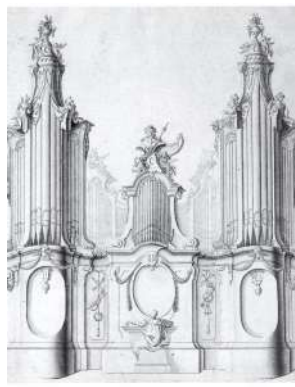


LIFE IN CHRIST

Receiving God's Gifts — Sharing God's Gifts

The Newsletter of Christ Lutheran Church, Jackson, MS

+ Christmas 2024 +



Life in Christ
is the seasonal publication of
Christ Lutheran Church, LC-MS
4423 I-55 North
Jackson, MS 39206
(601) 366-2055
www.ChristLutheranJacksonMS.org

Contents

On the Cover:

The Birth of Jesus

Carl Heinrich Bloch

1834-1890

Carl Bloch, a Danish artist heavily influenced by Rembrandt, is renowned for his illustrations of the life and death of Christ. The piece adorning the cover of this month's newsletter begins with the birth of Christ, depicting the stable scene with shepherds come freshly from the fields to adore the babe. Wonder and awe fill the face of the youngest shepherdboy, while the eldest behind him shields his own face in reverence. The lighting is extremely reminiscent of Rembrandt, with the Christchild Himself emanating radiance as the painting's sole lightsource; Joseph's hand covers his candle, as though submitting its flame to the True Light of the world.

Strikingly, Mary gazes directly at you, the viewer, drawing you into the frame. As the Church, she invites you to adore the Christ alongside the shepherds—Him who already stretches out His arms in crucifixion, robed in white linen as though for burial. Although Mary is depicted as startlingly young (as she likely was), she wears the scarlet of sacrifice, clutching the white robes of Jesus to her breast as though foreshadowing the righteousness to be made hers through His death. The only other figure to make eye contact with the viewer is a sheep beneath the young shepherd's arm... further foreshadowing of the Savior's sacrifice on our behalf. ■

- 4 Peace, Peace, and There Was Peace
- 6 Christ Lutheran Quilters
- 8 The Christmas Pickle
- 10 Welcome Home
- 12 Hymn of the Month
- 15 A Brief Note about A Really Old Icon
- 16 Visible & Invisible
- 18 A Treat before [Christmas] Dinner
- 21 A Quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- 22 The Expectant Joy of Advent
- 24 This Month at Christ Lutheran



peace, peace

and there was

Peace

Pastor Fields

As Christmas comes, one topic comes to dominate the minds of every American: what gifts should I buy for whom? We ask ourselves how much we can afford, what things might this or that friend or family member find useful, and to those who we are especially close to, what present might they find, above all else, meaningful.

In America, and largely throughout the West since the Middle Ages, the practice of gift giving has largely been considered an expression of the classical virtue of magnanimity. It is a lovely virtue, though a quite pagan virtue. Magnanimity, or 'great-souled-ness,' means the expression of one's superiority through generosity and mercy. It is something done not in spite of one's means, but to demonstrate one's means. It is to show kindness to those who have less specifically because you

happen to have more; and it shows your kindness particularly well in that you are disposing of your surplus not on your own desires, but on others' needs.

This notion of 'magnanimity,' and with it our culture of gift giving may seem a bit self-centered, if not even prideful. And yet, it is how we tend to think of giving gifts. After all, who is it that we tend to give gifts to the most? We give presents, whether on Christmas or at birthday parties to children. Once one grows up, one is supposed to have 'grown out of' expecting presents. Why? Because we give presents to those who cannot buy for themselves: kids. Adults are expected to be able to provide for themselves, and therefore do not need, or have 'grown out of' the reception of presents.

In the time of Jesus, and throughout most of the rest of the world, gift giving served a very different purpose. As opposed to being something that loving people bestow on the lesser beloved, it is something given to unloving people in order to express the desire for peace. If one reads about the travels of ancient traders on the Silk Road, or to the Far Northern trading cities, an extremely important part of the journey was to bring thousands of pounds of goods to give as gifts to the various princes and chieftains and lords of lands where one might want to spend the night in order to 'buy their peace' through the expression of non-violent intentions through the bestowal of costly presents.

For us, a gift expresses our generosity to the needy. In olden times, a gift expressed our desire for peace with those who are greater.

See then why it is a great confession for the Three Magi to bring gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the Christ-child. They are not merely being

