



LIFE IN CHRIST

Receiving God's Gifts — Sharing God's Gifts

The Newsletter of Christ Lutheran Church, Jackson, MS

+ Christmas 2022 +

On the Cover:

Holy Mother with God Enthroned with the Christ Child

Viktor Vasnetsov

1902

Life in Christ

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Table of Contents

4 A Child Is Born in Bethlehem

6 What Do You Want for Christmas

8 God's Growing Family

10 Fiction: Is Christmas a Pagan Holiday?

12 Traditional Christmas Food

14 Hymn of the Month

16 Kitchen Renovation

22 Hard Theology: *Cur Deus Homo*

24 This Month at Christ Lutheran



A
Child
is born in Bethlehem

Pastor Fields

Few holidays are more widely celebrated than Christmas.

Christmas is, of course, celebrated in all historically Christian countries, from America to England to Lithuania to Lebanon. Not only that, but it often is celebrated not as just a day, but a 'season,' sometimes lasting over a month.

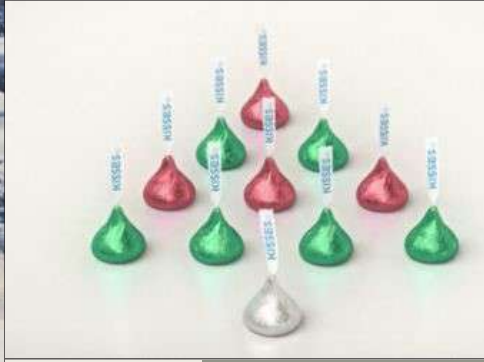
But even in non-Christian countries, Christmas has placed its flag. It is widely celebrated in Japan, Korea, and throughout Asia, as well as in the many hundred islands of the Pacific, and even Israel.

Now, one may say that it is only celebrated because of the mass-market appeal of the glitz and shine of the 'externals' of Christmas. People just love decorating the tree, and giving presents, and hearing the carols and old Christmas songs sung by old crooners from back in the day. No one cares about the *meaning* of Christmas, they just like the *trappings* of Christmas.

There may be some truth to this, and I will be the first to put Christmas up against any other holiday celebrated on earth as the most joyous and comforting day of the year.

But is it entirely true that billions of people around the world like Christmas just for the big Christmas dinners and Christmas parties and gift giving and Messiah sing-alongs?

I would argue that is not true, at least not entirely. It is true that most people do not spend the Christmas season consciously contemplating the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is also true that without at least some understanding of 'the reason for the season,' there would not be the same joy.



One need not be a good Christian, or a Christian at all, to be comforted by the thought, whether one believes it or not, that there is a God, that He loves us, and that He loves us so much that He wanted to become one of us, and He did so by doing the first thing that all the rest of us humans do: He was born of a woman.

Sure, Christmas is not about the garlands on the railing or the lights on the tree, but that does not mean that they somehow have nothing to do with the true meaning of Christmas, that they are the mere *commercialization of Christmas*. At the end of the day, they are the outward expression of the rather explosive joy that we feel when inwardly we ponder one truth: *'the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.'* *'Rejoice and be glad.'* ■



What do you want for

Christmas

A Sermon from our Regional Vice President, Rev. Christopher Esget

Disasters upend priorities.

Where will you go if there's no room in the inn? What will you do if you lose your job? In the hour of death, to what will you cling?

Disasters upend priorities. The shipwrecked need a plank, something to keep them above water. In that moment, nothing else matters.

Christmas is for the shipwrecked.

"Baby, It's Cold Outside" entertains those who are warm and have someone to be with. It brings no cheer for the cold and lonely.

God appeared in the world to the cold and lonely. God appeared in the world to the nobodies and the losers. Kings were oblivious to His coming. He came for those ruined by the storms.

You who are warm and well-fed: upend your priorities tonight, before disaster comes. Reassess what you want.

What do you want for Christmas?

When I was six or seven I wanted a SWAT tactical vehicle based on a popular television show at the time, and I also wanted the six-million dollar bionic man action figure (doubtless among a pile of other presents). I got one but not the other. With guilt, I still remember that dissatisfaction. Lavish me with gifts and I will still be disappointed. Surely I was covetous from birth.

