need that one about that very first Christmas.

We need that first story ...

that story about how God, out of love,

came into our lives and world in the

most beautiful of ways,

giving us this new way to be human and to show us a new kind of world is possible.

And we need that second story ...

that vet's story,

our own stories,

these stories of people experiencing light and life breaking in through death and darkness.

And we need to hear both because it's there,

it's there we discover that Christmas didn't just happen,

but Christmas happens.

It's there we discover that if Christmas is about anything,

it's not about singing the carols,

it's not about the decorations and lights,

it's not about the gifts and celebrations,

it's not even just about Jesus' birth ...

it's about something that transcends and includes all of that:

It's about a liberating,
powerful,
and every-thing changing truth.

It's about the truth that our church steeples shouldn't be pointing up to the
heavens,

but should be bent down towards the earth,

because it's here,

it's here,

it's here

it's here we can find God,

reordering the world so that everyone has enough,

and everyone has a place,

renaming everything and everyone that's ever been called 'good for nothing,'

'unwanted' and 'crap' as 'beautiful, needed, and good,'

and repairing everything with extravagant and indiscriminate love.

//

That's what Christmas is about.

It's the celebration that God is here,

with us and for us,

and we can have hope for a new life and a new world.

And because Christmas is that, Christmas is an invitation ...

Its the invitation to say 'yes'

to get in on what God is doing in this world,

to let the light shine on you and through you,

and to let it change everything -

showing us a new way to be human and alive in the world,

a way where everything and everyone is seen as holy,

where we do what we can to defy and resist violence and injustice,

and create a world that hums with reverence,

a world where everyone has enough,

and everyone has a place.

Yeah ... That's what we do with Christmas.
That's what we do with the holiness of this night.

So, if I can encourage you to do anything tonight ...

It'd be to take a moment to feel the holiness of it all,
and to know that Christ is born,
and that God,
that Spirit and Divine Mystery,
isn't up there,
far away,
distant,
and detached,
but is here,
is here,
with us and for us,
repairing,
renaming,
and restoring everything and everyone.



So, my friends ...

having felt it all,
may we have the courage to say "yes"
may we step into the light that is shining,
may it shine in us and through us
and may we join in that work of repairing and restoring the universe
knowing that new lives and a new world **IS** possible
because Christ is born,
and God is here.

Grieving Through the Christmas Season!

When someone you love has died, the holidays and times of special celebration and remembrance can be so painful.

The heart of the season can feel torn apart. Without love, what is life?

Without the people we love what are the special moments?

We can feel distanced from the celebrations going on around us.

- Take the time to honour your thoughts and feelings this Christmas. Remember, there is no one way to grieve or to celebrate.
- As it's a tender time, pace yourself and do whatever feels comfortable and meaningful for you. This may mean talking to your loved ones about doing something different this Christmas. Remember too that grief can be exhausting so give yourself permission to rest when needed.
- Due to the current amount of illness around in this winter season, you may be feeling continued isolation. Ensure that you have a plan made beforehand to connect with friends and family in whatever way you can to do so safely. Pick up the phone if you need to hear a supportive voice.
- Surround yourself with those who are supportive and include your Loved One in your conversations.
- Try to get walks outside and give yourself permission to take some special time alone if that is what you need.
- Have some rituals built into your days so you can honour the Loved Ones in your life. That will give your deepest thoughts and feelings a voice and can be very meaningful and healing. For example, when you light candles in your home, you can both honour your Loved One who has died and acknowledge the love you shared together.



Wishing you comfort and peace for the Christmas Season.

We are here for you so please reach out,

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

God

On this holiest of nights,
we're here celebrating Christmas,
this beautiful,
powerful,
liberating
and everything changing truth that proclaims you are with us.

You are with us.
We are not alone.
You are here.

As we head into our prayer time,
let us feel that presence,
that witness and forness,
cause God ... we need it.

