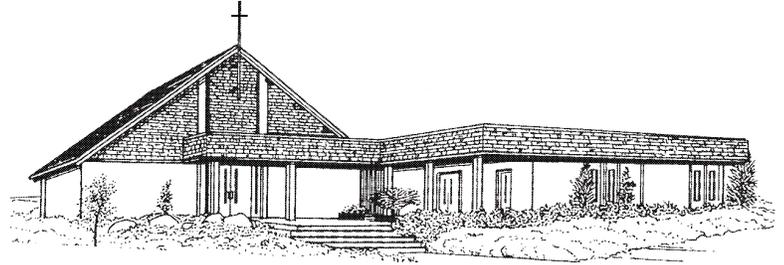




The Reporter



‘Finding God before It’s Too Late’

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I would like to thank Bill Waters for sharing the following article he received from one of our former pastors, Joel Gerlach. It should make each of us think about what is happening in our world and in our own community. It should also make us think about what is happening in our own families, and in our personal lives. Ben Stein’s final thought is one worthy of serious consideration: “Funny how we can be more worried about what other people think of us than what God thinks of us.”

The following was written by Ben Stein and recited by him on CBS Sunday Morning Commentary, November 11, 2012.

My Confession:

I am a Jew and every single one of my ancestors was Jewish. And it does not bother me even a little bit when people call those beautiful lit up, bejeweled trees, Christmas trees. I don’t feel threatened. I don’t feel discriminated against. That’s what they are, Christmas trees.

It doesn’t bother me a bit when people say, ‘Merry Christmas’ to me. I don’t think they are slighting me or getting ready to put me in a ghetto. In fact, I kind of like it. It shows that we are all brothers and sisters celebrating this happy time of year. It doesn’t bother me at all that there is a manger scene on display at a key intersection near my beach house in Malibu. If people want a crèche, it’s just fine with me as is the Menorah a few hundred yards away.

I don’t like getting pushed around for being a Jew, and I don’t think Christians like getting pushed around for being Christians. I think people who believe in God are sick and tired of getting pushed around, period. I have no idea where the concept came from, that America is an explicitly atheist country. I can’t find it in the Constitution and I don’t like it being shoved down my throat.

Or maybe I can put it another way: where did the idea come from that we should worship celebrities and we aren’t allow to worship God as we understand him? I guess that’s a sign that I’m getting old, too. But there are a lot of us who are wondering where these celebrities came from and where the America we knew went to.

Continued on page 2

Finding God, from page 1

In light of the many jokes we send to one another for a laugh, this is a little different: This is not intended to be a joke; it's not funny, it's intended to get you thinking in the light of recent events . . . terrorist attacks, school shootings, etc. I think it started when Madeline Murray O'Hare (she was murdered, her body was found a few years ago) complained she didn't want prayer in our schools, and we said, OK. Then someone said you better not read the Bible in school. The Bible says thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal, and love your neighbor as yourself. And we said OK.

Then Dr. Benjamin Spock said we shouldn't spank our children when they misbehave, because their little personalities would be warped and we might damage their self-esteem (Dr. Spock's son committed suicide). We said an expert should know what he's talking about. And we said OK.

Now we're asking ourselves why our children have no conscience, why they don't know right from wrong, and it doesn't bother them to kill strangers, their classmates, and themselves.

Probably, if we think about it long and hard enough, we can figure it out. I think it has a great deal to do with "WE REAP WHAT WE SOW."

Funny how simple it is for people to trash God and then wonder why the world's going to hell. Funny how we believe what the newspapers say, but question what the Bible says. Funny how you can send 'jokes' through email and they spread like wildfire, but when you start sending messages regarding the Lord, people think twice about sharing. Funny how lewd, crude, vulgar and obscene articles pass freely through cyberspace, but public discussion of God is suppressed in the school and workplace.

Are you laughing yet?

Funny how when you forward this message, you will not send it to many on your address list because you're not sure what they believe, or what they will think of you for sending it. Funny how we can be more worried about what other people think of us than what God thinks of us.

Pass it on if you think it has merit. If not, then just discard it . . . no one will know you did. But, if you discard this thought process, don't sit back and complain about what bad shape the world is in.

My Best Regards, honestly and respectfully -- Ben Stein.