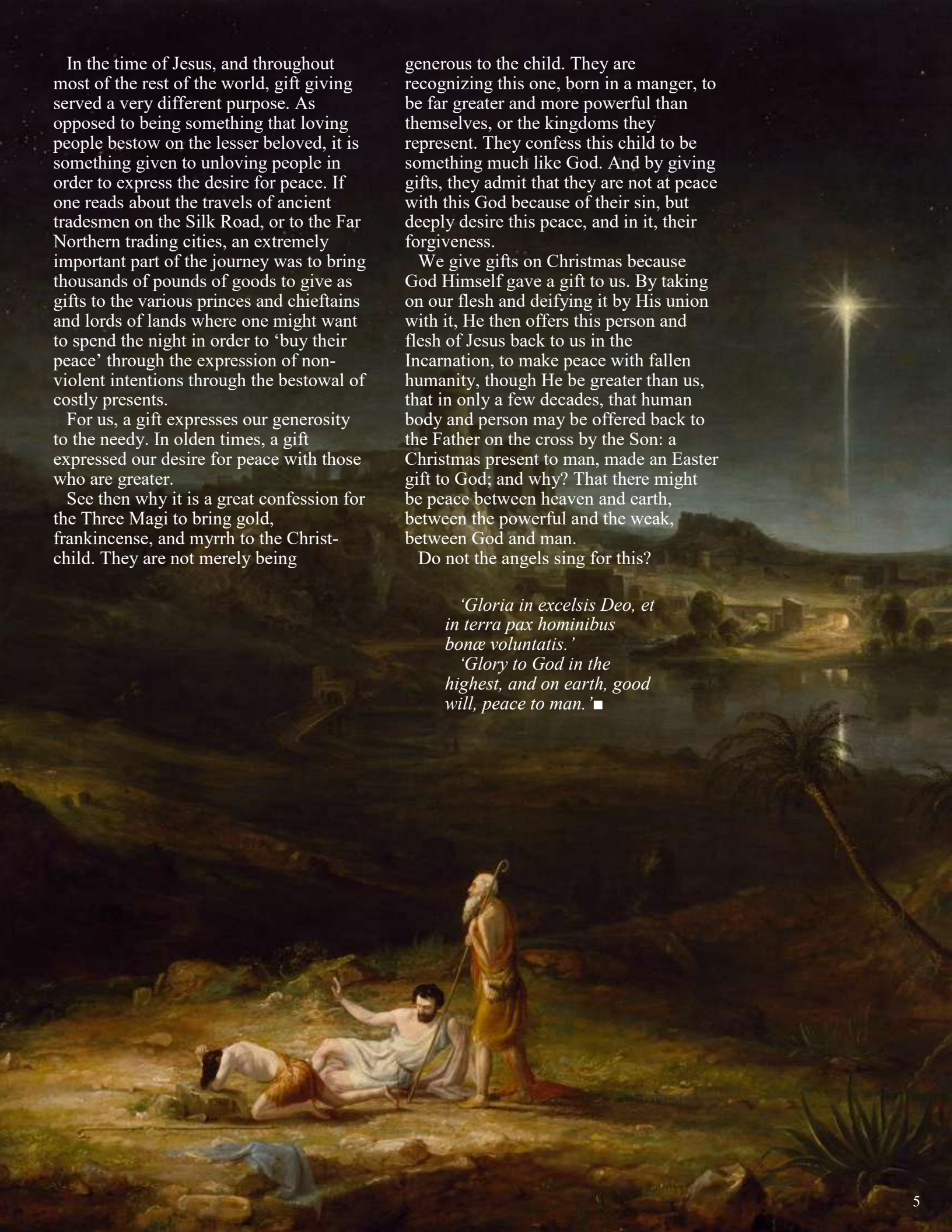
generous to the child. They are recognizing this one, born in a manger, to be far greater and more powerful than themselves, or the kingdoms they represent. They confess this child to be something much like God. And by giving gifts, they admit that they are not at peace with this God because of their sin, but deeply desire this peace, and in it, their forgiveness.

We give gifts on Christmas because God Himself gave a gift to us. By taking on our flesh and deifying it by His union with it, He then offers this person and flesh of Jesus back to us in the Incarnation, to make peace with fallen humanity, though He be greater than us, that in only a few decades, that human body and person may be offered back to the Father on the cross by the Son: a Christmas present to man, made an Easter gift to God; and why? That there might be peace between heaven and earth, between the powerful and the weak, between God and man.

Do not the angels sing for this?

*'Gloria in excelsis Deo, et
in terra pax hominibus
bonæ voluntatis.'*

*'Glory to God in the
highest, and on earth, good
will, peace to man.'* ■





CHRIST LUTHERAN

Quilters

Our Christmas quilters have made no less than *50 children's quilts!* Over the past two months, in a great flurry of fabric and thread, they have dedicated themselves to sewing small quilts for infants and children; these blankets will be delivered this month to the Center for Pregnancy Choices and to the Children's Hospital. They will be timely gifts of love to new mothers and hospitalized children—may they bear witness to our Savior's first love to man, which has given us this Christmas season!

If you would like to help sew, tie knots, or simply drink coffee and cheer our quilters on, their next quilting days are January 8 and 9, from 9am-noonish. The more, the merrier!

Thank you to these ladies for the love of Christ that they share through their quilting! ■





The Christmas P

the other Christmas greenery

Pastor Fields

As your pastor, I will now speak of a personal marital problem, to prove that I, too, am human.

Since our wedding, Sister Sara and I have disagreed deeply about the proper way in which to decorate the sacred Christmas tree.

In my family, we always decorated it in the most decorous and traditional manner: with only red and white lights, and spherical glass ornaments to represent fruit growing on the branches. This is the most excellent way.

However, against this expression of bourgeois tastefulness, Sister Sara always insists on defiling our beautiful Frasier fir with a cartoonish, warted, vile little gherkin. And, worst of all, when I speak against its presence, she defiantly establishes it among our tree's holy boughs with the only argument that I find invincible: it is a tradition.

A German tradition to be precise. A tradition of the very people who gave us the Christmas tree to begin with. And yet, after having spoken to several people from the northern European world, none seem to practice, or even be aware of this practice of the 'Christmas pickle.'

This reality caused me to research in depth the origin of this clearly inauthentic 'tradition.' Below are my findings that I have acquired on this subject to the best of my abilities:

The custom of the Christmas pickle seems to have started in the Great Lake states of our country, by most accounts Michigan, where a certain Import/Export store known as Woolworth's would sell European made ornaments during the winters of the 1880's. Among these ornaments were some brought in from Germany, where it was popular to decorate one's Christmas tree with vegetables: turnips, onions, radishes, and, of course, cucumbers.

Since all these vegetables were commonly pickled in the US, customers assumed that these were not merely Christmas veggies, but specifically Christmas pickles, which means that the cucumber could be nothing else but that venerable staple of American deli lunches, the kosher dill pickle.

These were all the rage in the Midwest, and it became quite gauche to complete one's holiday decorations without that supposed Old World touch granted by a little glass cornichon.

Since the Midwest was largely populated by German and Scandinavian immigrants at the time, as the custom spread to the rest of the country, it was assumed that the ornament not only originated in Germany, but that it was a sacred tradition of Northern European people everywhere.

It may not be, or have ever been, such a sacred tradition in the Old Country, but it has certainly become one today in much of US, and in many Lutheran households, and because of this, year upon year, I begrudgingly accept its presence between the scarlet and silver of our humble household tree.

ickle

Addendum

There is also a fun little custom that the Christmas pickle should be the very last ornament to be put on the tree, and that it should be hidden deep within the branches. After hiding it, the children are to look for it, and the first to find it is rewarded by being allowed to open a gift early, or to be the first to open a gift on Christmas morning. The origin of this custom is quite lost to the shroud of time, but most accounts seem to in some way connect it to a story where a German immigrant fighting during the Civil War was saved from starvation by being given a single miraculous pickle (by some accounts) or by discovering a lost barrel of pickles (according to some others). Thus, one must 'find' the Christmas pickle, along with its associated reward, in order to 'survive' until Christmas Day. ■





welcome
Home

On September 19, we bade farwell to one of our elders, Glen Hansford, as he flew off to foreign lands, called upon by our country for his service. He was gone for nearly two months, finally returning mid-November.