The SWAT van and the Bionic Man are long gone. The presents under the tree don't last much longer than the tree itself.

What do you really want for Christmas? What do you need?

We don't need more under the tree. Through our desire by a tree in the garden we were cursed. We need One who on the tree of the cross will overcome this curse.

Christ comes for the cursed.



Christ comes for the shipwrecked.
Christ comes for the lost.
Christ comes for the lonely.
He comes for the sinner.
So you must be a sinner, i.e., confess it.
The comforts you've surrounded yourself with must become worthless.
You are shipwrecked, and drowning.
You are lost. The compass by which you've been navigating is faulty.
Abandon your dreams of riches, and come to the cradle of the One who made Himself poor for you.

This year has been a year of fear. Inflation and war, sickness and strife. So not only to shepherds but to you comes the word, "Do not be afraid!" **"For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."**

A Savior. That's what the shipwrecked need.

No president can be your savior. No vaccine will keep you alive. No worldly gifts will satisfy the deepest longing of your heart.

To you, the shipwrecked, comes a Savior.

To you, the estranged, comes reconciliation.

To you, the sinner, comes pardon.

To you, the dying, comes Life.

What do you want for Christmas? What do you need?

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

No other gift will satisfy. He is what you need. This Jesus is your Savior. ■





Eddie, Christina, sponsors Charles & Anna Russell... and Asher, of course!

November was a month of growth at Christ Lutheran—and in the Church universal! On November 13 and 27, the Lord bore Peregrin Asher Gallarno and then John Taylor Rudsenske through the waters of Holy Baptism, into the new life of His Son. Christ Lutheran, along with the whole Body of Christ, welcomes Asher and JT into the number of her saints. We rejoice with their families and look forward to watching them grow up unto Life Everlasting!

God's growing Family



*Ben, Natalie, JT, and Pastor, along
with sponsors Brad & Emily Grohovsky*

*All who believe and are baptized
Shall see the Lord's salvation;
Baptized into the death of Christ,
They are a new creation.
Through Christ's redemption they shall stand
Among the glorious, heav'nly band
Of ev'ry tribe and nation.
(LSB 601, St. 1) ■*





Every year, around this time, we always hear someone make the argument that Christmas is merely a pagan holiday. This is usually based on two things: one is that Christmas makes people do weird, fun things, like take perfectly good tree from outside and bring them inside, and take perfectly good lights, and scatter them recklessly around the house both inside and outside. Everyone knows Christianity is solemn and boring, so how can it be the source of all this gaiety and pomp? It must be pagan.

This is rather silly, since it is nowhere written that Christians can't do fun stuff too. In

fact, almost all the traditions we associate with the Christmas season, from the Christmas tree to the Christmas lights to the Advent wreath come from 16th and 17th century Germany and Eastern Europe, all of which were very, very Christian. In fact, there is good evidence that Martin Luther himself made the first Advent wreath from an old wagon wheel that was laying outside his church.

The other argument one often hears is that originally December 25th was the pagan Roman holiday of the Feast to Sol Invictus, the unconquerable sun! Later, Christians wanted to



ions...

Is Christmas a

Pagan Holiday?

get rid of this holiday, so they invented their own, celebrating the birth of Christ, and put it on the same day to compete with it.

Actually the exact opposite is the case. Christmas was celebrated on the 25th of December since not long after the death of St. John the Evangelist. When Christians started to become a large minority in the Roman Empire, that the Emperor Aurelian established the Feast of Sol Invictus specifically to attempt to replace the already long celebrated Christmas.

Now, this brings up a common question: was Jesus really born on the 25th of December? Well, no, probably not, or rather it is better to say, who knows? So why do we celebrate His birth on that day? Well, it is simple actually. The Jews believed that a prophet died on the same day he was conceived. Jesus died, we do know, on March 25th, which means by this Jewish logic, He was conceived on March 25th. Assuming Mary had a perfect nine month pregnancy, then, of course, she would give birth on, you guessed it, December 25th. ■

Traditional



Christmas Food

Pastor Fields

There are many Christmas foods Americans consider traditional, from yams to turkey to ham to, well, whatever you make at Christmas. However, there are many Christmas dishes that are traditional for Christian reasons. They may not be good reasons, but at least they are entertaining reasons. So let us look at a few, and at least be entertained, if not delighted, during the coming season of Christmas!