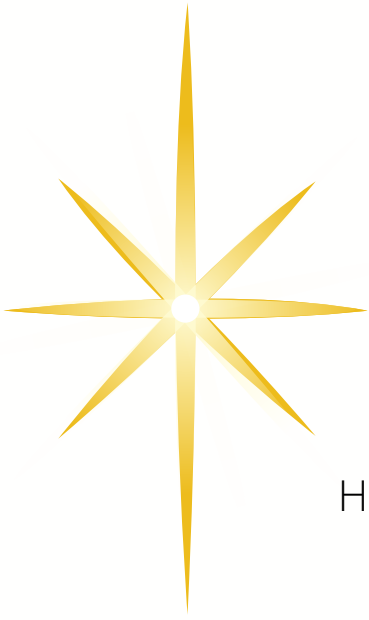
This has been a year!

This has been a year full of anxiety and fear,
of violence and division,
of racism and hate,
of small hearts and small imaginations,
and of exhaustion, grief, and loneliness.

There is so much - too much - that shouldn't be happening.

**We take a second now to name it all and
let out all our laments,
saying
"God hear our prayers ..."**

Spirit,
May you hear these prayers because we need you here.
In us and around us.



Comforting
Liberating
Connecting
Restoring
Repairing
Reconciling.

Help us to trust that Christmas is happening,
that you are here,
with us and for us,
bringing us together and making all things new.

But even with ALL that going on,
we know there is still room for joy.
there's always room for joy.

We take some time now to shout out our joys,
to resist the despair and lean into the truth of Christmas
by naming how life is still good and how love is still winning ...

We name all the front line and essential workers,
all those who have shown us what the best parts of our humanity look like.

We name the all the people who created the vaccines,
those people who have wowed us with their ingenuity and brilliance.

We name the random texts and phone calls,
all the ways we have been able to stay connected and be in touch.

We name the people who have stood up for justice and peace,
the people who have invited us to learn, grow, and do better.

We name the too many take out pizzas we eaten and shows we've binged,
and all those small forms of comfort we were able to find.

**For all the moments of joy we've had,
the big ones and the small ones
we take a second to shout them out now,
saying "God hear our prayers ..."**

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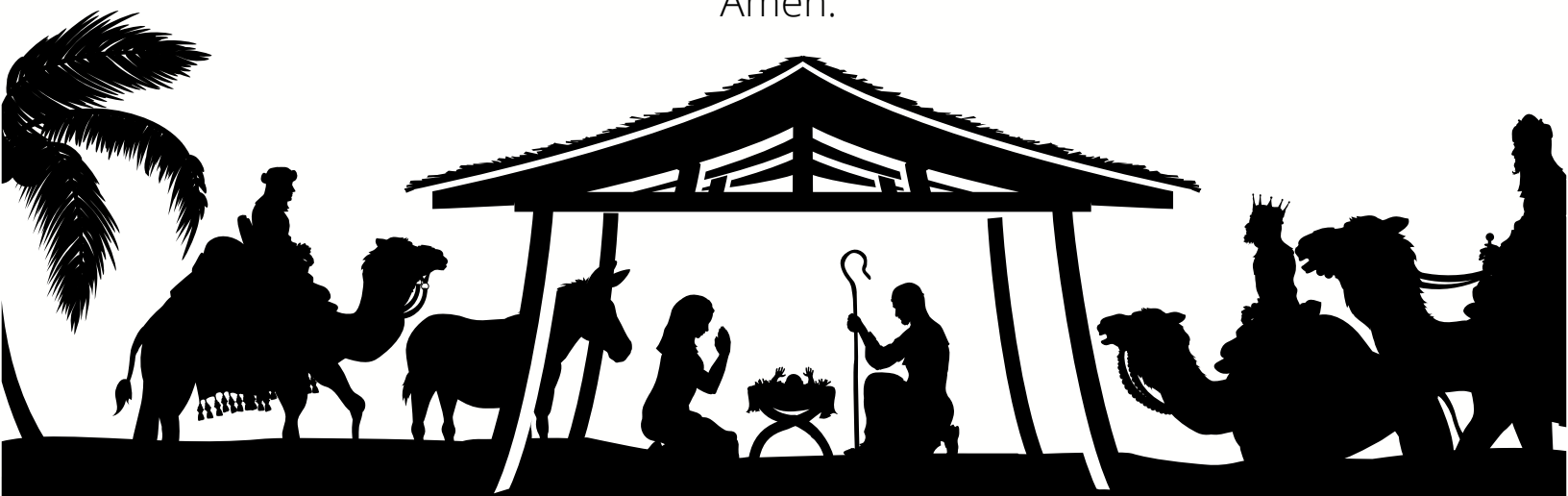
So, God
as we celebrate Christmas and remember its truth and meaning,
may we remember we don't just leave it all here,
but we take it with us, letting it change everything,
including ourselves,
especially ourselves,
from the inside out.

