

Below are the links (Facebook & YouTube) for the video of the Dec. 27th, 2020 pre-recorded service:

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

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCneF9IOARvh5R30Fzm-1ySA?view_as=subscriber

What Time is it for West Flamboro? Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 December 27, 2020

In Roman mythology Janus was the god of the gates and doors. And here we are at a gateway, one which opens up for us a new year of possibilities and challenges. It is also a gateway that points back. As we stand at the gateway to a new year, we are challenged to reflect on the year that has past as well as to envision the one that beckons us into our future.

The god Janus was thought to represent beginnings. This belief comes from the idea that one must emerge through a gate or door before entering a new place. As the god of beginnings, Janus also lent his name to the first month of the year. The god Janus has a distinctive appearance in art, as he is often depicted with two faces looking in opposite directions, back and forward. Some sources claim that the reason Janus was represented in this peculiar fashion was due to the notion that doors and gates look in two directions. In this way, one of the god's faces could look forward, while the other looked backward.

As I look back with you at 2020, I think most of us would confess that this has been one of the most difficult, challenging years we have ever experienced. The covid19 pandemic has changed our lives in so many ways. Many of you have suffered so much it is difficult to put the year in perspective. With family members in long term care facilities, in nursing homes and perhaps simply out of the region, we have been separated in ways never imagined. This Christmas we were unable to gather together with family and friends. Dinner tables were smaller and quieter. For six months in 2020 we have not been able to meet together in worship at West Flamboro Church. From mid-March through mid-September, I recorded my sermons and

prayers from my dining room table through my phone. Once again in mid-December I am forced to record the service through my phone. Now, at least, with Rachel or Sandra providing the music, we can record from the church sanctuary. It has been challenging for myself and for the Session to adjust to this new reality.

But on the other hand, it has also been a year in which I have had to learn new communication skills by offering bible study through Zoom. This has been a welcome blessing for myself and I believe for the participants. We have completed two courses this year: one on Revelation and another on Philippians. In 2021 we will continue this Zoom study format so that we can continue to grow in our faith and keep in touch with each other at a personal and community level. So yes, 2020 has been challenging, but it has also allowed us the room to reflect on our life together in creative and new ways. So here are some of the ways I am thankful for this past year of challenge:

people growing in faith; new families who joined our community; seekers and members who found new inspiration through the Alpha program; renovation projects completed that will enhance our fellowship and mission; the willingness of so many in our church to work together even when options have been limited for meeting; meeting our financial challenge when unable to meet on Sunday's

What time is it for West Flamboro Presbyterian Church? Ecclesiastes asks us to consider the time. There is a time for everything. What time is it at West Flamboro? What time is it in your life? For everything there is a season, both for the church and for us as individuals. Where are you today as you stand on the edge of a new year? What is your vision for this community of faith?

As we look into 2021 my sense is that we are all kinds of possibilities for us in this new year. Our search team have met over the past few months and have produced a very helpful profile that represents us well. My sense is that there is excitement here; I can feel your anticipation. I have been ministering here at West Flamboro for two and a half years and have learned to appreciate your depth of faith and your love for one another. I can sense the potential in this

community of faith; I can visualize life bubbling up from within and the Spirit bringing life and hope within reach.

The faith into which we are rooted is one of resurrection and hope. I believe that God will continue to lead and inspire you to overcome whatever seems to be the blocks to our growth and spiritual vitality. I am more and more convinced that Christian education in the form of small group studies and prayer and keys to your future growth and strength as a community of faith.

Our Gospel is very clear today what we ought to be about. Jesus continues to call each one of us down the way of the cross. He continues to challenge us to live out the sermon on the mount ethic: love for neighbour and self. Certainly, what we believe is important, but equally important is our life together as the light of the world. My sense of you here is that you take seriously the call to be on the side of justice and generosity to the other. The church has been a force for good in society throughout its history. Oh, yes, I know, it has also had a dark side and one that we dare not neglect. But today with all of you I want us to celebrate its compassionate side which has produced the hospitals, the educational institutions, the shelters for the poor and broken, the unloved and forgotten in society, and the many expressions of its love and empathy for the needy.

In addition to building up this body of Christ and growing a community of faith we need to make a real part of our vision the ministry of compassion both to those in this community around us in 2021, but also around the world. Through PWS&D and Presbyterian Sharing we can continue to reach out in mission to the needs of the world.

I read a book **In Search of the Unchurched**. One of the things emphasized in this study is the difficulty for people to enter a church for the first time, especially on their own. Imagine for a moment what it would be like to come into this our sanctuary for the first time. You see a fairly big building with several entry points that don't necessarily scream *welcome*. You go around the building, your tension is rising, and discover what might be the front doors. Then you step inside not knowing anyone or even what might happen once inside. Often these are people who have been hurt deeply by the church and it has taken a great deal of effort for them to re-connect. Once inside they find that

they don't know the unwritten rules, where the washrooms are, or what happens next as they desperately try to follow the bulletin they have received. It is easy for a church to slip into ways of handling visitors that may seem unwelcoming to the tense visitor. If church is one of the places where people today are going to connect with God and find this child born king of the Jews, we need to be more intentional about making the entry points as user friendly as possible.

It is true, as we have celebrated over this Christmas season, as Isaiah says, that light has come. It is true, as the story of the wise men confirms, that many are seeking. But we as the church of Christ in the world, the people of God, need to be alert to our role in communicating and encouraging seekers to find their way to this child of Mary, Jesus Christ. This ultimately is our reason for existence. As Paul reminded the Christians in Galatia: ***But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.***

We have been given the mission to reach out to people with good news, to promote faith, healing and forgiveness. Born of Mary, raised in the Jewish faith, sent by God: all so that humanity might be brought back into relationship with God. God sent his Son in order that we would be bought back! Ultimately, I believe, this is what the human family is looking for in their searching. Will we at West Flamboro help them in their search? Will they find what their looking for? I believe that Jesus is the doorway into genuine self-discovery, forgiveness and healing. This is the doorway that the church offers. It is the doorway that each of us offers others. And let us be a church that welcomes, nurtures, and encourages reconciliation and hope for the many seekers of the holy that come and who are reached out to by us.

Amen