

Come Join the Advent Journey

Christmas Worship Schedule

Christmas Eve

7:30PM Family Worship

The service is designed for children and features a special children's meditation in the Chancel area of the church.

10:30PM Traditional Candlelight Service with Special Music

Christmas Day

10:00AM One Worship Service with Holy Communion

Christmas Play

Sunday December 13, 2008

10:00AM One Service
(Followed by Pizza lunch)

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church

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Martinsburg, WV 25401

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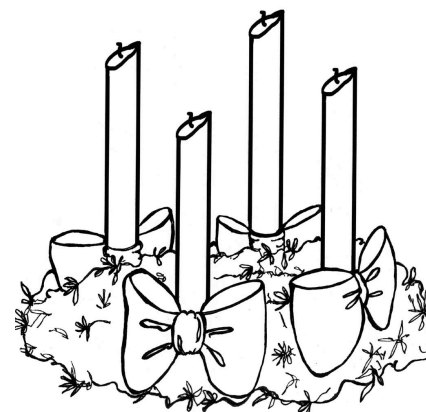
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*Advent Devotional
Booklet*

2009



*St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Martinsburg, WV*

Welcome to Advent

This has been a really long and difficult year for me. In January, I learned I had cancer, and trust me, that is not something you want to hear in our life EVER! The surgery went well until the blood clot and then everything got serious again. Thanks to wonderful support and your prayers I finally got home.

Recuperation took place in the midst of a torn-up home as the builders began in earnest to tear apart thirty years of peace to complete the addition. Mercifully, once again Linda and I felt the love and support of so many of you through this difficult time. The food, the visits, the help with lifting and moving heavy things, all were a tremendous blessing.

Then came Lauren's engagement and impending marriage. How much stress and anguish should a parent have to endure in a single year? Many of you have assured me that all will be well, and as you cared for me earlier, I am counting on you now.

And then through it all there has been the constant daily negative news about jobs, the economy, the disappearance of retirement savings, health care concerns and on and on. It is easy for Christmas to get lost in the midst of so much difficulty and sorrow.

So thank you once again Advent writers for each of your gifts of hope and love in the pages of this Advent booklet. Thank you for sharing your faith! Thank you for letting God use you to speak to us about hope, and light, and joy in these difficult times for us all.

And finally, a tiny gift from our creator in the form of story.

It was the time for the monsoon rains to begin and a very old man was digging holes in his garden. "What are you doing?" his neighbor asked. "Planting mango trees" was the reply. "Do you expect to eat mangoes from those trees?" "No, I won't live long enough for that. But others will. It occurred to me the other day that all my life I have enjoyed mangoes planted by other people. This is my way of showing them my gratitude."

Thank you each writer for showing your gratitude!
Pastor Riley

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FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Luke 21:25-36

11/29/2009

Looking at the dictionary there are two entries for the word advent. Both are nouns, one is a proper noun and its first definition is "the season of devotion including the Four Sundays before Christmas". The birth of Christ into the world and the second coming are the other two definitions for the proper noun.

The Adult Sunday School class has started the 5 year Bible Study plan and one of the key objects is getting us to read and understand the Word of God as a whole, not just in parts, or the literal interpretation. To read the words of Luke 21:29-30 every spring season when the fig trees sprout leaves we would be thinking that the Kingdom of God is near. What is near; now or a millennium away as the dictionary says will be the second coming of Christ.

Reading through the rest of today's devotion does not clearly tell when the coming of Christ will be either. What the verses 34 thru 36 do tell us is we must always be ready.

Being a Christian is an every minute, everyday devotion to being a believer and follower of Christ. We sure wish we were perfect at it but far from it would be correct.

Verses 34 thru 36 gives us a few hints on how to be ready when it is time. If we follow Christ as the Bible says and Martin Luther interpreted for us, being ready will not be a problem.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for our lives and the opportunities you set before us. Help guide us to follow your ways when these opportunities present themselves. We ask that you lead us in the path of righteousness all the days of our lives. In your name, we pray. Amen

Gail & Buddy Newman

Jeremiah 33:14-16

11/30/2009

The Lord is our Righteousness"

Jeremiah, a chosen messenger of God, must bring messages to the people which are not always good or accepted well. However, he knows that God will strengthen him in his quest.