"Funny how we can be more worried about what other people think of us than what God thinks." Ben Stein's article is a reminder of how Jesus addressed the same issue. In unmistakable words he said: "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (*Matthew 10:32-33*). Our lives are all about a clear confession of our Lord. We are not set apart by his forgiveness to hide the light of our faith under a box. Nor does our love in return for Jesus' great love lead us to hope we can fly under the radar screen. Neither did Jesus call us to be his servants and witnesses so we could practice a "covert" ministry.

We are to be bold. We are to be confident. We are to be ready to give the reason for the hope we have. While our goal is not to become religious zealots, we do need to visibly take a stand on our faith, and for our faith. Yes, people will be put off by our undisguised confession and by the open practice of our faith. Still the question remains valid, "who are we more worried about?"

As you and I celebrate the birth of our Savior, and as we live our lives to the glory, praise, and confession of our Lord, we need to do it with joy and boldness. We need to remember the shepherds who "spread the words concerning what had been told them about this child."

Thanksgiving Dinner 2012

By Carl Schueler

As part of a yearly tradition, friends and family members of Our Redeemer gathered to enjoy a Thanksgiving dinner in the Fellowship Hall. This “pre-Thanksgiving” pot-luck was organized by a number of the members along with Karolyn Hanna who provided decorations and an entertaining program after dinner.

A few attendees were visitors, including family and friends. As in previous years, tables were set with festive seasonal decorations and there was a fine array of excellent dishes including roasted white meat turkey, stuffing, mashed and sweet potatoes, gravy, cranberry salad, other salads and side dishes. Indeed, 26 attendees enjoyed a fine meal with plenty available for those who wanted to partake more than once.

Following dinner and conversation, Karolyn interrupted the attendees prior to allowing anyone to try the several desserts with an introduction to the evening’s program. I, at least, appreciated the timing, as I was not ready to enjoy dessert immediately after sampling all of the available delicious foods that were served for dinner.



The program borrowed from previous years, yet it was an enjoyable and entertaining review. We were given a multiple choice Thanksgiving Day quiz, with the winner receiving a special prize. The quiz covered the history and origins of many of our Thanksgiving traditions including such questions as:

- ☞ When was the first Thanksgiving dinner? (1621 at Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts)
- ☞ Can a wild Turkey fly, and if so, how fast? (Yes, up to 55 miles per hour!)
- ☞ Who suggested the Turkey as the National mascot (rather than the Eagle)? (Benjamin Franklin)
- ☞ Approximately what percentage of American homes serve turkey on Thanksgiving? (90%)
- ☞ Which U.S. President specified that Thanksgiving would fall on the last Thursday of November? (Abraham Lincoln)
- ☞ Which President advanced Thanksgiving Day from the last Thursday to the fourth Thursday of November to extend the pre-Christmas shopping season and improve the National economy? (Franklin Roosevelt)

It may come as no surprise that Al Todd, who’s college major was History, took the grand prize, but there were a few others who were not too far behind.

If you have not attended one of our annual Thanksgiving potlucks, make plans to attend next year! Bring friends or relatives - anyone who may be visiting you over the holidays! And blessings to all this year as we continue to celebrate the chief blessing of salvation in Christ every day!

Give thanks to the Lord,
for He is good, and His
mercy endures forever!

So Many Denominations: Why I'm WELS

By Pastor James Hein

(Recommended reading submitted by Al Todd)

Several years back, the United Methodist Church (UMC) launched a multimillion dollar advertising campaign, targeting young Americans, with the slogan "Open Minds. Open Hearts. Open Doors." I was reminded of this as my wife mentioned to me she heard a UMC promotional ad run while listening to Spotify Radio the other day. Spotify is a music listening tool aimed primarily at young Facebook users – precisely the demographic the UMC is now attempting to reach.

The UMC has lost approximately 3 million members in the past 40 years or so (from 11 to 8 million). Thus, the massive advertising efforts.

Some would look at the "Open Minds. Open Hearts. Open Doors." motto and suggest that it's a beautiful depiction of God's unconditional and inviting love. They would even point to various national awards the slogan has won as validation that it is a good tagline. Cynics might say that this motto was simply abbreviated from the longer slogan which included "Open Closets, Open Biblical Interpretation, and Open to Multiple Pathways to Salvation."