Roast Goose

Goose is probably the most universal Christmas dish. In America, it was replaced by turkey, due to the fact that America has turkeys. But originally, people ate goose on Christmas. The reasoning for this was that geese only lay eggs once a year (in contrast to chickens), and Christ's ministry, according to three of the four Gospels, lasted one year. Therefore, to celebrate the one year work of Christ that would be expounded throughout the coming Church Year, a goose would be eaten, since it gave birth but once a year.

Panettone

A simple Italian bread with fruit mixed up in it; in much of Europe it is associated with Christmas. Legend has it that a couple could not afford to be married, so the lady invented this delicious yet cheap bread to sell to raise money for their wedding. It was a success, and they were married. Not long after, it was seen as a symbol not just of marriage, but of the marriage of the divine and human nature in Christ. Panettone can be found in most Costco's around this time of year. Give it a try.

Buche de Noel

A French desert, meaning a 'Christmas log,' is simply a thin chocolate cake that gets rolled up so that it looks like a log of wood. Oftentimes, it is decorated with many intricate confections that look like holly leaves and mushrooms, and is often covered in powdered sugar to look like snow. It is meant to represent the fire of the home being kept lit late into the night in expectation of the coming of the infant Lord.

Lamb

Throughout the world Christians often eat lamb on Christmas for a very obvious reason: this day, the Lamb of God Who Takes Away the Sin of the World was born. Lamb is born, lamb is eaten. It is as simple as the simplicity of God. See above.

Fruit Cake

If man had not sinned, the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ would not have been necessary. Therefore fruit cake was invented, so that even the most holy grandmothers could commit at least one sin. Much like sin, fruit cake will last until the Second Coming. This is the allegorical interpretation of this dessert.■

Hymn of the Month

Sister Sara

December—

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

LSB 357

You have probably heard of an *antiphon*, but, who among us actually knows what that is? Well, for starters, quiz our kids who were confirmed last Easter—they have to review it every week! [Insert Sunday school teacher’s maniacal laugh]. But really, who else would know?

I shall tell you.

The Greek roots *anti* (“in place of”) and *phonus* (“voice”) give it away: it is when something is chanted back and forth. So for example, when we sing the introit at the beginning of the Divine Service, we sing it back and forth with the cantor, otherwise known as singing *antiphonally*. The antiphon as a ‘boldface term’ in church music refers specifically to the little liturgical text that frames (precedes and/or follows) a psalm or canticle. So, going back to our introit example, the first and last verse of the introit are the antiphon.

Our hymn this month comes from the seven “Great O Antiphons,” one for each of the seven days leading up to Christmas. These medieval antiphons framed the Magnificat (Song of Mary) during the evening vespers on those nights. In using the antiphons in this way, the liturgy was colored with the emphases of the Advent, placing all the normal canticles and songs in the context of the coming Incarnation at Christmas.

They are called the “Great O Antiphons” because each one begins with... wait for it... “O”!

- December 17: O Sapientia (O Wisdom)
- December 18: O Adonai (O Lord)
- December 19: O Radix Jesse (O Root of Jesse)
- December 20: O Clavis David (O Key of David)
- December 21: O Oriens (O Dayspring)
- December 22: O Rex Gentium (O King of the Nations)
- December 23: O Emmanuel (O “God with us”)

Fun Facts

Those medieval monks weren’t all work and no play! In fact, they were rather clever... just humor me. In the Latin, if you take the beginning letter of each name (excluding the “O,” of course), you get a rather nonsensical word: SARCORE. Buuut, if you read that word backwards, you get ERO CRAS, which is Latin for “tomorrow I will be present.” With the last of our antiphons being sung on December 23rd, this was taken as a “secret” message of the Eve of the Nativity coming on the 24th.