Help us be changed.
Help us be better.

Help us be the people Jesus will show us to how to be:
people of extravagant and indiscriminate love,
people who shine like stars,
transformed people who transform the world.

We ask this in the liberating and beautiful name
of the Christ born today, by saying together ...

Amen.





Saying Merry Christmas 27 Different Ways

How many can you match?

- | | | |
|--|-------|--------------|
| 1. عيد ميلاد مَجِيد | _____ | Greek |
| 2. Veselé Vánoce | _____ | Italian |
| 3. Glædelig Jul | _____ | Farsi |
| 4. Vrolijk Kerstfeest | _____ | Dutch |
| 5. Zalak Vitteya Ajjalani Neaka | _____ | Portuguese |
| 6. کریسمس شُما مُبَارَك باشَد | _____ | Mandarin |
| 7. Hyvää Joulua | _____ | Czech |
| 8. Joyeux Noël | _____ | Irish |
| 9. Fröhliche Weihnachten | _____ | Korean |
| 10. Καλά Χριστούγεννα | _____ | Finnish |
| 11. Mele Kalikimaka | _____ | Danish |
| 12. Nollaig Shona Duit | _____ | Ukrainian |
| 13. Buon Natale | _____ | Arabic |
| 14. メリークリスマス | _____ | Spanish |
| 15. Qismas Botivjaj | _____ | Swiss German |
| 16. 메리 크리스마스 | _____ | Japanese |
| 17. 圣诞节快乐 | _____ | Dothraki |
| 18. God Jul | _____ | Russian |
| 19. Niibaa' Anami'egiizhigad & Aabita Biboon | _____ | Thai |
| 20. Feliz Natal | _____ | German |
| 21. С Рождеством | _____ | French |
| 22. Feliz Navidad | _____ | Hawaiian |
| 23. Schöni Wiehnachte | _____ | Tagalon |
| 24. Maligayang Pasko | _____ | Klingon |
| 25. Čestit Božić | _____ | Ojibwe |
| 26. Веселого Різдва | _____ | Norwegian |
| 27. สุขสันต์วันคริสต์มาส | _____ | Croatian |



answers on last page

A Christmas Blessing

May there be harmony in all your relationships. May sharp words, envious thoughts, and hostile feelings be dissolved.

May you give and receive love generously. May this love echo in your heart like the joy of church bells on a clear December day.

May each person who comes into your life be greeted as another Christ. May the honor given the Babe of Bethlehem be that which you extend to every guest who enters your presence.

May the hope of this sacred season settle in your soul. May it be a foundation of courage for you when times of distress occupy your inner land.

May the wonder and awe that fills the eyes of children be awakened within you. May it lead you to renewed awareness and appreciation of whatever you too easily take for granted.

May the bonds of love for one another be strengthened as you gather with your family and friends around the table of festivity and nourishment.

May you daily open the gift of your life and be grateful for the hidden treasures it contains.

May the coming year be one of good health for you. May you have energy and vitality. May you care well for your body, mind, and spirit.

May you keep an eye on the Star within you and trust this Luminescent Presence to guide and direct you each day.

May you go often to the Bethlehem of your heart and visit the One who offers you peace. May you bring this peace into our world.

-Joyce Rupp

FEATURING OUR GREATEST STRENGTH — OUR RDLUC PEOPLE

This series of monthly articles will profile—with their permission, of course—one of the individuals, couples, or families that make our church the unique and special place it is. Who is 'important' enough to be featured here? Everyone! This month, we get to know **Ravi and Darlene Abraham**.