To be fair, in official documentation, in their *Book of Discipline*, the UMC has repeatedly reaffirmed "homosexual practice" to be "incompatible with Christian teaching" consistently since 1972. But in practice, the UMC has more often than not simply tried to avoid such taboo cultural questions. And when official votes have been taken on such issues, the results have been, by no means, overwhelming.

Having now read a number of documents and blogs by Methodist members, it's clear to me that those within the Methodist Church perceive it, to a degree, as a church without an identity, a body that doesn't know what it stands for anymore. This is all a little strange to me since I feel that one of the main reasons why I'm a pastor in the WELS is because of the brilliant teaching of the man often credited as the theological father of the Methodist Church: John Wesley.

So how did studying John Wesley affirm my Confessional Lutheran beliefs? In my second year of systematic theology at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Prof. Rich Gurgel exposed me to the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral." Fortunately for me, as I'd had to no math courses since high school, this had nothing to do with geometry, but theology. "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" was coined by Albert Outler based on Wesley's teaching.



John Wesley stated that the reason why we all arrive at the theological conclusions that we do is based on what we emphasize as authoritative while we're forming our doctrinal beliefs. There are four pillars that every Christian (or Christian denomination) uses to filter beliefs: 1) Scripture, 2) Reason, 3) Tradition and 4) Experience. Every Christian church body emphasizes these to differing degrees when they establish their beliefs. This understanding of biblical interpretation is *THE* reason why we see so many different denominations.

I learned the Wesleyan Quadrilateral when I started dating Adrian (now my wife) who had an Assembly of God background, furthering my curiosity about other denominations. When I figured out that one could use the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to graph churches and what they emphasize in doctrine relative to other churches, I did so. I started looking very carefully at different denominations' theological backgrounds and confessions of faith and charted them.

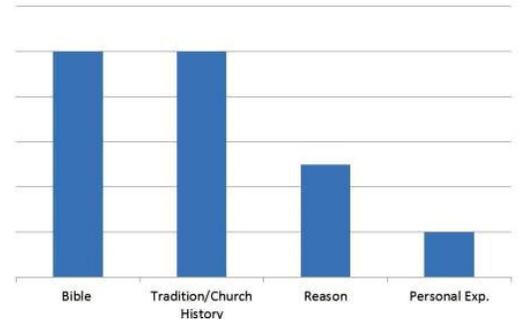
Let me give you a brief glance at what I'm talking about, with some explanation. Now bear in mind, EVERY Christian denomination, by definition of their being Christian, uses the Bible. Therefore, it is not sufficient to say that "we use the Bible to form our beliefs." Don't be fooled when people say that. The question is whether or not any additional factors strongly influence one's doctrine.

Continued on page 5

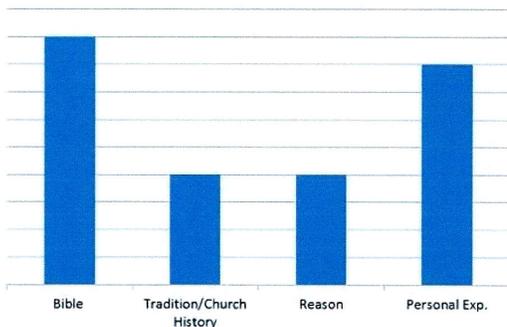
Why I'm WELS, from page 4

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Nonetheless, RCC leadership is perceived to have the right to repeatedly reinterpret what Scripture says. The Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility would suggest that church leadership has the same weight and authority as the Bible itself does. The problem with that, of course, is that everyone, including the RCC would freely admit that humans are flawed and sinful, and therefore even humans in important and influential positions can and do make mistakes. The RCC has openly acknowledged mistakes in church history by church leadership (e.g. Sale of indulgences; Spanish Inquisition). If you truly believe that the Bible is inspired and inerrant, but that humans make mistakes, wouldn't that naturally suggest that it is a dangerous position to take in suggesting that the pope holds the same type of authority that the Bible itself does? For the two to be on equal levels of authority, then the pope must be perfect (which he is not) or the Bible must be imperfect (which it attests it is not – 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). As all humans, even church leaders past and present, are flawed, they must necessarily be weighted less in the formation of doctrine in order for us to have a correct biblical interpretation.