Each of these antiphons is a prayer addressed to the Son of God, with each invoking Him based on His titles in the Old Testament:

Christ is called “**Wisdom**” throughout the Proverbs, and explicitly by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:24. **Adonai** is the Hebrew title (meaning “Lord”) that was often substituted for “Yahweh,” so as not to take the name of the Lord lightly. This Old Testament name draws us back to God’s appearance to Moses in the burning bush, and all through the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. “**Root of Jesse**” comes from the prophetic promise of Isaiah 11:10, wherein Jesus’ royal lineage from King David is foretold (Jesse was David’s father). That royal theme is reiterated in the next antiphon, using the title “**Key of David**” from Revelation 3:7 to look forward to the Last Day, when Christ shall unlock the door of heaven to all who are in Him. “**Dayspring**” is language from Zechariah’s song, the Benedictus (Luke 1:78-79; Isaiah 9:1, 5-6); Zechariah was the father of John the Baptist, and his song speaks of “the Dayspring from on high [that] hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” “**Desire of Nations**” comes from the prophet Haggai (2:7, 9), wherein it is foretold that the Lord will fulfill the desire of all nations in His coming, a coming which realizes the peace of man with God. Lastly, we call upon “**Emmanuel**,” a Hebrew name which means “God with us.” Truly, with the Christchild’s birth, God has come to dwell with man, in our own flesh, and shall never be parted from us.

With these ancient names, we see Jesus unifying all of the Old Testament in Himself, coming as the ultimate fulfillment of all that was promised from the beginning of time. In the hymn, we take on the identity of the house of Israel, an allusion to the Church throughout all ages. And in that same longing tone with which the prophets cried out for God’s coming, we too plead with Him to dwell among us as Emmanuel, God with us.

Rejoice, you who wait and sing these words. For He has come to you, O Israel. ■



Kitch

God gives Himself to us as Food. Clearly, He thinks food is important.

Throughout Scripture, throughout Christianity, throughout history, food is seen as a—if not *the*—centerpiece of life. Food is very literally our source of life, and it is the thing around which we share life *together*.

Well, it doesn't take much of a stretch then, to understand how important a kitchen is. I'll spare you the theological speech, and simply say: three cheers for a new church kitchen!

The voters' assembly approved funds for the renovation of our church kitchen (thanks in large part to the estate of our beloved Elmira Roeber, who joined the Church Triumphant last year), and our devoted Chair of Social Ministry, Mary Atchley, spearheaded the project. Now, several months later, we are enjoying the First Article Gifts with which God has blessed our congregation through the faithfulness of His saints.

If you have had any excuse to venture into the darkened corners of the church cupboards, you know the chilling experience of reaching past long-forgotten cleaning products and disorganized pots.

But did you know, that is not how it was meant to be! Long ago, in the depths of yester-year, this kitchen was actually constructed for future



“Before” photos...



completion, with ovens and fridge and stove... and lots and lots of beautiful cupboards! It was meant to be a heavily used and well-loved church kitchen, able to handle all manner of congregational festivities. And now, our Lord has blessed us with the fulfillment of that intent, with the kitchen newly renovated and ready for action! Bring on the weekly Altar Guild, bring on the Advent dinners, bring on the potlucks! Food is where life is at. And now we have a kitchen to make that food.■

en Renovation!





“During...”



“After!”



Pastor blesses the inaugural meal of the new kitchen!



The food, the desserts... this is a **good** day!



Where would we be without Gary to lead the charge??



How lovely to have a dishwasher!