In these verses, God sends Jeremiah the message that He (God) will do the good he has promised. In verses 15-16 Jeremiah brings the message of a new covenant and prophecies of the coming of Christ.

This Advent Season as we anticipate the celebration of the Birth of Christ, let us renew and build on our Trust. and Faith in HIM.

Prayer: Lord, we ask that you would make us all instruments of your Peace and sowers of your Word. Amen

Sue Wall

David finds himself praying for help in a moment of feeling lost. He acknowledges his sins, both past and present. He opens his heart to God's mercy and begs for forgiveness and help from sinning. He admits that he cannot see past his own sins by himself. He realizes that only through God's divine wisdom and great teaching will he truly be at peace and out of reach of the dark path of the non believers. He humbly asks for God's teaching and guidance through these troubled times and beyond.

We all face trials and tests of our Christianity everyday of our lives. We sometimes find ourselves failing these tests by almost unrecognizable actions, a sore word said to or about someone that has upset us or a harsh exchange with some who may have cut us off in traffic. We must recognize that the smallest of things are not in God's path for us and we need to ask everyday for his forgiveness, wisdom, and guidance to be the best Christian that we can be. We must be humble everyday of our lives and know in our hearts that we cannot do it without him. Only then can he truly enter our hearts and teach us the love he has for all of mankind.

I encourage you to write this psalm down and stick it in your pocket or purse and if you are having a hard day that is truly testing you, pull it out (it only takes about 45 seconds) and read it. We hope that you get the same from it as we did, which is a daily proclamation of our weaknesses as human beings and the knowledge that God will always be there. All we have to do is ask.

Prayer: Dear God, Please teach us your patience and wisdom to be the Christians that you know that we can be. Grant us the courage to face the tests of everyday life and come out on the other side better kinder Christians for having faced it with you in our hearts. Amen

Melica & Darrell Propst

While reading these verses from Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, I had such a positive and uplifting feeling. How wonderful to be part of such a loving Christian community of faith. Isn't it great to know that you are loved and people are praying for you? In this season of Advent as we prepare our hearts and minds for the birth of our Savior, let us try to pass this feeling on to everyone we know or come into contact with. During the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, remember to take time for prayer, reading the Bible and thanking God for the gift of his Son.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, As we await the birth of your Son, help us to be kind and loving to everyone we meet. Let us never lose sight of your love and the gift of your grace. Amen

Judy Brewbaker

E-mail messages. Text messages. Voice mail messages. Messages come to us through the radio, tv, newspapers and magazines. It's difficult to escape the barrage of messages that confront us at every turn. This scripture is about a message delivered to the people of Israel by the prophet Malachi (whose name means my messenger), in which he tells them: Jesus is coming; He will cleanse you into the precious child God created you to be; and then asks them, Are you ready? Just as the message from Malachi encouraged the people of Israel to get ready for the coming of the Messiah, it also reminds us that Jesus is coming into our hearts again at Christmas and we should get ready. Who or what is God's Advent messenger that calls us to spiritually prepare our hearts to receive Jesus? Could it be a particular Christmas carol, the quiet fallen snow that blankets our streets, a decorated Christmas tree, an excited child waiting to see Santa, the aroma of freshly baked cookies, or could it be a particular bible verse or Sunday School lesson that is your messenger? We all have a messenger if we will only listen and look for it beyond all the glitz and trimmings of the season.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, in this Advent season you send us the message of love in your Son, Jesus. Strengthen us to remember what this season is really about and help us to see the joy of you in our lives. Amen.

Jeanne Rector

God speaks through His prophets, holy since the dawn of time. We should serve Him for all our days and remember His holy covenants in order to be saved from our enemies.

You, Child Jesus, will come from the highest to prepare us in the ways of God, and teach us love, and mercy, and forgiveness for our sins. In this way we receive Peace.

