

To our Zion Family,

This past Sunday during the joyful chaos, we continued our “homework” of finding and sharing hope. I was buoyed up when Debbie Murdock shared that \$880 had been given this year in gift cards for the Angel Tree and that over 70 hats, mittens, and gloves had been collected for Johnson Park Center. Jim Marscher shared gratitude from the Stewardship Committee for the generosity expressed in the current pledges from congregants. Fran Holzberger shared encouraging news of the generosity of the Utica community in donating food for veterans. Dan Rodahan offered stories of the importance of local food banks at this time and shared his hope that this generosity would continue in January-June when donations tend to be down. This will be our last leadership letter before Christmas. There will be no leadership letter for Dec. 21-27, so there are many service announcements included here.

-Announcements and updates:

-Council and the Zion’s Task Force continue to monitor the COVID situation carefully and, like many, are concerned about the rising cases in our county. Although we had originally planned to offer an in-person option on Dec 20th, **we will be offering the Dec 20th service through Zoom, livestream, and service of the word – not in the sanctuary.** This decision was made based on rising positivity rates for COVID tests in Oneida County. The health and safety of our congregation remain our top priority.

-**This Sunday we will continue our remote worship practice**, offering the opportunity to attend the service via Zoom, livestreamed on Facebook, or by using the printed Service of the Word, which you will find later in this mailing.

-To join this Sunday’s service via Zoom, same log-in info as last week:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84354840714?pwd=TDJGTkwvSTBER2lNb1o1Qzd6WGxDdz09> Meeting ID: 843-5484 0714, Password: 022654. Or by PHONE, 6465588656, 84354840714#, 1#, 022654# US (New York)

-If you would prefer to view the service via livestream on our YouTube channel, you can do so by visiting our page at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWzOtbCe2z7-bIPvxp62IA>.

-**Christmas Eve service** will be offered at 8pm on Thursday, December 24th via Zoom and livestreamed, using the same links above. Pastor Janet will be preaching.

-Zion will **NOT** be offering a **service on Dec. 27th**. We have been invited to join Our Saviour for their virtual service that day. Look for a link in your email to join the service. Our next Zion Zoom service will be January 3rd.

-**Sara will be on vacation from Dec. 18-Jan.3.** The office will be closed unless we can find substitutes. Call ahead to make sure someone is in the office if you have church business.

In her wonderful sermon this week, Pastor Janet shared reflections on the three-descriptions of Christmas, that of sparkle, that of starglow, and that of Mary’s Song which captures God’s ongoing love and justice. One of my favorite expressions of Mary’s Song comes from Marty Haugen’s Holden Evening prayer, recorded here in the spirit of our times: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-SFeQsuZPU>. Pastor Janet shared, “Christmas is sparkle and glitter, it is fun and celebration. Christmas is star glow and angel choruses. It is the hush of worship and zooming with friends. But even more, Christmas is the time when Christ comes into our midst to wipe away the tears, to lift up those beaten down by pain and suffering, to call us all to love and serve in his name.” I’ll end this leadership letter with a Christmas song that I’ve been enjoying this season, “When I Think Upon Christmas”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hN9342aVZiY>. Wishing you and yours a joyful Christmas full of sparkle and starglow and Christ’s presence. Merry Christmas!

Peace,

Kristen Burson and Mark Thompson,
Church Council co-presidents



SERVICE OF THE WORD
GATHERING

WELCOME

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whose forgiveness is sure and whose steadfast love endures forever.
Amen.

Together let us honestly and humbly confess that we have not lived as God desires. Loving and forgiving God,
We confess that we are held captive by sin. In spite of our best efforts, we have gone astray. We have not welcomed the stranger; we have not loved our neighbor; we have not been Christ to one another. Restore us, O God. Wake us up and turn us from our sin. Renew us each day in the light of Christ. Amen.