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH



CHARISMATIC CHURCHES
(E.G. ASSEMBLY OF GOD, MANY NON-DENOMINATIONALS)



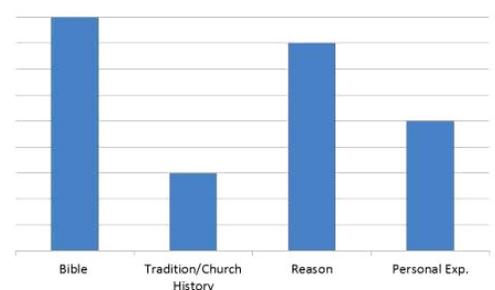
While I'm certainly speaking in general terms here, churches that strongly emphasize the spiritual gifts of individuals often have a tendency to overemphasize individuals at the expense of *the* individual (Jesus). They additionally tend to come out of an Arminian theological background which places a great deal of importance on free will and personal decisions. Most Arminians will be able to tell you the date on which "I made *my* decision for Jesus", a teaching that would fly in the face of what the Apostle Paul says about us all being spiritually dead by nature (Eph. 2:1-10). Charismatics value *feeling* the power of Christ. But the reality is that we all know our feelings have led us down dangerous paths before, and therefore, we cannot trust them wholeheartedly. Some days I might *feel* like the greatest Christian on the planet. Other days I might *feel* like the worst heathen there

is. But my perception of self counts little towards my eternal welfare. In other words, my status before God is not ultimately based upon what I feel. It's based upon God's verdict of me through Jesus (Rom. 8:1). Since feelings are part of the flawed and fallen human state, they must necessarily be weighted less in the formation of doctrine in order for us to have a correct biblical interpretation.

Reformed churches generally practice the theology of John Calvin, one of the major players in the Protestant Reformation. Calvin was originally trained as a humanist lawyer and his humanist leanings are often reflected in his theology. For instance, Calvin believed that the thing which separates us humans from animals, aside from our souls, is our intellect, our rational capacity. Therefore, he also tended to believe that God would not present anything in the Bible that was beyond the realm of man's logic. This led Calvin to such teachings as his famous "Double Predestination" – the idea that God predetermined the eternal destiny of every human being, choosing some to eternal life through Christ, and others to everlasting punishment for their sin. The troublesome implication here is that this understanding of God's foreknowledge turns God into an ogre who capriciously and

REFORMED CHURCHES

(E.G. PRESBYTERIANS, CONGREGATIONALISTS, MANY BAPTISTS)



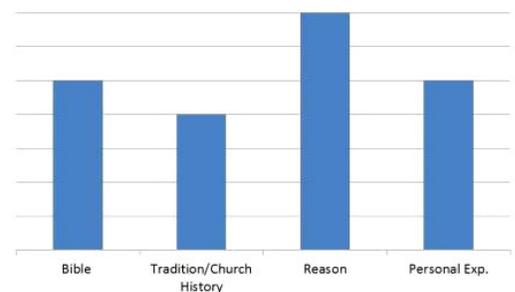
Why I'm WELS, from page 5

arbitrarily sentences some to heaven and some to hell. The even bigger problem is that while double predestination sounds somewhat logical (since the Bible does certainly speak of predestination – Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:5; 1 Peter 1:1-2), it is NOT biblical. You will find no part of the Bible that talks about God foreordaining anyone to go to hell. In fact, you'll find the opposite, that God wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). This is clear evidence that Reformed theology relies too heavily upon reason in the formation of doctrine. Since reason is part of the flawed and fallen human state, it must necessarily be weighted less in the formation of doctrine in order for us to have a correct biblical interpretation.

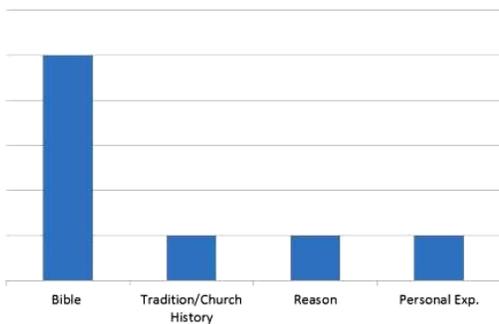
I won't spend too much time here, but Mainline Protestant denominations have been bleeding a slow death in membership for many years now, in part, because they don't know what they stand for anymore. When you compromise the Bible as even one of your true authorities, you lose yourself as a church. As liberal theology crept into Mainline Protestantism in the 20th century, teachings like the Creation Account, the Global Flood, Predictive Prophecy, and really anything of a miraculous nature, including belief in Jesus' actual physical resurrection, was lost almost entirely in many churches.