As a testament to Glen's sense of duty, the elders informed him that he had an elders meeting two days after he touched down on American soil... and he didn't miss the meeting! Little did he know, what began as business turned into a surprise welcome-home party! Pastor and the elders convened for a 'relaxed' meeting around the firepit at the Heds' house—meanwhile, church folks sneaked in the front door, laden with food and failing miserably to contain their excitement. Once the men finished their meeting and the door opened for them to come in from the cold, the whole house rang with a spirited round of 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow,' followed by a flurry of hugs and handshakes.

We are exceedingly grateful that God returned Glen to us safely. Thank you, everyone, for your prayers while he was away, and for your outpouring of love at his return. God is surely good to us!

Welcome home, Glen! ■





Hymn of the Month

Sister Sara

December—

O Jesus Christ,
Thy Manger Is

LSB 372

This profound little hymn begins with the image of the Christ Child's manger^{3/4}an image so mundane, it is deceptive. Our overfamiliarity with the Christmas creche may induce us to forget how troubling it is to man's imagination that Almighty God could be contained, period, let alone submit Himself to such humiliation as this... that the forger of galaxies should be so small and weak as to belong in an infant's bed. But this is the Incarnation: Christ has taken on the frailty of human flesh... *your* human flesh.

Setting forth the Incarnational theme of this hymn, allow me to reiterate that Gerhardt begins the stanza with the image of the *manger*: a feeding trough! This Word made flesh lies upon the place of feasting; the Lord's cradle foreshadows the Sacrament, wherein He is incarnated for His sheep to graze upon. When you kneel at the rail, you recline at the paradise of His manger, that you may feed upon the flesh of God, just as the stanza says.

The second stanza testifies to what theologians call the "two natures" of Christ: that He is both true God and true Man. His majesty and divine authority, as demonstrated in His miraculous taming of the wind and waves, meets us in the depths of our human weakness. "Thou, God's own Son," as we confess Him in the Nicene Creed, "With us art one": the Son has knit Himself forever into the flesh of mankind, that united with Him, we might be one with God. With this great consolation, we hear His echoing reassurance, "Take heart; it is I. Be not afraid" (Mark 6:50).

Stanza three poetically describes the "Great Exchange," that Christ gave us His perfection, while taking our guilt upon Himself. Immanuel, the Old Testament name bestowed on Jesus, means "God with us." This reiterates the previous stanza's emphasis on our union with Christ; and it is His very birth in our place that "doth quell the power of hell and Satan's bold deceiving." Gone is our primal sin, as Eve was deceived by the serpent, and now is the day of Jesus' victory!

The Text

1. O Jesus Christ,
Thy manger is
My paradise at which my soul reclineth.
For there, O Lord,
Doth lie the Word
Made flesh for us; herein Thy grace forth shineth.
2. He whom the sea
And wind obey
Doth come to serve the sinner in great meekness.
Thou, God's own Son,
With us art one,
Dost join us and our children in our weakness.
3. Thy light and grace
Our guilt efface,
Thy heav'nly riches all our loss retrieving.
Immanuel,
Thy birth doth quell
The pow'r of hell and Satan's bold deceiving.
4. Thou Christian heart,
Whoe'er thou art,
Be of good cheer and let no sorrow move thee!
For God's own Child,
In mercy mild,
Joins thee to Him; how greatly God must love thee!
5. Remember thou
What glory now
The Lord prepared thee for all earthly sadness.
The angel host
Can never boast
Of greater glory, greater bliss or gladness.
6. The world may hold
Her wealth and gold;
But thou, my heart, keep Christ as thy true treasure.
To Him hold fast
Until at last
A crown be thine and honor in full measure.

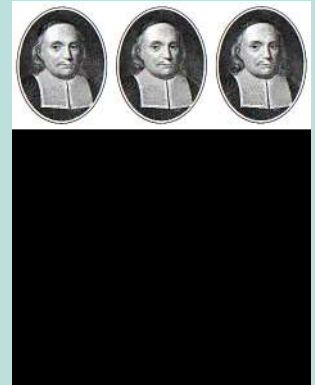
Having pondered the significance of the Incarnation, the hymn now turns to the singer, bringing the grace of the Incarnation into the believer's heart. Stanza four address you, the Christian, assuring you that this good cheer is yours! Therefore, "Be not afraid" (Mark 6:50), and "let no sorrow move thee." Jesus draws you into Himself; He joins you, O little Christian, to the eternal Godhead. Truly, "how greatly God must love thee!" (1 John 4:9).

Fun Facts

Stanza five magnificently expresses the Theology of the Cross: God reveals Himself to us not by our own reason or strength (i.e., the Theology of Glory), but in Christ crucified. It is in the suffering of the cross that we see who God is, and understand His salvation for us. If we are indeed united to Christ, then we too can expect the suffering of the cross in our own life, just as the hymn tells us: “What glory now the Lord prepared thee for all earthly sadness.” But just as Christ’s glory was manifest in His suffering, so too do we find joy in bearing our cross. Not even the resplendent angelic host can make this boast, for this privilege is given to us alone who are united to Christ.

While stanza five fortified us in our present suffering, stanza six points us toward the joy of the world to come. Whatever enticements this life might offer us, whatever wealth and gold, all of it pales in comparison to the treasure of Christ. Therefore, “hold fast until at last a crown be thine and honor in full measure.” Here our theme of the Incarnation has come full circle: at Christmas, Christ came into our flesh; but on that final day, Christ will take our flesh (that is, us) into God. And surely, there is no greater crown and honor than to be united with God forever. ■

Paul Gerhardt, one of our most beloved Lutheran hymn-writers (who is responsible for sixteen hymns in our Lutheran Service Book!), is still considered Germany’s greatest hymn writer. Gerhardt’s life was marked by tragedy: his parents each died when he was a young teenager, his house and possessions were destroyed in a town-wide fire, he was removed from his parish as a priest for not confessing Calvinism, four of his five children died in infancy, and his wife died when his sole remaining child was six. He survived the Thirty Years’ War and the Plague. And yet, the Lord works amidst pain and suffering, as He certainly did through the pen of Gerhardt, blessing many generations to come.