People of God, hear this glad news: by God's endless grace your sins are forgiven, and you are free— free from all that holds you back and free to live in the peaceable realm of God. May you be strengthened in God's love, comforted by Christ's peace, and accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn: *O Come All Ye Faithful vs. 1 & 2 #283* —Kelli Watson

Vs. 1 O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant! O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem; come and behold him, born the king of angels: O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Vs. 2 The highest, most holy, light of light eternal, born of a virgin, a mortal he comes; Son of the Father now in the flesh appearing! O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Prayer of the Day

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH

ADVENT INVOCATION —Wendy Stevens

The revelation of God's love for humankind is seen through the gift of his Son on the first Christmas. We have learned what God is like through the life and teachings of Jesus, and we have discovered the true meaning of love through his death on our behalf.

First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

THE LIGHTING OF THE FOUR ADVENT CANDLES

(light 2 purple candles, then 1 pink candle, then the last purple candle) —Jim & Kim Marscher

Today we relight the Candle of Expectation, reminding us of God's promise to send a Savior, and the Candle of Preparation, remembering John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus, and the Candle of Proclamation, reminding us of the joy that comes from telling others of his coming. Now, as we light the Candle of Revelation, our lives are filled with the greatness of his love, revealed through the coming of the Christ Child.

THE HYMN: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (verse 4) #257*

Oh, come, O Branch of Jesse, free
your own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell your people save,
and give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

Refrain

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.

THE PRAYER

-Wendy Stevens

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, ruler of the universe. In your Son, Emmanuel, you have shown us your light and saved us from the power of sin. Bless us as we light the candles on this wreath. Increase our longing for your presence, that at the celebration of your Son's birth his Spirit might dwell anew in our midst, for he is our light and our salvation. Blessed be God forever. Amen.

Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27

Gospel: Luke 1:26-38

Sermon: Advent 4 -Rev. Jennifer DeWeerth

This morning I want to talk about *where God goes to live*, in hope and promise, and unexpected places. Eventually, since we read the famous Annunciation story, we are going to get to Mary's womb, but we're going to start with 2 Samuel.

Instead of a first reading from Isaiah as we have heard in the previous weeks of Advent, today we read from the second book of Samuel. The reason is pretty obvious-because in the Gospel reading, vs. 32, the angel Gabriel says, "and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David." And our scripture from 2 Samuel is where that *covenant with David* (the fourth covenant of Hebrew scripture after the covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses) is spelled out.

As he scans his new monarchy, having just brought the ark of God to Jerusalem and settling into his own new royal home, David is pleased, but something still bothers him, "I have a place to live but the ark of God is still in a tent..." So he decides to build God a house. His spiritual advisor, Nathan, encourages him at first to fulfill this desire he has to build God a worthy house. But then God comes to the prophet Nathan that very night and tells him to warn David off this plan. God says essentially, "No you're not building me a house; I'm gonna build YOU a house; one of your descendants will forever be king in Jerusalem."

And God actually provides a rationale about why David does not need to build a huge temple. God says, "I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle" and I'm good with it. God does not need a fancy house; God is everywhere, and will not leave God's people. Of course, many years later, this promise appeared to have been broken with the destruction of the southern kingdom, the end of the Davidic reign. But for 500 years, the people of Israel clung to the stubborn hope that God would find a way to keep this promise. And then we get to the angel's announcement to Mary.