Prayer: Please watch over us all, and guide us toward your light. Listen to the music in your soul. Take care of those who are sick; heal them and bring them back to us whole; shelter us, and let us all feel the warmth and peace of this blessed season. Amen

Harriet Eyler

Philippians 1:3-11

12/5/2009

During the Season of Advent we are preparing for the coming of Christmas, the birth of Christ. In his letter to the Christians at Philippi, Paul doesn't mention baking cookie and cakes. He doesn't say anything about shopping for presents, and he doesn't even mention decorating the house with festive lights and shining baubles. What is up with Paul? When this letter was written Paul was a prisoner in Rome.

If we were in Paul's position we would be upset over the harsh conditions in the prison. No soft pillows to lay our heads on. No gourmet food to soothe our hunger. No fine drink to quench our thirst. Rats and other vermin infesting the place. But what does Paul say?

Paul gives thanks for the steadfastness of the Christians at Philippi. He prays that they will grow in love as they grow in knowledge and insight in their Christian journey as they await the Day of Christ, the second coming. Simple really, Nothing like our preparation.

Prayer: Dear God, teach us to live simply and in service to your people. Amen

Jerry Crites

Luke 3:1-6

12/6/2009

Standing before God, all people are equal. As we prepare for the coming of God's son, we all should prepare to receive him as equals, one among another. No one is a "peak" or a "valley" in his understanding or love, but rather we all have a level smooth highway, by grace, to heaven,

I well remember when I was choir director at the 1st Baptist Church, one particular choir member- Bonnie. She had been invited to church as a result of a "community outreach". At first, she was suspicious and angry, but gradually, through acts of kindness by the members of the congregation, she came to accept the word of God, and let his word guide her life. She joined my choir, and although she could barely read, and certainly couldn't read music, she became one of my most faithful members. When my mother lay dying in the hospital at Christmas time, Bonnie was at her bedside singing Christmas carols with several other choir members. Even now, I use her copy of "Messiah" to conduct the choruses at Christmas. "The crooked made straight, the rough place plain."

What a great truth! Amen, and Glory to God.

Bill Bland

As a country we tend to be obsessed with the weather. We turn on the television first thing in the morning to find out what the weather will be for the day. Will we need to wear our winter coat, pull out the umbrella, or possibly grab the sun glasses as we head out the door? Riding in our cars, the conversation will come to a momentary pause while we listen to the 30 seconds of what the future will hold in terms of the weather. Most people can even tell you the television station number for The Weather Channel.

After being so determined to find out what the day will bring many of us will then laugh when the day's sun does not match the predicted forecast. We even joke that we could have possibly have done a better job ourselves. And well may we have, if we had only taken the time to look towards the heavens.

A soft drizzle and balmy breezes signal a beautiful spring day. Just as gray clouds overhead along with a cold wind are good indicators of snow flurries ahead. Regardless of what the skies may say, perhaps it is the heavens that we should be looking at. David tells us in the 19th Psalm that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the skies proclaim the work of his hands".

All around us, God's handiwork celebrates their creator. The sun shining and the moon lighting our night both paid tribute to a divine creator. The warm drizzle of the rain reminds us of a loving God that cares for all his creations including the smallest flower. The cold winter wind and snow demonstrates the simple need that all God's creatures need to rest.

All of God's creatures sing of his magnificence. Yet man as the smartest of all his creatures fails daily to remember the God that loves us. So the next time the weather comes on, instead of pausing your conversation to hear the weather, take a moment and look at the heavens. Pause and take time to say thank you to a God that loves you and all his creations. Pause and praise God for the many blessings he has bestowed including the warm spring rain, and the snowy winter wind. Remember to praise the same God that the heavens and skies sing about.

Prayer: Let us pray.... Dear God, Thank you for the many gifts that you bless us with each day. Thank you for your love and caring during the warm spring days, and the cold winter nights. Let us never forget to join the heavens in singing of your glory. To the glory and honor of your holy name. Amen.