The amalgamation of our church with Midlands in 2008 brought many fine people into our midst, including this great couple who exemplify what Christianity is all about. To know Darlene and Ravi is to witness daily quiet dedication to a life of introspective spirituality."



"Driving to church is a spiritual experience in itself," says

Darlene. "Worship is central to both our lives and RDLUC has such a beautiful country setting that we feel worshipful even before we arrive there." Shortly after coming to our church, Darlene was introduced (at a session presented by an attender at the time) to qigong, the system of coordinated body posture, movement and breathing used to enhance general health and spirituality. She fell in love with the practice and became an instructor in 2012. For a time, she held weekly indoor classes at church, then moved to an outside summer venue once COVID hit. Last summer her sessions—offered at no cost but by voluntary donation, which goes to support our Congregational Care program—had eleven to fifteen regular enrollees. Among them, Darlene laughs affectionately, was Ravi, who unfailingly showed up to help his dear wife with setup and takedown.

FEATURING OUR GREATEST STRENGTH . . . continued

— OUR RDLUC PEOPLE

Their participation doesn't end there. Holder of the office of church trustee for the past three years, Ravi has treated all of us, at times, to special music in the form of his lovely bass solo voice, raised to God's glory. Many of us have also seen them both pick up packages of food and church literature to deliver to shut-ins and those living alone (part of the Congregational Care program started during COVID). And some of us benefit regularly from Darlene's behind-the-scenes organizational skills at scheduling those who 'man' our weekly prayer stations during services.

Could this busy couple possibly do anything more to enrich our church? The answer is yes! They have helped in the kitchen for some of the 'On the Edge' concerts we host. And Darlene is part of a fourteen-member Healing Team that meets in person once a month and gathers remotely every Monday morning at ten a.m. to submit names of individuals who have asked for prayer and/or distance healing. "All of us pray for the folks on our own lists and for those on the general list," she explains. "it's a time of peace and of powerful energy. I find it very moving."

Also very moving, Ravi and Darlene, is your outstanding devotion to the enhancement of our church family's life. We love you both very much for who you are and for all you do!



Our thanks to Fran Porter for writing this submission



Our thanks to Nancy Bullock and Bob Griffin who have very generously created for RDLUC 250 Christmas stockings and angels. Bob and Nancy live in Diamond Valley and are known for their beautiful Christmas displays. They also donate many cookies and other craft items, such as wreaths and wooden ornaments. They say they enjoy the wonder and excitement of the Christmas season and wish to share it with others. Thank you for your very special contributions, Nancy and Bob!



YOUR SMILE FOR THE DAY



How many letters are in the Christmas alphabet?

25 — there's noel.



What does the month of December have that no other month does?

The letter "D."



What do you call a snowman who likes to take tropical vacations?

A puddle.



What type of key do you need to put on a Nativity play?

A don-key.



How did Mary and Joseph know Jesus' weight when he was born?

They had a weigh in a manger.



Why is it always so cold around Christmas time?

Because it's Decembrrrr.



What do snowmen do on the weekends?

Chill!



What falls in the winter but never gets hurt?

Snow.



How do snowmen lose weight?

They wait for the weather to get warmer.



What's a dog's favourite Christmas song?

Bark, the Herald Angels Sing.



During which winter month do people sleep the least?

February



What can you catch in the winter with your eyes closed?

A cold.



What is a lamb's favourite Christmas carol?

Have Yourself a Mary Little Christmas.





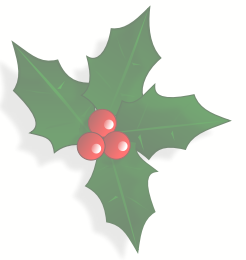
New Year's Prayer

Faithful Companion,
in this New Year I pray:
to live deeply, with purpose,
to live freely, with detachment,
to live wisely, with humility,
to live justly, with compassion
to live lovingly, with fidelity,
to live mindfully, with awareness,
to live gratefully, with generosity,
to live fully, with enthusiasm.
Help me to hold this vision
and to daily renew it in my heart,
becoming ever more one with you,
my truest Self.
Amen.