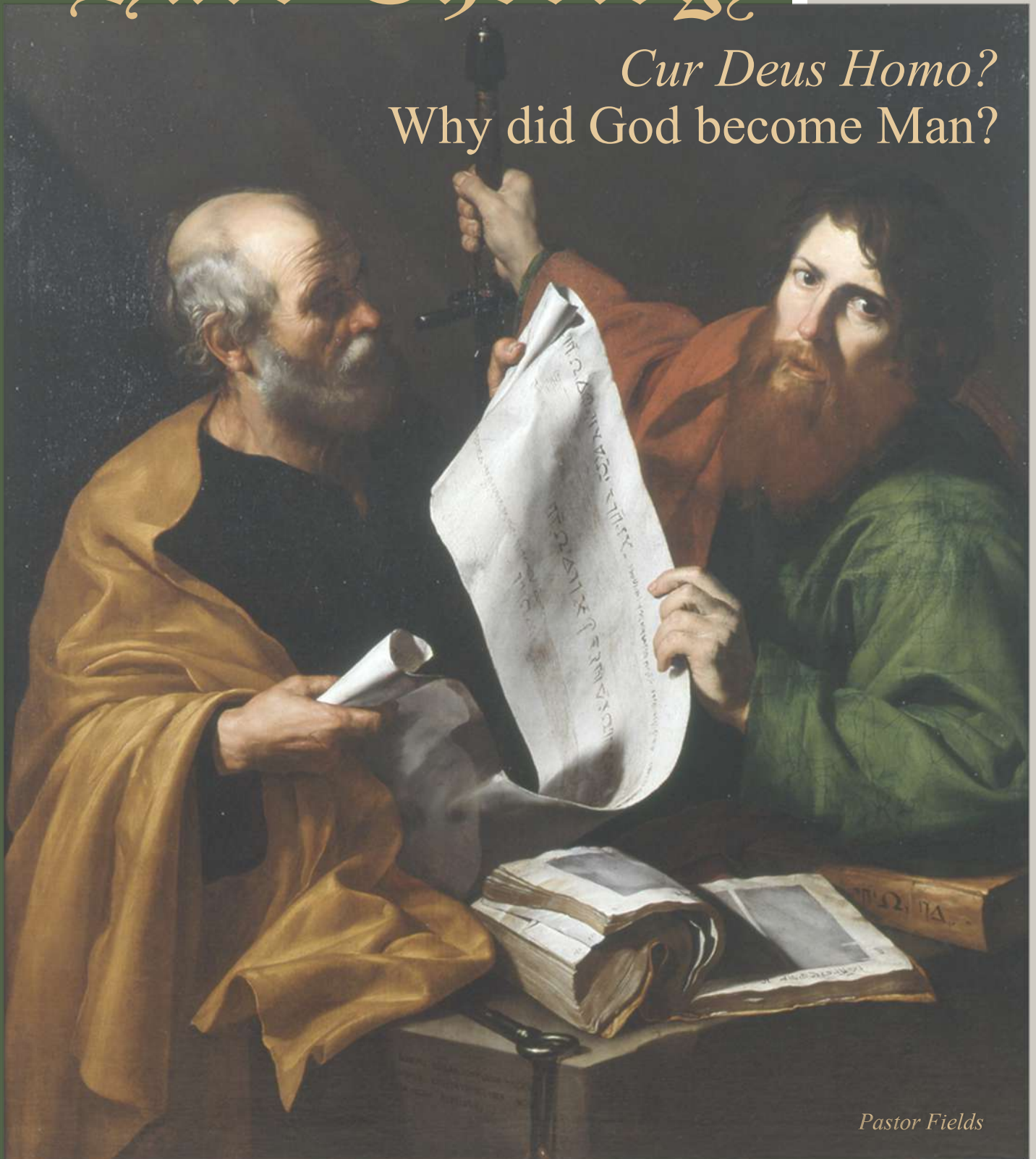
Chuck never disappoints!



We love you, too, Joan!

Hard Theology

Cur Deus Homo?
Why did God become Man?



Pastor Fields

It is an old and often asked question: did God really have to become a man to save the world? Could He have done it in some other way? Did He really have to be born of Mary?

It is a valid question, and a perfect one to consider during the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany. In theory, God can do anything He wants, in any way He wants, so why did He freely choose to do it *this way*, that is by having *the word become flesh*.

Theologians have offered many answers to this question, many of them brilliant, though in my opinion, the best answer to this problem is that if God did not become man, then there would be no Christmas,

and I simply won't worship a God that would deprive us of Christmas.

But, that is a subjective argument, personal to me, and likely in no way convincing to a third party.

St. Anselm of Canterbury offered an answer to this question in a book he wrote, addressed to a hypothetically Muslim audience entitled *Cur Deus Homo*, literally 'Why God a Man?' Some find the argument fascinating, others find it confusing, and others still just find it stupid. However, regardless of what people think of it, it is almost definitely the most well known argument among theologians.

