

FIRST Impressions

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Pastor's Pen God's Gift

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with a child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

Prophecy over 700 years before the birth of Christ, Isaiah spoke to King Ahaz of Judah about the deliverance that God would provide that besieged kingdom. This prophecy has provided the world with one of the clearest declarations of the Christmas miracle. God would come in the flesh to dwell among us. He would enter our world through the womb of a virgin. What a wonderful sign God gives to us to behold and believe.

It may be difficult to identify with King Ahaz of Judah. As reflected in

Continued on page 2

Local Events

Saturday Mornings: The Market at Pepper Place; www.pepperplacemarket.com

Through 1/2: Beyond Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience, BJCC;
www.vangoghbirmingham.com

12/3-19: Holiday Spectacular, Red Mountain Theatre; www.redmountaintheatre.org

12/3-22: Christmas Movies at the Alabama, Alabama Theatre;
www.alabamatheatre.com

12/15: Trans-Siberian Orchestra in Concert, BJCC Legacy
Arena; www.tsobirmingham.com

12/17-19 & 21-23: George Balanchine's The Nutcracker®,
BJCC Concert Hall; www.alabamaballet.org

12/18-19: Alabama Symphony Orchestra presents Handel's
Messiah, Alys Stephens Center; www.alabamasymphony.org

12/28: TicketSmarter Birmingham Bowl, Protective Stadium;
www.ticketsmarterbirminghambowl.com



(cont'd from p. 1)

2 Kings 16:24, he was a young, arrogant king of "detestable" ways. In spite of this, the prophet Isaiah went to Ahaz to offer him spiritual strength in a time of national crisis. Because of his godless ways, Ahaz did not merit a sign or a faithful prophet. Yet despite these evil ways and his phony spirituality, a covenant-keeping God gave Ahaz a clear sign of what he would do, not only for Ahaz but for our sin-darkened world through the Immanuel prophecy. What can we learn from God's actions?

We learn about the character of God. He is a God of tremendous mercy and tenderness. In the midst of the dilemmas that were entirely of Ahaz's doing, God came to deliver the king and his kingdom. We should never underestimate the depth of God's love for any of us. None of us is worthy, and still God comes. He comes into our lives with signs that are clear and understandable to us. He is not a God who would stay hidden and unnamed from a people he loves. As we worship him, he extends to us a cup, the bread, and a cross. At Christmas we are presented with a star, a manger, a virgin, shepherds, and kings. As Jesus takes

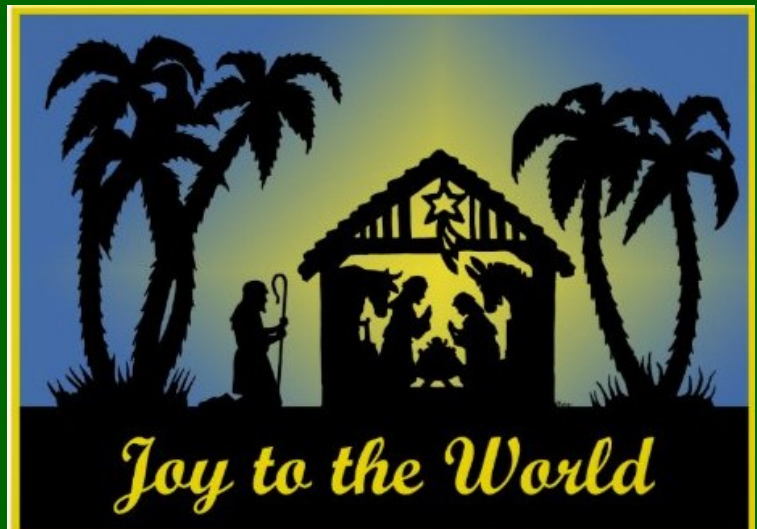
on our flesh God presents us with tangible proof that he is indeed among us, to be known by us, in a personal relationship.

At Christmas, through signs and the messages, God continues to seek after us. Will we be onlookers who stroll past these familiar words and signs with casual interest? Or will we stop, open our eyes, ears and mouths, and dare to believe that a loving heavenly Father is here to cut through our fears, and to draw us to himself? Ahaz. You. Me. God still desires that we believe and be saved. Christmas is a gift for such as us.

Dear God, you know of no hopeless ones in this world. Help us to stop and realize that you are truly there for us. Enable us to believe. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

In His Peace,
Pastor Schultz

Joy of the Lord



Called to Serve and Celebrate Ministry

A Christmas Prayer by Robert Louis Stevenson

Loving Father,

Help us remember the
birth of Jesus, that we may share
in the song of angels, the gladness
of the shepherds, and the
worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and
open the door of love all
over the world. Let kindness
come with every gift and good
desires with every greeting.