But before we get to Mary, I want to linger for a moment more with this passage from 2 Samuel, and what God says in this story, through Nathan. For more than nine months we have not been in the temples we have built for worshiping God. Maybe once, yes, in October, but mostly we have not gathered in that space since last March. That's hard for us, because of our desires, just as it was for David to have to put a pause on his temple plans, but from God's perspective it really is not a big deal. Just as God wandered with the Israelites and remained with them in exile and in tents, maybe we can hear what God is saying to us, something like this:

"My people, I have not been in your church since the day you closed down, but I've been moving about wherever you are, and been with you regardless of that space in that building. Look, Zoom is fine with me, I don't need anything better than that. I'm not too proud to sleep in a tent; I'm not too proud to live in *your* heart. COVID-19 is not stopping me from being with my people. So, what if we're not in the building? I've always been leaving the building anyway. *I've always been on the move. I have always been God with you.*"

Now on to Mary. We can guess that she thought her life would be like this: she would marry, which was the most important thing for a young woman, really a girl, of her time and place. She would become pregnant, she hoped, and bear children. Pregnancy was both the most dangerous thing that could happen to a woman because of the high rate of death associated with childbirth, and at the same time, it was the primary purpose of a woman's life, of a marriage, of a people in society-to procreate.

That was the plan. But then the angel Gabriel shows up. Imagine the disruption of her life and how this message sounds to Mary... *a strange presence and an insistent voice disrupting the plans for a life*. Do we know anything like this sense of disruption in our plans? I'm not saying that a pandemic is like a visit from a present-day angel Gabriel, but it has certainly been a shock that has disrupted our lives and mystified us and made us struggle to find meaning that used to be found not only in our plans, but in our daily routines. As we have struggled with the danger and the loss, at the same time, we have lived in hope.

My favorite pandemic expert, science and health reporter, Donald G. McNeil, was interviewed on a podcast earlier this week about the new vaccine. The interviewer reviewed the data about the escalating positive cases, the increase in hospitalizations, and the rapidly rising death toll. He noted that we are entering an interim time in which it will take a

while to get the vaccine widely distributed across the population, from three months to a year, and during that time, it seems clear, hundreds of thousands more people are likely to die. He asked McNeil, “*I wonder just how dark you think this is all going to be?*” His interviewee paused and my head jerked up at the answer because the senior science reporter for the New York Times said, “*I think we are in the valley of the shadow of death. It is really dark.*” There is light, there is dawn coming, but it’s not here yet.

I paused not only because it was unusual to hear a science reporter on the COVID beat quoting scripture in an interview, but because of Valarie Kaur. Valarie is an activist lawyer and filmmaker who has spent the past almost 20 years working on issues of hate crimes, immigration, and spreading a message she has learned from her Sikh faith which she calls “revolutionary love.” But I know her from a viral video of her message when she was with the Poor People’s Campaign and a whole bunch of religious leaders for a Watch Night service on New Year’s Eve, at the end of 2016. I have watched that video hundreds of times. The reason is that she asks a question in that video that has become a driving question of hope for me over the past few years.

Valarie Kaur speaks for only six minutes, but she talks about the damage of hatred and racism, the horrors of hundreds of years of slavery and oppression and incarceration of bodies because they are Black, brown, foreign, female, or just different. Her own grandfather was imprisoned when he arrived as an immigrant in the US because of his brown skin and the turban on his head. She talks about the rising tide of white nationalism, violence, and hatred in our nation, “Yes,” she says, “the future is dark.” But then she recalls her grandfather’s Sikh prayers of “rising hope” in his dark prison cell, and she thinks about the birth of her young son, and this is what Valarie Kaur says, “The mother in me asks, “*What if? What if this darkness is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of **the womb?***”

In Advent: What hope do we find in the darkness of the womb? What immense and unimaginable possibility exists in the darkness of the womb? *Everything about a pregnancy is a “what if?” Everything about a womb is about protecting and nurturing with love in this darkness until something wonderful can be born.*

God is not too proud to live in a desert or a tent. God is not too proud to become blood and bone and saliva and flesh and live in the darkness, the dark amniotic fluid of a poor, peasant, unwed teenager. In these four Sundays of Advent we have seen that God’s choice is to live

- 1) in a fragile place where we hunt for small signs of hope,
- 2) in a wilderness where we can see only just the beginning of good news,
- 3) in a song of the oppressed about a world turned upside down
- 4) in a tent and a tabernacle, where the divine presence is rooted only in promise and not in pillars or stone.