As I mentioned earlier, the irony behind this for Methodists is that they still promote the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. [See for yourself.](#) The dilemma, however, is that Wesley himself was not suggesting that all four pillars (Bible, Tradition, Reason, Experience) *should* contribute equally to your formation of doctrine, only that they *do* contribute to every church's doctrine. The more Methodist literature you read today though, the more you get the impression that, as with many Mainline Protestant churches, all four of these pillars contribute rather equally to what they believe.

MAINLINE PROTESTANT CHURCHES
(E.G. ELCA, EPISCOPAL CHURCH, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST, UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, AND THE MORE LIBERAL SEGMENT OF MANY REFORMED CHURCHES)



CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN



This is why I'm WELS Lutheran. The church I belong to and pastor in learns from the faith of the saints who have gone before us (Heb. 13:7), but also recognizes that these leaders were great not because of their perfect faithfulness, but because of their profession of Christ's faithfulness. Therefore, traditions, customs, and rituals developed by leaders of previous generations, while helpful, are not mandated by God nor should they be elevated to the status and authority of God's Word. Additionally, the church I belong to and pastor in values reason as a blessing from God for applying his Word to our lives (James 1:22) and for subduing his creation (Gen. 1:28), but also recognizes that it would be inappropriate to subjugate the Bible to flawed human reason, especially since there are undeniably "hidden" components of God's Holy Will (Isaiah 45:15). And finally, the church I belong to

and pastor in values personal experience. We regularly encourage Christians to tell of the great things that God has done for us (Deut. 3:24) and to use the resources the gospel gives us for humility and confidence and perspective and optimism (Rom. 8:28). But my church also recognizes that a sinner, even a believing one, living in a sinful world, is going to experience highs and lows and that whether I *feel* God in my life or not, I can *know* he's there (Matt. 28:20).

As I was studying to become a pastor, I became very sensitive to this question: Was I becoming a Confessional Lutheran minister simply because this is the faith I was raised in and spoon fed? Was this merely the path of least resistance? Through comparative denominational study, I became convinced that what I have here in this particular church body is a very unique, very healthy approach to biblical interpretation. It's an approach that acknowledges both the inerrancy of the Bible and the potential pitfalls of Church Tradition, Human Reason, and Personal Experience, and

Why I'm WELS, from page 6

thereby identifies the Bible as the clear and supreme authority by which we formulate our beliefs. I'm certainly not suggesting that this would be the only church body in which you'd find true believers; wherever the gospel is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is working and winning hearts (Rom. 10:17). But if God is known most decidedly through his inspired Word, then it only makes sense that I'd want to be in a church that had the safest, healthiest approach to interpreting that Word.

People choose the church they belong to for a variety of reasons – family background, friendship ties, a specific ministry, style of worship, appeal of a pastor, proximity to the church, etc. But if “church” is the design of God to help bring believers closer to him and to one another (Eph. 2:19-22), it seems fairly obvious that the *main* reason for choosing the church that we do would be sound Biblical teaching – the thing that the Bible itself says is the way to know Jesus (John 5:39), and therefore know salvation (2 Tim. 3:15).

In all honesty, if I was selecting a church simply based on external preferences, I don't know that I'd choose the WELS. I'm not positive that the general worship style resonates with me. I don't know that the general church programs best connect with either the talents or needs of the average person in the 21st century. I don't know that the general church governance and administration that is used is the most efficient way to organize hundreds or thousands of God's people. But I'm a very big fan of our approach to biblical interpretation. In other words, I drive this car not for its style, nor for its comfort, nor for its efficiency, but primarily for its safety features (i.e. correct understanding of the Means of Grace – the gospel in Word and Sacraments).

Some might say that my assessment of other denominations or of my own church body is unfair and exaggerated. That's fine. I'd simply encourage you to investigate for yourselves. Try not to be too anecdotal in your research – e.g. “I knew a Baptist once who.....” Rather, try to look at the documented teachings of the church bodies themselves, perhaps through their own [official websites](#).

Let me know if you come to the same conclusion that I do.