Lutheran hymnody of the 1600s bore the doctrinal rigor of the Reformation, but in a deeply subjective, devotional tone. Unlike the laity (and even clergy!) just a century earlier, this generation was raised upon a relatively solid catechetical foundation. The 1600s’ tumult of war and the Bubonic Plague provided a fresh challenge to the Church: surrounded—*intimately*—by grotesque death on every side, how does the Christian live? Where does he find consolation and hope? The resulting marriage of sound theology with the depths of human suffering produced some of our most beautiful hymnody, wherein the singer’s comfort as a Christian is found in union with Christ.



Hymns by Paul Gerhardt in the Lutheran Service Book

- O Lord, How Shall I Meet You (334)
- All My Heart Again Rejoices (360)
- O Jesus Christ, Thy Manger Is (372)
- A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth (438)
- O Sacred Head, Now Wounded (449, 450)
- Upon the Cross Extended (453)
- Awake, My Heart, with Gladness (467)
- All Christians Who Have Been Baptized (596)
- Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me (683)
- If God Himself Be for Me (724)
- Evening and Morning (726)
- Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing (737)
- Entrust Your Days and Burdens (754)
- Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me (756)
- Now Rest Beneath Night’s Shadow (880)
- I Will Sing My Maker’s Praise (977)



a brief note

about a really old icon

On the next page you will see a really old icon. This particular icon is currently illustrating Pastor's latest series entitled 'Visible & Invisible,' about the relationship between the physical and the spiritual. If you don't mind, spare me a moment to tell you why this icon—besides being really old—is really cool.

Its name is *Christ Pantocrator*, literally meaning 'Christ, Ruler of All.' As one of the oldest Byzantine icons in existence, it hails all the way back to the 6th century; this is particularly remarkable because it survived the iconoclasm of the Byzantine Empire (i.e., the destruction of icons... ask Pastor about that crazy controversy). It is from Saint Catherine's Monastery, which is built at the foot of Mount Sinai on the Sinai Peninsula (of Moses and the Ten Commandments fame).

Although its history is interesting enough, the really cool part lies in the substance of the painting itself. You have probably noticed that Jesus looks weirdly lopsided: His face is obviously asymmetrical in this icon. Can we chalk this up to the limitations of an amateur artist, or...? Spoiler, there is

something theological going on here!

Christ Pantocrator depicts what has been historically interpreted as the two natures of Christ. On the left, His face appears flawless and serene, while the right is dark and haggard. The left represents His divine nature, pure and undefiled from all eternity; the right shows the humiliation of His Incarnation, replete with its suffering. On His 'divine' side, He raises His hand in blessing: the thumb, ring finger, and pinky come together representing the Trinity; the index and middle fingers signify the Son's two natures, with the index finger raised as the divine nature and the middle finger lowered slightly for the human nature (this is a common hand position for Christian blessing). On His 'human' side, Jesus holds the Gospel, which is the eternal Word made manifest in the physical—a reference, doubtless, to His Incarnation.

The illustration above shows the original icon (left), a symmetrical version using only Jesus' 'divine' side (middle), and a symmetrical version using only His 'human' side (right).■

Visible



e & Invisible

The Three Advents of the Body of Christ

Pastor Fields

As we study a little the biblical understanding of the goodness of God's creation, both physical and spiritual, and with it the goodness of man, both body and soul, let us briefly speak of the confession of this theological fact in the rhythm of the Church year.

The Church Year begins with the Season of Advent, which, together with Christmas, occupies almost the entire month of December. We recognize both as the seasons devoted to the coming of Christ: Advent, a season of anticipation of the Lord's coming by the prophets; and Christmas, a season of the realization of the Lord's coming in His miraculous birth by the Blessed Virgin Mary.

But we tend to leave something out: it is not simply about the Lord's coming, His advent, but specifically His advent in the flesh. More specifically, in human flesh, our very own human flesh. This is to say that He comes to us not merely as the invisible God, but as the invisible God made visible by taking on a physical form, and not just any physical form, but the form of a servant, that is, the form of a man. He is God who has become Man, and therefore becomes Man who is God, and it is as this theandric person, this 'God-Man' that Christ comes to us during this season, not once, but three times.

You see, we tend to focus on Advent as being about Christ as God and Man coming to us in His birth to His virgin mother. However, the season of Advent is actually about every coming of Christ to us in the Flesh. This is made clear to us in that the Gospel reading for the First Sunday of Advent is almost always about the Triumphal Entry, that is, His coming to suffer for us as He heads toward the cross. It seems odd to us sometimes that, in a season

leading up to Jesus' birth, we begin by focussing on His soon-approaching death, but Advent is not about specifically Jesus' birth (that is the territory of the Twelve Days of Christmas), but about every coming for us for our salvation, and that begins with His coming as a sacrifice.

With that said, this month we do not only ponder Christ's coming in the Flesh at His birth, and in His Passion, but also in His Judgment on the Last day, something we focus on during the Last Sunday of the Church Year which immediately precedes and provides a bridge liturgically into Adventide. For His coming to judge both the living and the dead is also a coming not just as the Second Person of the Trinity, but as Man.

Also, we remember yet one more 'advent' of our Lord during this time, His coming in His body and blood during the celebration of the Eucharist, that by His transfigured and glorious body, He might join Himself to our flesh, and in turn glorify us by His divine presence. It is no coincidence that the Season Advent culminates with the Feast of the Nativity, more commonly known as Christmas, the Christ-Mass, the Eucharist of the Incarnate Deity.

... He might join
Himself to our flesh,
and in turn glorify us
by His divine
presence.