And now, of course, we realize it: **in the darkness of a womb**, the body of a Palestinian girl. God has never needed a building or a government or a guarantee of prestige or power. God chooses to live in the darkness of a womb in a human body in a nowhere corner of the world, a dark stable, a dark night. All around us is this darkness and yet, we ask “What if? What if this darkness if not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb? *What if the God of love is waiting in the darkness to be born?*” Amen.

Apostles’ Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

ANTHEM The First Noel/Christmas Eve Waltz, Composed and Arranged by David Lanz -Kelli Watson

Prayers of Intercession

God of power and might, tear open the heavens and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need.

God of preachers and messengers, you have entrusted your church with the work of proclaiming good news. Strengthen the witness of bishops, pastors, deacons, church musicians, lay leaders, and all people who contribute their prayers and talents to public worship at Zion Lutheran Church. Embed your word in their hearts. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of exiles and wanderers, you repair what was once destroyed. We pray for people who have been displaced from their homes by fire, flood, earthquake, or storm. Support the work of Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Disaster Response, and all disaster relief organizations in their recovery efforts. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of the powerful and helpless, you clothe us with strength when our spirits are weak and weary. Bestow your spirit upon this congregation and empower us to comfort the people who turn to us in times of need. Make your church a place of refuge and healing. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Listen to the cries of your people waiting patiently for your healing hand and comforting Spirit, especially those who suffer with chronic pain and all cancer patients, Pr. Mary Etta, Gail, comfort for Norm, Bill & Rusty, Don & Wanda, healing for Richard, Tom, Edween Ham, Claudia & Fran, Beth, Edie Marie, Suzee, Ed and family, prayers for Michael Gilleece and family, Your Neighbors clients, Theresa, and our country, that the light of Christ may shine upon them with hope. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Thanksgiving at the Table

Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord, heaven and earth are full of your glory. In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son, who reached out to heal the sick and suffering, who preached good news to the poor, and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all. In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me. Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection, and ascension, we await his coming in glory. Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord, and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food, the body and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all glory and honor, now and forever.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn: *Joy to the World vs. 1 & 4 #267* -Kelli Watson

Vs. 1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king; let ev'ry heart prepare him room and heav'n and nature sing, and heav'n and nature sing, and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

Vs. 4 He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love, and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.

Blessing

The Creator of the stars bless your Advent waiting, the long-expected Savior fill you with love, the unexpected Spirit guide your journey, now and forever.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Thank you, Kelli Watson, for providing the beautiful music for today's service.



The Fourth Sunday of Advent

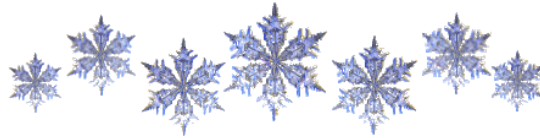
...For this momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison... 2 Corinthians 4:17

As the days get colder and darker, we enter into the depths of winter. Lord, these are the times when we feel it in our bones. We miss the warmth and light. We crave it! O Lord, bless us as we crave your warmth and light, looking forward to the days when we will never be cold and dark again in your eternal light.

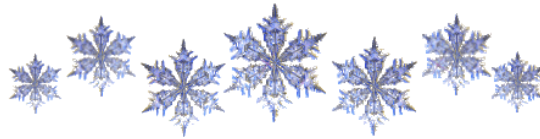
Wrap your comfort and love around us like a quilt on a cold evening.

Your Word is like a warm winter fire, kindling our faith and illuminating the truth. Amen.