Advent is the season as Christians we love to enjoy. We light our beautiful purple or blue candles one by one for the four weeks until we get to the last glorious light, the white Christ candle. Advent is a time of preparation - it is a time of making ready for our Savior's entrance into our world.

We can help prepare for the birth of Jesus by telling others; by shining our lovely candles one by one and finally by blessing the world with our illumination of the promise of salvation. We never are fully Christian, but we are always working toward *becoming* Christian in the way this verse describes.

Help prepare for our Savior's birth by making the world brighter with your blessing.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Help me to show your light to all I meet during this Advent season so that all might prepare the way in their hearts for your Son. Amen

Beth Chapman

Growing up in Oregon, I was fascinated by the stories of the Pioneers who had taken the Oregon Trail. Every year in school, my social studies classes included the study of the dangers, hardship, and sacrifice of the Pioneers who had settled our town. Every community event highlighted the individuals who had dared to seek a new life west of the Mississippi. The local parades always featured senior citizens riding in cars instead of the covered wagons in which their parents and grandparents had arrived. In fact, even the local newspaper was “The Pioneer.”

Being immersed in this history, I romanticized the whole concept of being a Pioneer. I was sure I was born in the wrong time period. I knew I would have been willing to sacrifice everything to live a new life, and I wished I’d been one of the individuals to explore new territory and lead the way for others.

As an adult, I am more realistic. I don’t even like to go a day without a shower, and I take full advantage of every modern convenience. I’m not sure I really am that hardy individual I convinced myself I was as a child. I’m also more realistic about the challenges and risks of being the first to try or do anything. “Pioneers” often face pessimism, ridicule, and sometimes outright hostility. Yet without them, we wouldn’t achieve new understanding and optimism.

And so it was with the Disciples, the Pioneers of the Christian Faith. They, like the Oregon Pioneers, also faced dangers, hardship, and sacrifice. But their mission was much greater than settling in a new geographic home. Their mission was to encourage all of us to settle in a new spiritual home with Christ.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the pioneers who have come before us... who have led us to you. Please help us to be pioneers for others by living a life that exemplifies the lessons of Jesus Christ. Amen

Trina Bartlett

What is the world coming to - wars in the Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan), an economic recession, special interest groups, lack of concern about the plight of the poor, and many people out of work? But it seems that times like these have always been. It seems that there has always something to turn us away from God - other idols – money, food, drink, our own self-interest, or anything else that can draw our attention away from God.

Zephaniah certainly dealt with that in ancient Judah. The people of Judah turned away from The Lord, and Zephaniah, a prophet, had to deal with it. At first, he told of the certain judgment and punishment that the people would receive for their sins. He described God’s wrath. The people were doomed. YET

Yet in their despair, there is still hope. Zephaniah ends his prophetic book with the above-cited verses. The Life Application Study Bible calls this section: “The Day of Hope;” The Lutheran Study Bible calls it: “A Song of Joy.”

Zephaniah tells the people to shout and sing because the Lord has taken away their judgment, He will make them strong, He will remove disaster, He will save the lame and outcast, and finally, He will bring them, and us, home.

Why? Why would the Lord do this for the people of Judah and for us – all of us sinners?

I think you know the answer.

The answer is found in John 3:16.

Therefore, let us use this time of Advent to not only decorate our houses, bake cookies, shop, and all that – let us remember His Own Son that forgives all of our sins and saves us from that judgment. As we perform each preparation, let us remember to say a prayer or a word of praise for all that the coming season means.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank you for your own Dear Son, who you sent to take away my sin. Help me to remember to be faithful to you, to read your Word, to pray. Help me to remember that you love all of us and forgive us – all we have to do is ask. Amen.

Priscilla Horner

This passage is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for God's forgiveness and comfort, after a time when He had been angry with His people. Isaiah was certain of God's presence in his words, God IS my salvation. He IS my strength and my might. Isaiah encouraged his people to give thanks to the Lord, make known His deeds, and proclaim His name. He directed His people to sing praises, shout aloud and sing for joy.