So let us, this season, meditate on the many times our Lord has come, and does come, and will come to us, in His divinity, and in His humanity, now, and until that time when time will be replaced with eternity, in the life of the world to come. ■



It seems Churchly people always enjoy learning about the customs and traditions practiced around the world that have to do with Christian holidays, and so I thought I would write a little, as I have before, about some Christmas traditions. However, there are so many that it would be impossible to even begin to touch on even a small sampling of them. So I thought that perhaps I would touch on traditions associated with Christmas dinner. This too is too vast a subject on which to treat. Christmas desserts, perhaps? Also much too big a topic.

After much thought, it came to me as a Christmas miracle. The subject of our discourse shall be: *Christmas cookies!*

Cookies are an everytime food, as I am often reminded by small children. But there seem to be some universally agreed upon special connection between baking cookies and the season of Advent and Christmas. There is nothing that sweetly whispers 'Christmas' like enjoying a sweet little cookie over a glass of milk whilst looking out upon a snow covered field (or here in the South, looking upon what we imagine snow might look like if we could remember the last time we had any). Such cookies are so proper to Christmas that even St. Nicholas approves of the practice.

With that said...



In America: A Little Sugar on the Lips

In this, The United States, the most powerful nation in all of human history, we love to welcome the Lord with nothing else but the humble sugar cookie, though in many forms. Though we often enjoy the more nuanced flavors of certain sugar cookie varieties, such as the bold gingerbread cookie, or the warm and tempting snicker-doodle, perhaps few things are more fondly remembered in our childhood memories than the classic frosted cookie cutout, a simple sugar cookie, in the shape of a festive object, such as a Christmas tree or a reindeer, decorated with pure saccharine frosting mixed with only the finest food colorings.

behold, some Nativity treats to enjoy from around the world!

CHRISTMAS] dinner



Among the Germans: Something with an Edge



When we Americans wish to serve a cookie with a little more of an Old World flare, we often buy or make Christmas cookies out of the German tradition. Most often these are similar to American sugar cookies, but with a cutting accent of spice, less sweet, and more ball-shaped than flat. Furthermore, they tend to be adorned with either powdered sugar or, when one is feeling fancy, a dollop of chocolate or a preserve. A perfect example of this is the classic *pfeffernuesse*, flavored with clove, cinnamon, allspice, and, as the name would suggest, black pepper.

The Sicilians: They Think They Invented Everything



Including snow! By far the most popular Christmas cookie among Sicilians in Europe and Italian-Americans here in

states is the regal *pizzelle*, a thin cookie made from a somewhat watery batter, flavored with little more than anise seed and sometimes citrus or nuts (most commonly orange or almond). They are always pressed into the shape of a snowflake, since Sicilians of course know best what form ice should take in the winter.



The Greeks: Olive Oil Cures All Ills

The Greeks are known for making a simple cookie known as *melomakarona*, literally a ‘honey-blessing.’ As the name suggests, it is sweetened with honey, and, like most Greek things, replaces the butter in most cookies with liberal amounts of olive oil, and is flavored with a touch of brandy.



The Other Italians: Something with a Little Pizzazz



In the States, we love to put sprinkles on everything from cake to ice cream to, yes, even cookies. However, this often causes us to forget where the simple sugar sprinkle first gained popularity: in Italy. Specifically, in Italy, it is a necessary topping to a Christmas cookie made with milk, sugar, lemon and lard. Try it at home, and eat something with a little *pizzazze*.

The French: More Panache than Pizzazz

The French enjoy nothing more during Christmas than those fancy colored macaroons, a treat made from two small cookies flavored with almond paste (and these days, a fruit extract) with a cream filling between them. Leave it to the French to make a feast fanciful.

The Jews: What Do You Want?



The fortune cookie is near and dear to the hearts of American Jews during the season of Christmas. With its encouraging message and slightly sweet flavor, it makes one feel that not all is lost.■

“The lack of mystery in our modern life is our downfall and our poverty. A human life is worth as much as the respect it holds for the mystery. We retain the child in us to the extent that we honor the mystery. Therefore, children have open, wide-awake eyes, because they know that they are surrounded by the mystery. They are not yet finished with this world; they still don't know how to struggle along and avoid the mystery, as we do. We destroy the mystery because we sense that here we reach the boundary of our being, because we want to be lord over everything and have it at our disposal, and that's just what we cannot do with the mystery. Living without mystery means knowing nothing of the mystery of our own life, nothing of the mystery of another person, nothing of the mystery of the world; it means passing over our own hidden qualities and those of others and the world. It means remaining on the surface, taking the world seriously only to the extent that it can be calculated and exploited, and not going beyond the world of calculation and exploitation. Living without mystery means not seeing the crucial processes of life at all and even denying them.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer



Blessed Advent. This pre-Christmas season of the church year is one I like to spend reading the words of those who faithfully awaited the incarnation. This unflinchingly leads me to the pages of Isaiah. This Israelite prophet of the 8th century BC was inspired to compose one of the lengthiest and richest books of the Bible. Isaiah is especially relevant this time of year, as it is saturated with promises of the coming Messiah—the Chosen One of Israel. The one we know as Jesus. Writing more than seven centuries before our Savior’s birth, Isaiah’s words testify to the eternal plan of our Lord to save and bless his people. A brief journey through this scroll makes this message abundantly and joyfully clear.

In Isaiah 7, we read: “the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Ages of expectant waiting passed, and indeed, a virgin *did* conceive. Mary bore a Son, who was called Immanuel, which means “God with us.”

In Isaiah 9, we learn more: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined...” Indeed, the world was in darkness without Jesus. But the Father reached into that dark world and blessed it with the light of Christ. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.” This answers our next question: *Why* will this child be born? Isaiah makes this answer plain: to bring about an eternal kingdom of justice and peace—two things we sorely lack and desperately need in our world.

And what kind of person will this Chosen One be? According to Isaiah 42, a servant: “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him... I the Lord have called thee in

righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness...” That’s right. Jesus came to serve *us*, to save *us*... undeserving wretches though we are.