St. Anselm writes:

'The Atonement cannot be effected, except the price paid to God for the sin of man be something greater than all the universe besides God. Moreover, it is necessary that he who can give God anything of his own which is more valuable than all things in the possession of God, must be greater than all else but God himself. Therefore none but God can make this satisfaction. But none but a man ought to do this, other wise man does not make the satisfaction. If it be necessary, therefore, as it appears, that the heavenly kingdom be made up of men, and this cannot be effected unless the aforesaid satisfaction be made, which none but God can make and none but man ought to make, it is necessary for the God- man to make it.'

What St. Anselm is saying here is something like this: before sin, we had something of infinite value, that is, eternal life with God. Because of sin, we lost or 'sold off' this gift eternal life in exchange for 'having our eyes opened to see good and evil.'

So the question is, how do you 'buy something back' that has infinite value? Well, you offer something in exchange that has infinite value. But what is that valuable? Only God. Only God can 'make that satisfaction,' which is just a way of saying 'pay the price.'

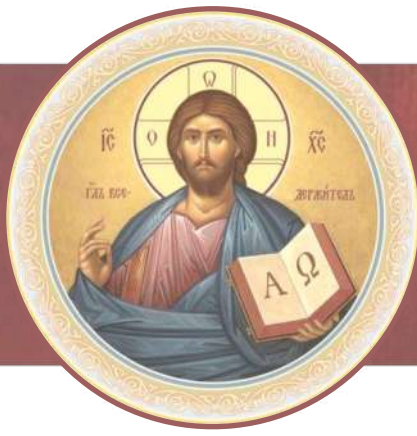
So it seems only God can pay the price. But God was not the one who lost the gift of eternal life with God in the place. Man did. Therefore, it is only just that man must be the one to pay the price to 'buy back' the gift. But man cannot, since he has nothing of infinite value.

So, in order to square this circle, God becomes man, so that, as man, He can pay the price on behalf of man, but as God, He

Himself possesses that one thing of infinite value. That is why God became man.

It seems like an odd argument, since it makes sin all about payments and debts and who can pay on behalf of who, which is why it is often mocked, even by Christian theologians.

But the reason St. Anselm made this peculiar argument was because he was attempting to make what he thought would be a 'universal' argument for the incarnation, that is, not just one that would make sense to professing Christians, but one that would make sense to Muslims and Jews and Buddhists and Hindus. So, by his own admission, it is not the *best* argument for the incarnation, it is just one he thinks would be most widely understood. And, it is true that few things or more widely accepted than the fact that everything is available for the right price. ■



THIS MONTH

At Christ Lutheran



Saints' Days in December

- 4 St. John of Damascus, Confessor
- 6 St. Nicholas of Myra, Bishop & Confessor
- 7 St. Ambrose of Milan, Bishop & Confessor
- 13 St. Lucia, Martyr
- 15 St. Ignatius of Antioch, Bishop & Martyr
- 17 St. Daniel the Prophet & the Three Young Men
- 19 St. Abraham, Patriarch
- 20 St. Katharina von Bora Luther
- 21 St. Thomas, Apostle
- 24 Sts. Adam & Eve
- 25 Feast of the Nativity
- 26 St. Stephen, Martyr
- 27 St. John, Apostle & Evangelist
- 28 The Holy Innocents, Martyrs
- 29 St. David, King of Israel

Adventide

November 27

Christmas Work Day

Help us spruce up the church grounds as Christmas draws near!

Come ready for coffee, cocoa, and Christmas cheer!

**Saturday, December 3
8:30 a.m.**

Advent Dinners

6:00 p.m.

Wednesdays

Beginning November 30

Dine with us as we hold vigil for our Lord's birth!

Sign up in the Fellowship Hall as you are able to contribute.



Join us for a

ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ

KOINONIA CHRISTMAS

Sunday
December 11
Held Home

Come for supper and
bring a gift for a
game of Unsacred Santa!



March for Life 2023

Join your fellow Lutherans in the 49th annual March for Life this January in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit lcms.org/marchforlife.

Sacred Music
for the
Advent Season
lutheranpublicradio.org



Christmas Choir
Wednesdays
8:00 p.m.



Decoration Day!

Decorate the church
with us on
Saturday, December 10
8:30 a.m.

Artwork in This Issue:



Cover: *Holy Mother with God Enthroned with the Christ Child*, Viktor Vasnetsov, 1902.