In this season of Advent, let us follow Isaiah's direction and encouragement and make a joyful noise unto our Lord. As we sing those beautiful, traditional Christmas hymns, let them not be so well-known that we forget the true meaning of their words. Let us remember that these hymns are in praise of OUR salvation, OUR strength and OUR might. Let us sing and shout for joy, for the Holy One is truly in our midst.

Prayer: Heavenly Father help us to open our hearts to your joy and salvation and give us the courage to shout our praises for Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Brenda Morrison

Paul, a convert to Christianity, was passionate in his witnessing to the Gentiles. These verses were written by Paul during his house arrest while waiting for his trial pending an appeal to the Roman emperor—troubled times; yet he fervently wrote the words "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

In troubled times or in the moments when we are in trouble, how do we think/perceive? Is the glass half-full or half-empty? Or, is it twice the size that it needs to be? How do we choose to see it? God grants all that we need – including instructions in how to live. Whether we listen and choose to follow is another matter. Advent provides a time of excitement, knowing that we can prepare ourselves to receive God's grace, through faith—but we need to choose to do it.

When asking God for guidance through hard times and difficult decisions, if we are genuinely thankful for our blessings, we will be comforted. Though Paul was troubled, he wrote with joy, confidence and peace because he was a person of deep faith. He asked people to share this faith and not worry, even in spite of sufferings, advising them to pray with a thankful heart.

Praying with a thankful heart.....pretty unselfish. We have so many blessings, don't we? We are sure you know people, as we do, who have tragedies and sufferings in their lives, but who only speak of their blessings. For all of our blessings, we "Rejoice in the Lord always. [We] will say it again: Rejoice!"

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are so thankful for all the blessings you have given us. May we set good examples for others so that they also will be thankful and praise your name. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Pat & Scott Wood

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Luke 3:7-18

12/13/2009

In Luke 3:7-18, John is preparing the way for Jesus. In this reading we learn that John demands for people to share what they have with those who are in need; do your job well and fair, and finally; be content with what you earn. I asked myself, do I live within these requirements? As John baptizes tax collectors who collect more than required and keep for themselves and baptizes soldiers who oppress the poor and take advantage of all people, he expects change. Are there aspects of his three demands I can change? Can I share more or better and can I do my job better and be fairer?

During this season of Advent, ask yourself those same questions? Do you meet the demands of John in his preparation for Jesus? What can you do better? If the tax collectors can collect only as required, can you perform better at your job? At life? At being a Christian? Can you find time to be present with God in either involving yourself at Church, or communication with God in the comfort of your home? Challenge yourself to be a tax collector, or soldier who needed great change to prepare for Jesus. We have already been baptized by the Holy Spirit, can we maintain our end of the bargain?

Jennifer Moss

Psalms 148

12/14/2009

When I think of the book of Psalms in general, I think of singing and praying. How can I link this particular Psalm to Advent?

It is totally a "praise" passage. All of God's creations are called upon to praise the Lord---from the sky to the earth; from the creatures to humankind. Why? Because He is the Creator.

So what does that have to do with the anticipation of the birth of Christ? God's most important creation was Jesus--Himself in flesh. And while this psalm does not mention the birth of Jesus, it does remind us just how great God's love is for his chosen people.

Often when we pray, we ask for this and that and maybe say "thank you" for a prayer answered or for a good day, etc. Maybe this psalmist is reminding us that praise is also essential in our relationship with God--praising God for His wonderful love.

Prayer: Praise God for, not only all the beauty around us, but also for sending His Son into our lives--changing us forever. Amen.

Sharon Brumback

These verses pertain to Paul's preaching to the Jews about the Kingdom of God. There were those who believed and those who did not. But he was not forbidden from trying to persuade them about Jesus from Moses' teachings and the Prophets. And so, he continued teaching about it day and night, for two years, to anyone who would come to him, as he was living under house arrest during that time.