Daily Prayers for Advent



I would like to convey my thanks to the congregation for the gift of edible fruit (dipped in chocolate!) and a beautiful bouquet. Those who were able to join the Zoom service saw the bouquet on the piano, but others may not be aware. The arrival of these gifts at my house was certainly a day brightener. -Mary Senn



An Update from a Former Zion Member

Audrey Scholl was very involved with the Council of Churches, which a former pastor, Rev. John Sprock, helped to start, and was very active at Zion. She moved away about 15-20 years ago. We have an update from her daughter-in-law, Susan (husband Jeff) Scholl. Audrey has had a difficult year in Florida. She lives in an assisted-living apartment, so her food and shelter are taken care of. The past six months of isolation due to being quarantined in her apartment were hard on her. She spent a little time in the hospital this fall, then rehab (where she tested COVID positive), then a week at her daughter Cindy's, and now is back in her apartment. She is getting more care. Her family is not seeing her at this time, but she is grateful for phone calls and Zoom! Greeting cards can be sent to: Audrey Scholl, 8733 W. Yulee Dr. Apt 220, Sunflower Springs Homosassa, Florida 34448.



***Just a few more days left** to get those Amazon orders in! Don't forget about the Amazon Smile program. Thank you to the many people who have been using this program this year, as we receive the donations. VISIT <https://smile.amazon.com> and browse the millions of selections (pretty much the same items from Amazon), and choose the charity, Zion Lutheran Church, New Hartford, NY. Thank you!!*

“May you never be too grown up to search the skies on Christmas Eve.”

-Millie Angevine

*January Birthdays – Happy Birthday from your Zion family!
We are wishing you a wonderful day & a blessed year ahead!!*

Louise Wurster	2	Peggy Joslyn	8
Ryan Higgins	2	Emily Lambe	11
Miriam Grove	3	Pat Jeche	13
Claudia King	3	John Kelly	13
Daniel Gymburch	4	Kelly McGlynn	13
Adrienne Midura	4	Jim Marscher	15
Bob Loomis	5	Arianna North	19
Lori Owens	5	Scott Gwilt	20
David Weir	6	Linda Bennett	24
Seth Marenic	6	Theresa Weir	24
Tony Bonvicino	7	Eli Rettig	25
Fred Majka	7	Lou DeAngelis	30
Laura Campbell	7	Beth Scarafale	31

Given to the Glory of God

<u>In Memory of:</u>	<u>To:</u>	<u>Given by:</u>
Ozzie Meneses	Zion Food Baskets	Laura Hilt
Bob Imobersteg	Local Food Pantries	Kirstin Soykan
<u>In Honor of:</u>	<u>To:</u>	<u>Given by:</u>
Fran & Claudia King	General Fund	Jack Henke
Bob & Bonnie Loomis	Angel Tree	Chuck & Shirley Carlson
Jack Henke	Building Fund	Linda Bennett
Mary Senn	Zion Food Ministry	Kirstin Soykan
Debra Murdock, Jim & Kim Marscher, Gloria Cifonelli, and Bob & Bonnie Loomis	Building Fund	Linda Bennett
Carole Grove	Your Neighbors	Linda Bennett
Laurel McCurdy, Wendy Stevens, Mark Thompson, Sara Silva, Mary Senn, Kristen Burson, Pastor Janet Hoover, and Rev. Jen DeWeerth	World Hunger	Linda Bennett

		October 2020 Treasurer's Report		
	Nov 2020	Year to Date	Budget	Over/Under Budget
Income				
Giving	\$ 10,195.75	\$ 142,990.23	\$ 176,307.65	\$ (33,317.42)
Other Income	\$ 1,934.71	\$ 27,203.33	\$ 30,877.95	\$ (3,674.62)
Total Income	\$ 12,130.46	\$ 170,193.56	\$ 207,185.60	\$ (36,992.04)
Total Expense	\$ 14,973.55	\$ 142,792.86	\$ 235,927.40	\$ (93,134.54)
Net Income	\$ (2,843.09)	\$ 27,400.70	\$ (28,741.80)	\$ 56,142.50

****ANNUAL REPORT:** Please submit your reports between now and January 4th. **

Last call for FAIR TRADE ITEMS for Christmas gifts!