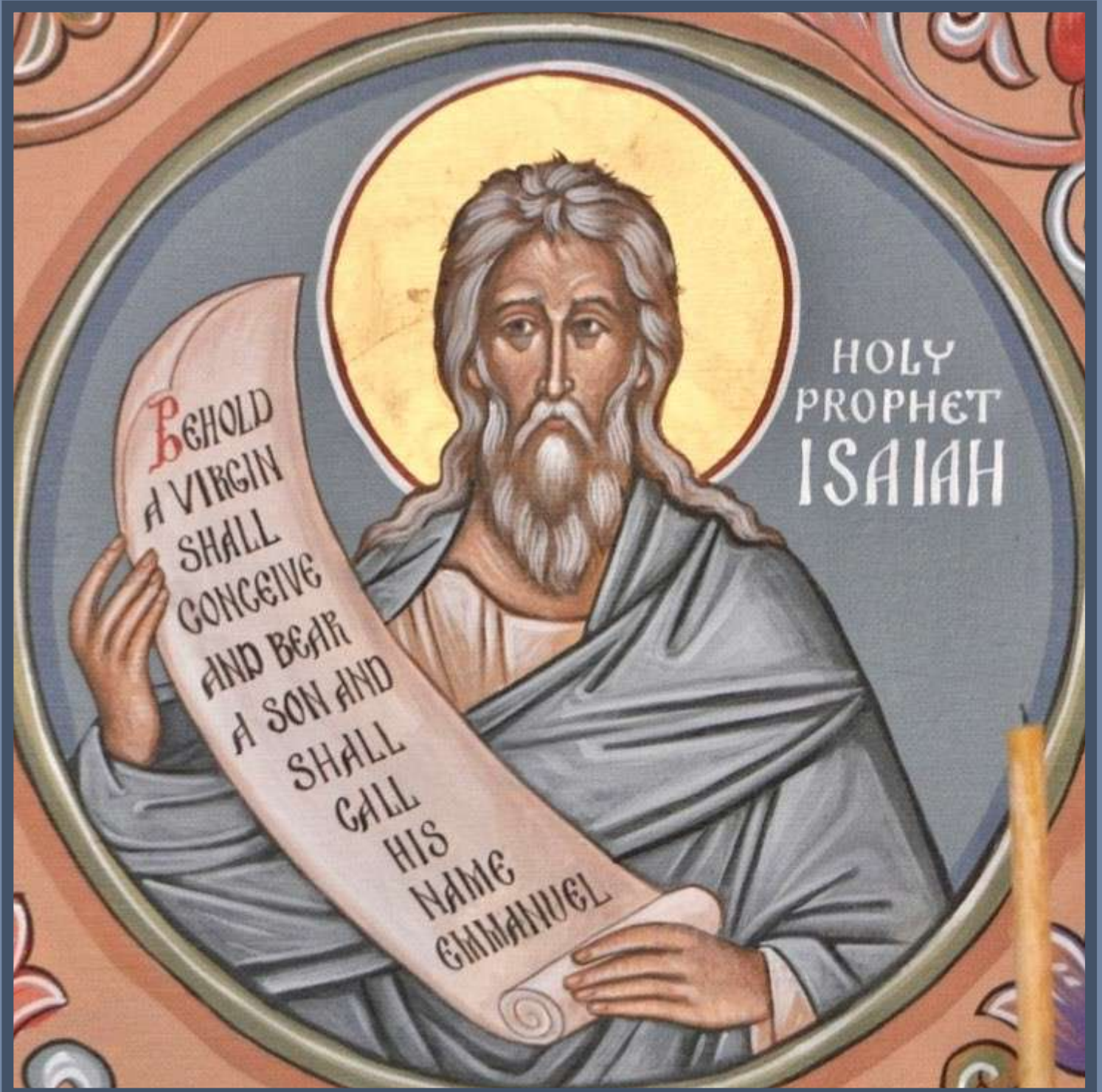
How could such grace be? How could this promise be fulfilled in a world as sinful and terrifying as our own? In Isaiah 43, we read: “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine... For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.” Isaiah knew how undeserving of this immeasurable gift we were and are. He even said, “all our righteous deeds are as filthy rags.” (Is 64:6). But God loved us despite our treachery and offered us forgiveness through his Son. In Isaiah 53, the means by which the incarnate Messiah will accomplish our reconciliation is revealed: “He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and by his wounds we are healed.” God’s Chosen One, prophesied to be born of a virgin, was born to die. Therefore, the celebration of Jesus’ birth is not merely about the manger. It’s also about the cross.

God’s message spoken through the ages by Isaiah gave his people hope. And now, in these last days, these words give us comfort and assurance in the truth of the Gospel. How could we ever doubt, when Isaiah foretold the birth, death, and divine plan of our Lord more than seven centuries before they unfolded? It is no wonder, then, why Jesus revealed himself to the people of Nazareth by reading the scroll of Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke 4:18-19).

Blessed Advent. The Chosen One whom Isaiah foretold is in our midst in this season, speaking to us and hearing our prayers—calling us all by name.■