So what does the Kingdom of God mean for us? Peace, harmony, safety, families filled with love, freedom from sickness and pain. This may be a hard thing to comprehend. Because we hear on the news, every day, about gangs and killings, drug dealers, wars, etc. We suffer, or watch loved ones suffer from illness. We see families torn apart as a result of poverty or divorce. We know there are many people who are hungry and starving.

Soon we will be celebrating Christmas. This is the time of year we get to hear more of the "good news" stories - stories that help us feel rejuvenated in our faith in God and our fellowship with others. Volunteers feeding the hungry, donations of toys, food and clothing, people visiting the lonely and maybe even sharing some Christmas carols.

We will rejoice in the remembrance of the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ. And we can also rejoice in the knowledge that one day the Kingdom of God will be upon us and that all of our desires for peace, love, happiness, and good health will be fulfilled. And in knowing this, we should continue to do God's will, in our daily lives, all year long, through our words, and through our example, not only to remind ourselves, but to share with others the Good News of the Kingdom to come.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I'm asking for your comfort today. Times are so uncertain and I'm troubled by many things that are out of my control. Help those who are victims of terrorism and war. Be with those who have lost so much in the past year. Let us be comforted by the strength and peace you offer to us through the birth of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Cindy & Pete Moats

As Advent approaches the psalmist cries out to God, so must we cry out for him to come and shine his face on us so our sins, by his grace, will be forgiven. This scripture reminds us that so many times in our daily lives, we fail to live by Your teaching and that brings about quarreling among our neighbors. At this Advent season, as each candle is lit, we should strive to live by the word of God and help bring about peace and love to our fellow man.

Prayer: Gracious God, help us to find the way to world peace. Give blessings to all during this Advent season and may all be filled with joy by the birth of Christ. Amen

Catherine & Wayne Whitmore

Homework is what I need for Advent. This passage sent me shuffling about the Bible trying to pin down the meaning of Micah. I needed to find out about the prophets and their relationship with God. Micah was Isaiah's contemporary. He worked with the common people in Israel about 735-700 B.C. It is Micah who says that Christ will come from Bethlehem as the new ruler of Israel whose kingdom will reign with God's righteousness. Micah is probably the source of the prophecy used by the wise men as they answered Herod. Matthew quotes Micah about Christ's birthplace. Micah wanted to encourage the faith of God's people; his vision is a God of love. In this Advent season as we scurry about, we should try to remember that Micah wants "God's-eye view" to be ours: love and peace. Micah saw the transition from judgment to salvation to all who believe in Christ.

Prayer: Dear God: Help us to remember the vision of Micah, a Savior from Bethlehem. Guide each of us as we try to follow the ways of love and peace that Christ teaches us. Amen

Barbara Maxwell

This bible passage, "Mary's Song" reminds us that what is in our hearts, minds and actions should always glorify the Lord. God does great things for us if we take the time to listen to him with our hearts. When we face disappointment, we should remember that perhaps God has other plans for us. When we remain humble to God, we shall be blessed in life, perhaps not in riches, but in faith.

The Christmas season is always busy, always filled with hope and expectations of good things. But it is also the time to share our blessings, to share a hug, to share a smile, and to remember that while we are rich in spirit and material belongings, there are others who need our help. When we share with others, we are reminding them of the miracle of Jesus' birth, and that with God, all things are possible.

Prayer: "Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for giving us another day to share Your love with those around us. Thank You for the opportunity to serve You as we go about preparing for the joyous season we call Christmas. Please help us to remember that it is not the material gifts we receive from others, but the gifts we give, gifts of time, gifts of the heart, and gifts to those in need, that will extend our joy of Christ's birth into the new year. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen."

Lori Taylor

Hebrews 10:5-10

12/19/2009

Upon reading Hebrews 10:5-10 several times I find it very emphatically stated telling us how the old sacrifices and burnt offerings of the Old Testament gave GOD no pleasure, as Jesus the Son of God was sent to do GOD'S will --even to die a horrible death on the Cross for all our sins; if we only were truly sorry for our sins and BELIEVED in God and Jesus we will surely be saved and will be with GOD and Jesus some day What a wonderful comfort that is to us to know we will have peace with God someday. I will never understand how anyone can reject such a wonderful offer by not believing with their whole heart. I know as we go thru life many things will occur and God never promised us a rose garden; but He promised He would be with us every step of the way.