Zion's Fair Trade Hutch in the Fireside Room has been replenished with plenty of organic food items, just in time for safe, last minute holiday shopping.

A few of our offerings:

- Mind, Body & Soul coffee, both whole bean and drip
- Dark Chocolate Caramel Crunch with Sea Salt Bars
- Dark Chocolate Almond Bars
- Chocolate Chips
- Extra Virgin Olive Oil from Palestine
- Cashews, both Natural and Roasted/Salted
- Green Tea with Ginger and Vanilla Rooibos Tea

Shopping by appointment, curbside pick-up, and home delivery are all possibilities. Call/text Laurel McCurdy at (315) 939-9875 or email her at lemccurdy@gmail.com. Thank you for supporting this ministry of Zion Lutheran Church!

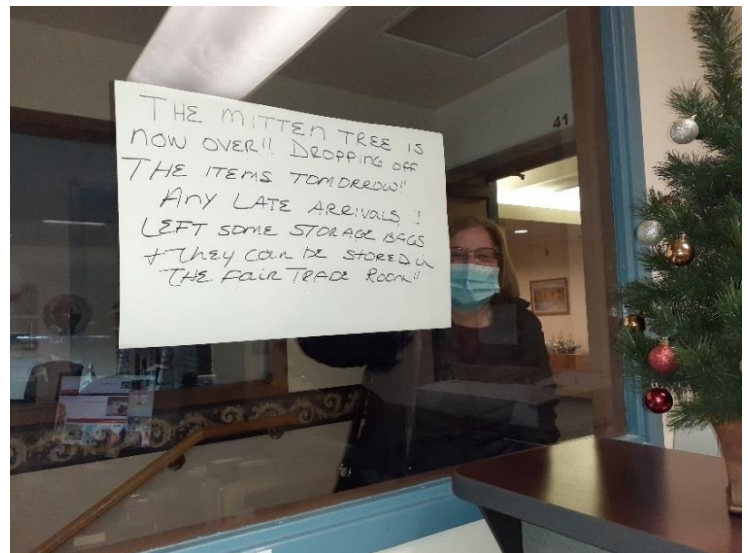
Chex Mix Another special holiday recipe provided by chef Jon!

Ingredients:

3 cups Corn Chex™ cereal, 3 cups Rice Chex™ cereal, 3 cups Wheat Chex™ cereal, 1 cup mixed nuts, 1 cup bite-size pretzels, 1 cup garlic-flavor bite-size bagel chips or regular-size bagel chips, broken into 1-inch pieces
6 tablespoons butter or margarine, 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce, 1 1/2 teaspoons seasoned salt, 3/4 teaspoon garlic powder, 1/2 teaspoon onion powder

Preparation: In large microwavable bowl, mix cereals, nuts, pretzels and bagel chips; set aside. In small microwavable bowl, microwave butter uncovered on High about 40 seconds or until melted. Stir in seasonings. Pour over cereal mixture; stir until evenly coated. Microwave uncovered on High 5 to 6 minutes, thoroughly stirring every 2 minutes. Spread on paper towels to cool. Store in airtight container. **Substitution:** The original recipe includes Corn Chex™, Rice Chex™ and Wheat Chex™. You can mix and match to suit your taste—just use a total of 9 cups of cereal. **Healthy:** To reduce the fat to 2 grams and the calories to 80 per serving, use 3 tbsps margarine instead of the 6 tablespoons butter, omit mixed nuts and use fat-free bagel chips.

Presentation/Garnish: Make enough of this favorite mix to package up as gifts for special friends—it's so good and always a welcome surprise! Pre-heat oven to 250°. Put cereal and seasoning mixture into ungreased roasting pan and bake for 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. Spread on paper towels to cool, about 15 minutes.



Thank you to Zion's Social Ministry team for your time & talents!!