Deliver us from evil by the
blessing which Christ brings,
and teach us to be merry
with clean hearts. May the Christmas morning make us
happy to be Thy children, and the Christmas evening
bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving
and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Blessings to You All,

Lorenza Robinson

Called to Serve & Celebrate Ministry

Worship Ministry Forgotten Benefits

*"He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities."
- Psalm 103*

The psalmist expresses God's love for him and gives Him thanks and praise for the benefits that He has bestowed upon him. However, God does not treat him or you and me as He should because of our iniquities before Him. It is the Lord we should bless as He is the fountain of all that is good. How can we bless the Lord for the countless benefits that we receive daily without any effort from us? We should bless and give thanks to the Lord with our soul and all that is within us. Do you ever think how good God is to you and me? Of course, we live in a world that is naturally hostile to the notions of accountability, and discipline. Many of us are about individualism, that is to do what we want making the things of the world and ourselves gods. We take the benefits of God for granted by what we do for ourselves giving no thought to what God has done for us. Nevertheless, God does not deal with us according to our sins but according to His gracious goodness. Forgiveness for our sins is the most important benefit we can receive. Forgiveness is first because by the pardoning of sin which removed the wrath of the Father and restored us to His favor. He has cured the sickness of our souls that leads to death and redeemed us from eternal damnation and obtained eternal redemption for all believers.

Moreover, how many times do we need God's forgiveness for our iniquities? It is impossible to count. Day after day, our transgressions should bring our God's anger. The justice we deserve before God is condemnation. Yet over and over, He removes our iniquities. Our iniquities have gone to the Cross with Jesus and taken away the wrath and given us redemption. Jesus' righteousness has become ours so that we may present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. He has not inflicted the judgement which we have merited. As the heaven is high above the earth, so God's mercy is above the merits of those who fear Him. Though it is for our own benefits, by the pardoning mercy of God, that we are to take comfort and give Him glory.

In His Peace,
Charles Craig
Worship Ministry Chair



"Forget not
all his
benefits."
(Psalm 103:2)

LWML News

Painting the Planet **Purple** with Servanthood

1942 -2022 -- 80 YEARS of GOD'S GRACE

PREPARING for the HOLY DAY, Not the HOLIDAY

My husband and I were discussing how our grandparents always looked forward to Christmas and the family traditions we shared. We recall before Thanksgiving how our grandmothers would start the holiday cleaning. Then right after Thanksgiving, our granddads and daddies would get the live tree from the field or artificial tree out of the attic, ornaments, and other decorations out the closet and the process of decorating would begin. The grocery list was set for Christmas dinner. This was to make sure everything was in place, from the red and green food coloring for the layers of those delicious cakes, to the turkey and dressing for dinner with all the sides.

Having set aside their money in the Christmas Savings Club or a specific hiding place, most of the shopping was always finished. We would also have food saved from the summer garden and other items from home canning.

During the life we shared with our grandparents from childhood to that of an adult, and especially in the holiday seasons, we never experienced them becoming stressed or angry. They would sing gospel or listen to their favorite Christmas carols, and even watch televised Christmas Specials that were on television.

Well, Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter seemed to be their favorite times, why? The family was coming together for a special time. Granddads and dads were the ones blessing the food. Our grandmothers, apparently feeling the spirit, had a lovely saying, “Ah baby, My baby, Savior, Savior, Savior. It’s Jesus, only Jesus.” Yes, in those few words!

Those few words became important teachings handed down from the spiritually fed patriarchs and matriarchs that prepared us for a Christian life with Jesus and the importance of His birth. We learned from their guidance on handling our struggles, blowing winds, crooked roads, and deep valleys of life's highs and lows we may encounter; **stay focused on Jesus.**

Distractions of commercialized holiday celebrations and those caused by the Covid-19 pandemic can take our focus off Jesus. Therefore, **be still** (desist, stop what you’re doing; abandon all motion and sound and embody a presence of calm, quiet, or peace).

Keep focus on JESUS.

Happy Holy Day,

Sheree McGraw, President
First Lutheran Church LWML



Christ Care Ministry

Delivered - Luke 1:1-20

“And so it was, that, while they were there [in Bethlehem], the days were accomplished that she [Mary] should be delivered.” - Luke 2:6 (KJV)

“But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” - Luke 2:19

There are few places in the Bible, if any, where the Gospel is presented more beautifully than in Luke’s Christmas text in chapter 2. The picturesque charm this account holds for many of us is the result, in part, of the beautiful simplicity of its language and its warm associations with our childhood Christmas scenes. But for the most part, it is the result of the meaning of the incarnation for our life, here and hereafter. This is the birth of our Savior (v.11).

There is such an abundance of Gospel throughout this text. Yet, there is opportunity for *even more Gospel* in the detailed description of the pregnant Mary in verse 6: *“the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.”* What this means, of course, is that it was time for her baby to be born. The word *delivered* refers to childbirth, nothing more.

Yet, as pointed out in the preceding “Gospel in the Text” section (Luke, chapter 1), salvation is an individual as well as a universal event. Mary gives Jesus birth; Jesus gives Mary salvation. Birth delivery is paralleled by soul delivery. Jesus came so that she (Mary) should be delivered from sin, death, and hell.

Verse 6 doesn’t say this. But verse 19 (shown above)

demonstrates Mary’s soul-delivery occurring. And there are many other passages in the Bible that describe our salvation in the language of delivery.

“Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell’ (Ps.86:13 KJV); “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:24-25 KJV) are but a few of many examples. Especially appropriate to the Christmas account are the words of Hebrews 2:14-15 (KJV): “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death ... He might deliver them, who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage.”

So beloved, in a sense, Christmas also means that *the days were accomplished when we should be delivered!* Wow! - The best Christmas gift of all ... for all. Share the Good News!

A Joyous Christmas to You,
Pastor Tom



From the President On Him God the Father Has Set His Seal

“It is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” – John 6:27

There is a special accent in these words, as if Jesus were saying, “My Father is not a common man, not a plain fellow. I will tell you who he is; he is God. The Father is the one who is known as God. And this Father has his eyes on his Son. God has made everything dependent on him, so that one is saved by eating his body and drinking his blood. Otherwise all will be damned. God has chosen only his Son, Christ, for this mission. God has put his seal on him and has placed his will and all his mercy on Christ, and on none other.”

God has only one seal, and this he has set on Christ. On him alone God has bestowed the Holy Spirit, so that all people should look only to him. All of Holy Scripture points solely to him, attesting that he alone possesses seal and letter; for he is the exemplar, made, given, and offered to be our sole help. Thus God himself spoke from heaven: “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5) Since God has put his seal exclusively on him, we must listen to him and accept him alone.

Prayer: O Christ, our hope, our hearts’ desire, creation’s mighty Lord, let your mighty love prevail to purge us of our pride. Amen.

Stan Weir
Congregational President

Worship with us
Sundays at
10:15 a.m. in person
or via
Facebook or YouTube.



Hurricane Ida Relief Opportunities

If you wish to donate to Hurricane Ida relief efforts, here are three trusted places to support with your time and/or money.

The Southern District - LCMS

<http://southernlcms.org/disaster-response/>

Donations for disaster relief may be made online or by mailing a check to the Southern District office. One-hundred percent of your gift will go directly to the recovery of those affected by Ida. Please give as you are able in order to help the district help those directly impacted by Ida.

Donations by check may be mailed to the Southern District office:
100 Mission Drive
Slidell, LA 70460

Please write "Disaster Relief" on the memo line.

The Southern District Volunteer Effort

Pastor Ed Brashier, Director of Shepherd's Heart Disaster Response Ministry, is The Southern District - LCMS Disaster Response Coordinator. The Hurricane Ida response team will be using the NEW LCMS Volunteer Registration program. Go to <https://www.lcms-lert.org/> and create a profile, then "Fan" the Southern District. For safety's sake, this program requires a background check for all volunteers. This is an "extra mile" measure to protect the homeowners, congregations, and volunteers from those who might be there for the wrong reasons.

Feeding Ministry

The Village Church - Lutheran in Lacombe, LA provides an ongoing feeding to communities affected by natural disasters. Their small team all of whom have been affected by Ida willing, help others. Just two days after Ida hit, they served 600 meals of Jambalaya, did the same in the days following, and will continue to do so in the coming weeks. Contact Walter Organ at waltorgan@gmail.com for information on how to support them.



Advent Calendars for Kids

The Advent season is here! If you're interested in a free children's advent calendar to help the kiddos in your life count down the days to Christmas, **[CLICK HERE](#)** to submit your request.



Midweek Advent Schedule



Everyone is invited to attend our
Midweek Advent Worship
as we wait upon the Lord!

Dinner at 5:15pm

Worship at 6:00pm

The season of Advent is characterized by waiting—waiting upon the Lord for his presence to be revealed to us on Christmas. In this worship series for Advent, we look back in Scripture at those who waited upon the Lord for his promises to come to pass through the Christ Child. We also look forward, contemplating how we should wait upon the Lord in this present moment of our lives, as God continues to make himself known to us.

*They who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and
not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

—Isaiah 40:31

Join us Wednesday evenings during Advent for a meal at 5:15 p.m. and worship at 6:00 p.m.

December 1 - FAITH

In our first service we take a look at the story of Abraham and Sarah who waited in **faith** for the birth of their son, Isaac, as we wait as a family for the birth of God's Son.

December 8 - HOPE

In our second service we read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, who told us all to have **hope** as we wait for the coming of the Lord.

December 15 - REJOICING

In our third service we recall the **rejoicing** of Elizabeth and Mary as they waited for their children to be born.

December 24

Christmas Eve Carols, Communion and Candlelight , 6:00pm

Join us as we welcome the Lord on Christmas Eve. After our long Advent waiting, the Lord is come – into our lives, into our homes, and into our hearts.

Sunday Morning Adult Bible Study is Back!

Sunday morning adult bible study will resume on November 28 in the fellowship hall. Please join us at 9:00 a.m. for an hour of study, discussion, prayer, fellowship and of course coffee (can't be Lutheran without it). It sure will be good to study God's word together again!



Change in Mobile Giving

GivePlus is becoming Vanco Mobile! A brief message from GivePlus:



“To inform your members about all the great features and updates in Vanco Mobile, we will email your members who now use GivePlus with details about the Vanco Mobile app. Our message is simply to notify your members that GivePlus Mobile will not be supported or functional after January 31, 2022, as your church moves to the improved Vanco Mobile app. Only church members who use the GivePlus Mobile app will be contacted.”