Prayer: "I pray this little prayer every day to thank GOD for all He gives me, the love of family and friends and healing when we are sick, may we always give HIM the thanks He deserves ". Amen

Lucille Hasselman

Luke 1:39-45

12/20/2009

The anticipation of expecting a baby is always an exciting time. We can only imagine the excitement that Mary and Elizabeth shared. Mary was anxious to see Elizabeth and tell her the news. Here Mary was carrying the Savior of the World. It is hard to fathom all of the hopes and dreams that Mary must have been thinking of during this time. Elizabeth was probably equally hopeful that her unborn child would also do great things in life.

As expectant parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles, we all have great hopes and dreams for our children. We all want great things for their lives and have high expectations for them. The highest expectation for our children is that they lead a holy life and follow and serve the Lord.

Prayer: Be with us now as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to keep the true meaning of the season in our hearts and minds. Amen

Erica & Daniel Propst

Advent as a time of preparation and expectation is given a different perspective when seen in the context of writings of prophets such as Isaiah. Our advent season, only four weeks, sometimes seems to overwhelm us, often because we confuse advent with a Christmas celebration. The Jews, however, had been waiting – expecting – a messiah for a very long time. For hundreds of years before Christ's birth, they had waited for a child who would be "a great light" whose "authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace." Despite all the expectation, all the planning, and all the preparation, the Jews missed the exact thing they sought. They failed to recognize Christ.

We must not make the same mistakes. We cannot become so involved in expecting what is coming that we fail to remember that Jesus is already with us. The gift has been given. It is up to us to nurture, cherish and preserve that gift in our hearts and minds. Let us celebrate advent not as a time of preparation for Christ's coming but as a time of reaffirmation of the possibilities that Isaiah foresaw and Christ taught.

It is not up to the "great light" to fight oppression, to feed the hungry, to care for the poor, or to strive for peace. That light was passed to us by Jesus' great commission. Let us use it well.

Prayer: Lord, during this Advent season, help us to remember that our expectations have already been met. We have received your perfect gift. We pray for the strength and will to use this gift wisely for the betterment of all your people. Amen.

Andrew Banks

With all the busyness during the Christmas season it becomes easy for us to lose sight of the celebration of our faith. Purchasing the perfect gift, hanging the wreath on the front door and making travel arrangements can briefly take priority over remembering our duties as Christians.

In Psalms we are reminded to praise the Lord with all of our being. We are instructed to sing, proclaim and declare our salvation to all the earth. David wrote this passage with an overwhelming excitement for all God has done. He writes "Share with all the nations that our Lord reigns...let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad." If we believe that God is great, should we not be compelled to share the good news?

As Christians this holiday season, it is up to us to tell others about the greatness of our Savior. The best witnessing happens with a heart full of appreciation and understanding of how the Lord has changed our lives. Take a few moments to reflect on all that God has done for you. Share your story with someone who needs it most.

Prayer: Thank you Heavenly Father for all your blessings. Help us to use our voices and actions to show others all you have done for us. Open the hearts of the unsaved so that your will may be fulfilled. In your Holy Name we pray, Amen.

Amanda & Jamie Ferenchick

Titus 2:11-14

12/23/2009

I can't help but wonder what will happen with this year's holiday season. In recent years, the focus has, unfortunately, been on things and sales. I suspect that in many ways this year won't be different; but I hope that, in light of the current economic situation, people will revert to the holiday things that we all remember doing as kids and not just forget about it because they don't have much money to spend this year. You know, the things that don't cost a fortune. Remember having homemade cookies with hot chocolate and marshmallows, going to relatives' homes to visit, going out to cut down a live tree and trimming it, driving around looking at Christmas lights. Then finally, there was Christmas Eve service. My favorite was the midnight service when all the lights were gone and there was only the candlelight from the chancel rail candles. It probably still is my favorite. Have you ever sat outside on Christmas Eve? I do go outside, until I get cold, on Christmas Eve to listen to the silence. I'm not listening for Santa - it is so peaceful. I'm sure that it is peaceful around midnight most nights, but on Christmas it seems even more so. That is one of the things that I look forward to each year – it costs me absolutely nothing. Think about the things you did as a kid. We may share some of those things and you likely had other experiences. Whether our Christmas fund has been affected or not, we should all take time to make a popcorn string to feed the birds or make a chain of green and red paper, especially if we have kids. They need those memories more than those toys; they are what help us get through tough times like these. It also enables us to live decent and honest lives like God wants us to do.