The
Expectant Joy
of Advent

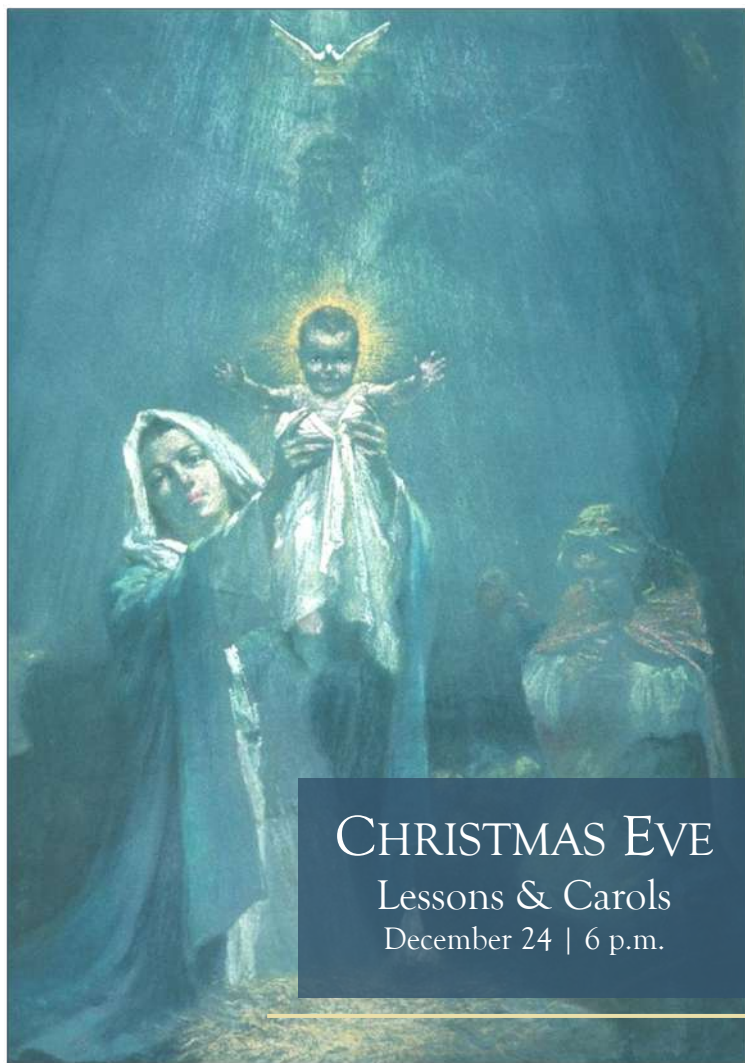
Jonathan Kettler



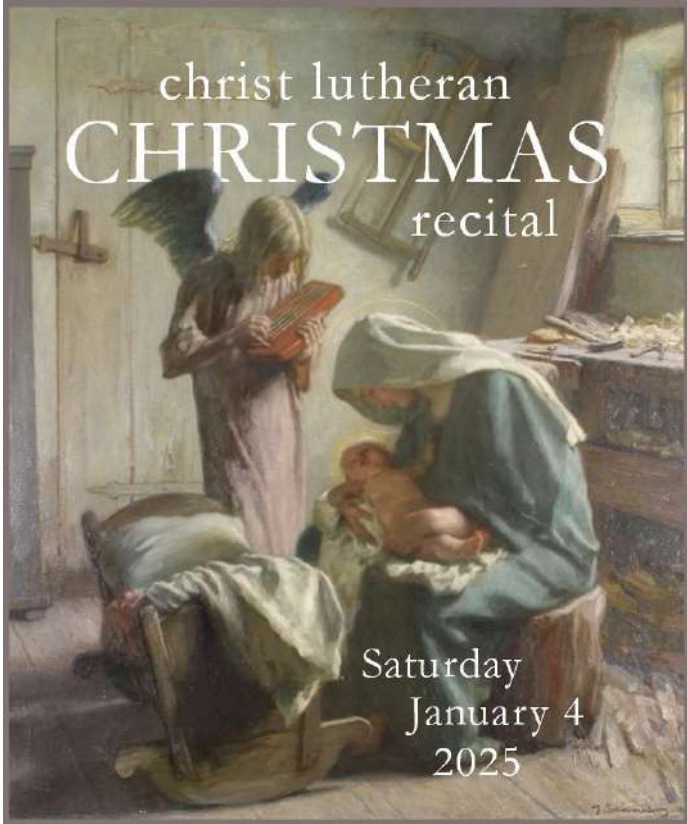


THIS MONTH

At Christ Lutheran



CHRISTMAS EVE
Lessons & Carols
December 24 | 6 p.m.



christ lutheran
CHRISTMAS
recital

Saturday
January 4
2025



**Advent
Suppers**
Wednesdays | 6 p.m.

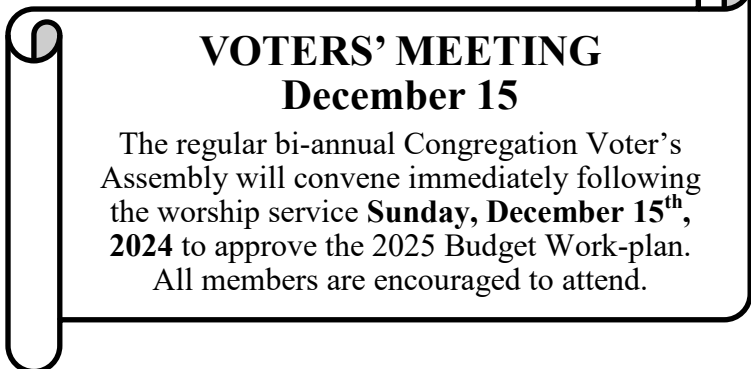


christmas poinsettias

\$10 each

Sign up at the narthex table to provide poinsettias for the chancel on Christmas.

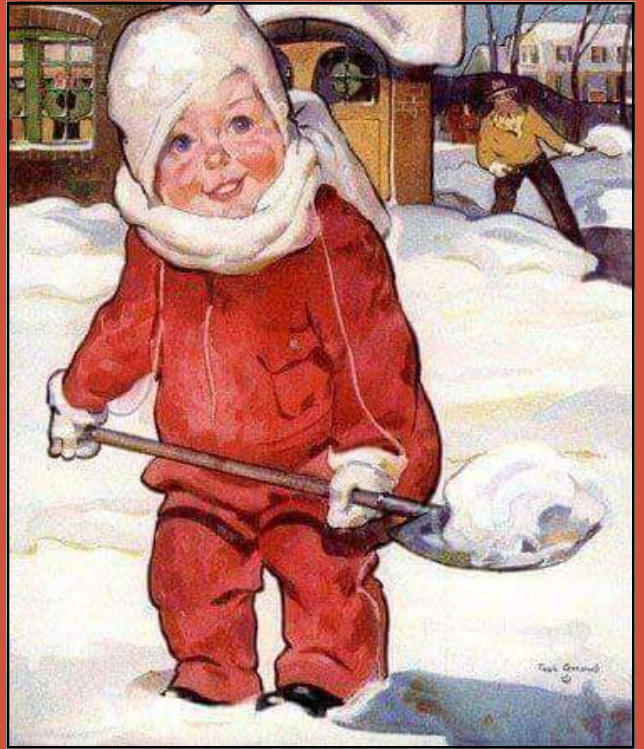
Take yours home after the service.



VOTERS' MEETING **December 15**

The regular bi-annual Congregation Voter's Assembly will convene immediately following the worship service **Sunday, December 15th, 2024** to approve the 2025 Budget Work-plan. All members are encouraged to attend.