Page 4: *No Christmas Problem Now*, Norman Rockwell, 20th century.

Page 5: *Santa with Elves*, Norman Rockwell, 1922.

Page 6: *Santa at the Nativity*, Cecilia Brendel, 2016.

Page 14: *Design for an organ*, Johann Georg Dirr, 18th century.

Page 16: *In the Monastery Kitchen Monks Cooking Fish Vegetable*, Eduard Grutzner, 1911.

Page 22: *Saint Peter & Saint Paul*, Jusepe de Ribera, 1616.

VOTERS MEETING December 4

The regular bi-annual Congregation Voter's Assembly will convene immediately following the worship service **Sunday, December 4th**, to approve the 2023 Budget Workplan. All members are encouraged to attend.



THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

+ December 25 +
10:30 a.m.



Advent Evensong

Wednesdays
7:00 p.m.

Issues, Etc.



Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio

www.issuesetc.org



A monthly publication, *The Lutheran Witness* offers synodical news, reports from Lutheran around the world, and more. You may subscribe through the church for only \$13 for a year, and it will be delivered to your home. Checks may be made out to Christ Lutheran Church with the notation "Lutheran Witness." Please see Sister Sara for more information.



SUNDAYS

10:30 A.M. DIVINE SERVICE

WEDNESDAYS

7:00 P.M. EVENSONG

CHRISTMAS EVE

6:00 P.M. LESSONS & CAROLS

CHRISTMAS DAY

10:30 A.M. DIVINE SERVICE



Christ Lutheran
**Christmas
 Recital**

Saturday | January 7 | 2:00 p.m.

If you are interested in participating in the recital,
 contact Sister Sara!




Decoration Day
 isn't just for grown-ups!

**Saturday
 December 10
 9:00 a.m.**

Christ Lutheran Kids, wear your
 crazy Christmas jammies
 and join us for some festive fun!

December 2022

PRAYER FAMILIES and BIRTHDAYS	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Keith & Anita Martin 3—Nathan Hansford 3—William Hansford	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Serving this month: Elder—Gary Atchley Greeters—Rush & Allison Agent Ushers—Bruce Bodkin, Mark Ochs</p> </div>						
Michael & Layne Martin 5—Leslie Riddlehoover 8—Bob Pedersen 9—Allison Agent	4 ADVENT II 9:00 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service 11:30 a.m. Voters' Meeting <i>St. John of Damascus</i>	5 6:15 p.m. Elders Mtg.	6 <i>St. Nicholas</i>	7 <i>St. Ambrose</i> 6:00 p.m. Dinner 7:00 p.m. Vespers 8:00p.m. Choir	8	9 6:30 a.m. Bible Study	10 8:30 a.m. Decoration Day 9:00 a.m. Decoration Day: Kids!
Bailey Martin 11—Savannah Kettler 13—Bill Cookston 14—Gloria Pedersen 14—Natalie Rudzenske 16—Lori Held 16—Margaret Haynes 17—Curt Dickens	11 ADVENT III 9:00 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service 5:00 p.m. Koinonia Christmas	12 <i>St. Lucia</i>	13 6:15 p.m. Council Mtg.	14 6:00 p.m. Dinner 7:00 p.m. Vespers 8:00p.m. Choir	15 <i>St. Ignatius of Antioch</i>	16 6:30 a.m. Bible Study	17 <i>St. Daniel & the Three Young Men</i>
Christopher Martin 19—Chuck Rubisoff 21—Jo Rudzenske	18 ADVENT IV 9:00 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service	19 <i>St. Abraham</i>	20 <i>St. Katharina von Bora</i>	21 <i>St. Thomas</i> 6:00 p.m. Dinner 7:00 p.m. Vespers 8:00p.m. Choir	22	23	24 <i>Sts. Adam & Eve</i> CHRISTMAS EVE 6:00 p.m. Lessons & Carols
David & Michelle Miller 27—Joshua Bowman 29—Eddie Gallarno 30—Allen Goodlett	25  FEAST OF THE NATIVITY 9:00 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service	26 <i>St. Stephen</i>	27 <i>St. John</i>	28 <i>The Holy Innocents</i>	29 <i>St. David</i>	30 6:30 a.m. Bible Study	31