Prayer: Lord, help us to not be so concerned about all the gifts we will buy this season. But, help us to lead a more honest and good life by creating memories with others. Make us realize that our greatest gift is your Son and we must not forget He is the reason for the holiday. In His name, Amen.

Kristi Davis

Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

12/24/2009

What news! "Good news of great joy" that the long awaited and prophesied Savior has been born on Earth at last! And to whom was this good news first proclaimed? Not to the highest of the high Jewish priests, not to the head of the secular government, but rather to simple shepherds tending their flocks. A foreshadowing of Jesus' message about service and humility, and is perfectly in keeping with the Son of God being born in a lowly manger.

What a gift! God's only begotten Son, comes to offer his earthly body in sacrifice to take away the sins of all who believe in him. And He came to teach his followers to serve others and spread the message of peace and love. It was an unimaginable gift, an almost unfathomable act on God's part to reach out in forgiveness to his children, offering them the one true way to reconciliation with God.

What a Christmas! In this day when many of our children are hoping and expecting the best Christmas ever (and maybe some of us grown-ups as well?), we know in our hearts that we have already had the best Christmas ever!

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remain ever grateful for the gift of your son and his sacrifice. Help us to remember this gift and this sacrifice and we look for opportunities to go and serve you by caring for and serving each other. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Angela & Don Hasselman

Come Join the Advent Journey



Christmas Worship Schedule

Christmas Eve

7:30PM Family Worship

The service is designed for children and features a special children's meditation in the Chancel area of the church.

10:30PM Traditional Candlelight Service with Special Music

Christmas Day

10:00AM One Worship Service with Holy Communion

Christmas Play

Sunday December 13, 2008

10:00AM One Service
(followed by Pizza lunch)

Advent 2009 Devotional Writers

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| <i>Andrew Banks</i> | <i>Linda & Jerry Kirkpatrick</i> |
| <i>Trina Bartlett</i> | <i>Barbara Maxwell</i> |
| <i>Bill Bland</i> | <i>Cindy & Pete Moats</i> |
| <i>Judy Brewbaker</i> | <i>Brenda Morrison</i> |
| <i>Sharon Brumbach</i> | <i>Jennifer Moss</i> |
| <i>Beth Chapman</i> | <i>Gail & Buddy Newman</i> |
| <i>Jerry Crites</i> | <i>Melica & Darrell Propst</i> |
| <i>Kristi Davis</i> | <i>Erica & Daniel Propst</i> |
| <i>Harriet Eyles</i> | <i>Jeanne Rector</i> |
| <i>Amanda & Jamie Ferenchick</i> | <i>Lori Taylor</i> |
| <i>Angela & Don Hasselman</i> | <i>Sue Wall</i> |
| <i>Lucille Hasselman</i> | <i>Catherine & Wayne Whitmore</i> |
| <i>Priscilla Horner</i> | <i>Pat & Scott Wood</i> |

Please give a special thanks to each person who wrote a devotional for Advent. Take a minute to thank these contributors for graciously helping lead us on the journey to Bethlehem.

We had several members of the congregation who wanted to write a devotional this year, but either did not let us know in time or were not available when we made assignments and did not have a chance to write. HOWEVER, we will use them for Lent 2010. Ash Wednesday is February 17, so we will be starting the week after Christmas with requests for writers. Let us know if you will write a Lent Devotional. Thanks
Doris and Bill Agee