-Joyce Rupp

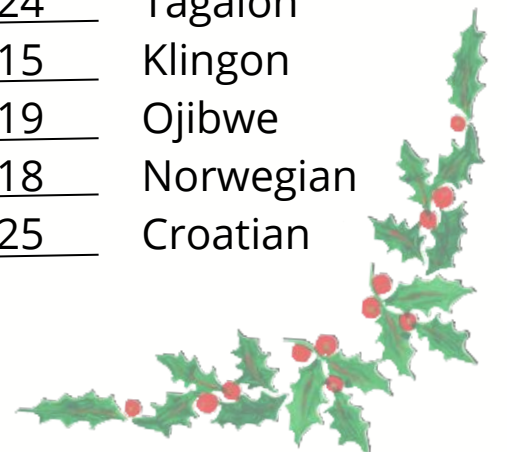
Saying Merry Christmas 27 Different Ways

Answers



1. عيد ميلاد مَجِيد	<u>10</u>	Greek
2. Veselé Vánoce	<u>13</u>	Italian
3. Glædelig Jul	<u>6</u>	Farsi
4. Vrolijk Kerstfeest	<u>4</u>	Dutch
5. Zalak Vitteya Ajjalani Neaka	<u>20</u>	Portuguese
6. کریسمس شُما مُبَارَك باشَد	<u>17</u>	Mandarin
7. Hyvää Joulua	<u>2</u>	Czech
8. Joyeux Noël	<u>12</u>	Irish
9. Fröhliche Weihnachten	<u>16</u>	Korean
10. Καλά Χριστούγεννα	<u>7</u>	Finnish
11. Mele Kalikimaka	<u>3</u>	Danish
12. Nollaig Shona Duit	<u>26</u>	Ukrainian
13. Buon Natale	<u>1</u>	Arabic
14. メリークリスマス	<u>22</u>	Spanish
15. Qismas Botivjaj	<u>23</u>	Swiss German
16. 메리 크리스마스	<u>14</u>	Japanese
17. 圣诞节快乐	<u>5</u>	Dothraki
18. God Jul	<u>21</u>	Russian
19. Niibaa' Anami'egiizhigad & Aabita Biboon	<u>27</u>	Thai
20. Feliz Natal	<u>9</u>	German
21. С Рождеством	<u>8</u>	French
22. Feliz Navidad	<u>11</u>	Hawaiian
23. Schöni Wiehnachte	<u>24</u>	Tagalon
24. Maligayang Pasko	<u>15</u>	Klingon
25. Čestit Božić	<u>19</u>	Ojibwe
26. Веселого Різдва	<u>18</u>	Norwegian
27. สุขสันต์วันคริสต์มาส	<u>25</u>	Croatian

How many did you get?



WE ARE RED DEER LAKE UNITED CHURCH



We are an inclusive and affirming community of faith – people of all ages, perspectives, and stories, who gather to connect with God, each other, and ourselves, and find in Jesus a new way of being human and alive in the world.

**you're welcome, wanted,
and accepted. join us on
the journey.**

Red Deer Lake United Church

96187 Spruce Meadows Green SW
Foothills, AB T1S 2R9

e: office@reddeerlakeuc.com

p: 403-256-3181

w: reddeerlakeuc.com

 red deer lake united church

 reddeerlakeuc

our staff & ministry team:

minister

Rev. Nick Coates

nick@reddeerlakeuc.com

congregational care counsellor

Vi Sharpe

ccare@reddeerlakeuc.com

children's ministry coordinator

kids@reddeerlakeuc.com

administrative manager

Angie Johnston

office@reddeerlakeuc.com

communications administrator

Charlee Mac

info@reddeerlakeuc.com

custodian

Bill Holman

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS:

Monday - Thursday

9am - 3pm

Do you have a story to share? A memory? A poem? A photograph? We would love to publish it in the next issue of this magazine.

Please call us at **(403) 256-3181** or send your submission to **info@reddeerlakeuc.com**

**The next submission deadline is
Jan 15, 2023.**