Christmas Work Day



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

Come ready for coffee, cocoa, and Christmas cheer!

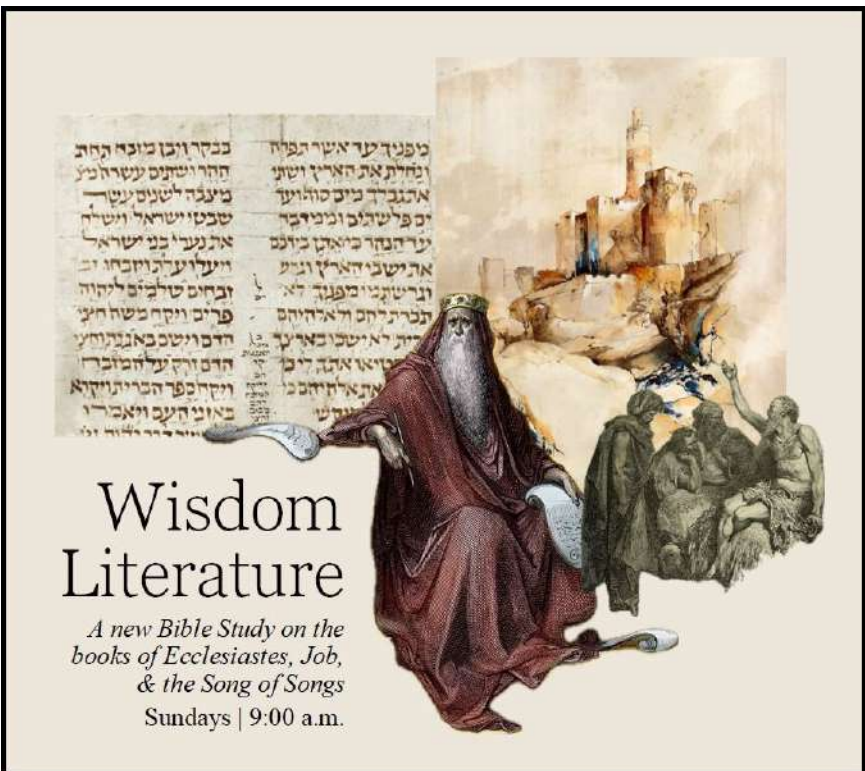
Work Day
Saturday, December 7
8:00 a.m.



advent vespers
the Incarnation & the Kingdom of Heaven
Wednesdays | 7p.m.



THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY
+ December 25 +
10:30 a.m.



Wisdom Literature
A new Bible Study on the books of Ecclesiastes, Job, & the Song of Songs
Sundays | 9:00 a.m.



Artwork in This Issue:

- Cover: *The Birth of Jesus Christ*, Carl Heinrich Bloch, 1834-1890.
Page 4: *The Angel Appearing to the Shepherds*, Thomas Cole, 1833-1834.
Page 12: *Design for an Organ*, Johann Georg Dirr, 1700s.
Page 16: *Christ Pantocrator*, Saint Catherine's Monastery, 6th century.
Page 21: *Angels Appearing before the Shepherds*, Henry Ossawa Tanner, c. 1910.
Page 23: *Icon of Isaiah the Prophet, Christ the Savior* Orthodox Christian Church, Chicago, IL.



The Lutheran Witness magazine
Subscribe today at cph.org/witness

Christmas Choir

Wednesdays
7:45 pm

DECORATION DAY!

Come decorate the church with us!
Saturday | December 14 | 8:00 a.m.



Join us for a

COMMUNIO

CHRISTMAS

Sunday
December 15
101 Lansdale Dr., Madison

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



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

ACTSEFW
CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

Symposia Series 2025

January 21–24, 2025
40th Annual Symposium on Exegetical Theology
48th Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions

December 2024

PRAYER FAMILIES and BIRTHDAYS	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Barbara Glenn 3—Nathan Hansford 3—William Hansford 5—Leslie Riddlehoover	ADVENT I 9 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service	2	3	4 <i>St. John of Damascus</i> 6 p.m. Dinner 7 p.m. Evensong 7:45p.m. Choir	5	6 6:30 a.m. Bible Study <i>St. Nicholas</i>	7 <i>St. Ambrose</i>
Allen & Sabrina Goodlett 8—Bob Pedersen 9—Allison Agent 11—Savannah Kettler 13—Bill Cookston 14—Gloria Pedersen 14—Natalie Rudenske	ADVENT II 9 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service	9 6:15 p.m. Elders Mtg.	10 6:15 p.m. Council Mtg.	11 6 p.m. Dinner 7 p.m. Evensong 7:45p.m. Choir	12	13 6:30 a.m. Bible Study <i>St. Lucy</i>	14 8 a.m. Work Day/ Decoration Day 9 a.m. Decoration Day: Kids!
Haines Family 16—Lori Held 16—Margaret Haynes 17—Curt Dickens 19—Chuck Rubisoff 21—Jo Rudenske	ADVENT III 9 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service 11:30 a.m. Voters Meeting 5 p.m. Communion <i>Christmas</i> <i>St. Ignatius of Antioch</i>	16	17 <i>St. Daniel & the Three Young Men</i>	18 6 p.m. Dinner 7 p.m. Evensong 7:45p.m. Choir	19 <i>St. Abraham</i>	20 6:30 a.m. Bible Study <i>St. Katharina von Bora</i>	21 <i>St. Thomas</i>
Merina Hansen 27—Joshua Bowman 28—Wyatt Coté	ADVENT IV 9 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service 6 p.m. Caroling	23	24 CHRISTMAS EVE 6 p.m. Lessons & Carols <i>Ssts. Adam & Eve</i>	25 FEAST OF THE NATIVITY 10:30 a.m. Divine Service	26 <i>St. Stephen</i>	27 6:30 a.m. Bible Study <i>St. John</i>	28 <i>The Holy Innocents</i>
Hansford Family 29—Eddie Gallarno 30—Allen Goodlett 2—Larry Bowman 3—Christa Kettler	CHRISTMAS I 9 a.m. Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Divine Service <i>St. David</i>	30	31	1 FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION & NAME OF JESUS 	2	3 6:30 a.m. Bible Study	4 2:00 p.m. Christmas Recital