ONE FINAL NOTE: In a society that I'm convinced is now officially post-Christian, I generally try not to come across as overly denominational, simply Christian. It becomes very confusing for those 75% or so of people not regularly attending church when you start pitting one church body against another. That said, there are occasions when it's a worthwhile exercise to clarify the fundamentals of what it means to be a Christian (the example pointed to in the above post being the acceptance of the Bible as ultimately authoritative).

Of First Importance Is Doctrine

The dangers to which feeble folk (such as many of us are) and sinners are exposed will not be so great if only they stay with the pure doctrine of Christ and do not become sectarian spirits. For a branch may perchance be torn or broken or sustain some other injury, but as long as it stays on the vine and does not sever itself from it, it can be healed. Just so it is with a Christian. Although he has lapsed from virtue and has sustained an injury, he can be restored if he does not introduce new doctrine, if through repentance and faith he clings to Christ again. Then he is not condemned and rejected as the man is who begins a different teaching and sect according to his mad mind, wants to be right and does not want his error rebuked, or remains impenitent in his life and does not want to cling to Christ again. For such folk are like worthless and rejected branches. Although they continue to associate externally with Christians, they are bereft of all Christian comfort, grace, help, and salvation.

“What Luther Says, page 415, paragraph 1227

Meetings for December

Church Council	December 4th at 7:00 pm
Board of Education	December 11th at 7:00 pm
Outreach	December 15th at 10:00 am
Board of Elders	December 18th (<i>tentative</i>)
Board of Trustees	December 26th at 7:00 pm

Congregational Quarterly Meeting
January 13th after the worship service

"Peace Came to Earth"

Peace came to earth at last that chosen night
When angels clove the sky with song and light
And God embodied love and sheathed his might --
Who could but gasp: Immanuel!
Who could but sing: Immanuel!

And who could be the same for having held
The infant in their arms and later felt
The wounded hands and side, all doubts dispelled --
Who could but sigh: Immanuel!
Who could but shout: Immanuel!

You show the Father none has ever seen,
In flesh and blood you bore our griefs and pain,
In bread and wine you visit us again --
Who could but see: Immanuel!
Who could but thrill: Immanuel!

How else could I have known you, O my God!
How else could I have loved you, O my God!
How else could I embrace you, O my God!
Who could but pray: Immanuel!
Who could but praise: Immanuel!

Christian Worship: Supplement
Jaroslav Vajda

Reporters Wanted!

Book review Personal Story of Faith
Event Reports Potluck, Gathering, Party, Field Trip

Half-page to three pages
Reviewed for scriptural consistency and readability
by 25th of month to appear in next issue

Hard-copy to Carl Schueler, or email to Carl Schueler
(cfs_home@hotmail.com) or Pastor Proeber
(pastor@orlesb.net)

A simple and rewarding way to serve!

Thanks to Carl Schueler, Al Todd and Bill Waters
for their contributions to the Reporter.

There is always a standing invitation to provide
material for the *Reporter*. Through the years members
have contributed literally hundreds of articles, and
these really make every issue more interesting. Arti-
cles have covered a wide variety of subjects: ORLC
news, past and planned events, thought-provoking in-
structional articles on WELS history and other relig-
ions, and articles relating to personal perspectives on
our faith in Jesus.

We pray that more members will continue to think
about possible articles for 2013. If you have an idea,
and you are not sure whether to act on it, please don't
hesitate to speak to Pastor Proeber or Carl Schueler for
advice. Thanks!

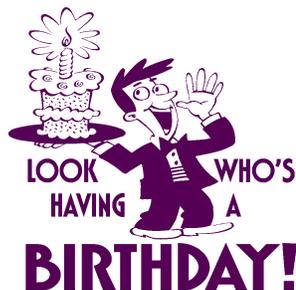
Editor's Corner

It is with a true sense of humility that another vol-
ume of "The Reporter" is complete. It is amazing that
over the past 12 years, we have benefited from 11
years of nearly non-stop production. There was one
year where *The Reporter* was not printed regularly,
but Carl accepted the challenge to get everything to-
gether and get it on to the Pastor's desk.

Over the years the look has changed. Color was
added on a small scale, then on a much larger scale.
Today, the entire newsletter process goes directly
from the computer to the copier - a significant savings
of time. *The Reporter* also appears on our website in a
pdf. format.

We pray that this means of communication will
continue to be used by the members, and shared with
others. We also pray that the articles continue to help
us meet the goal of our mission: *to grow, to encour-
age, and to proclaim.*

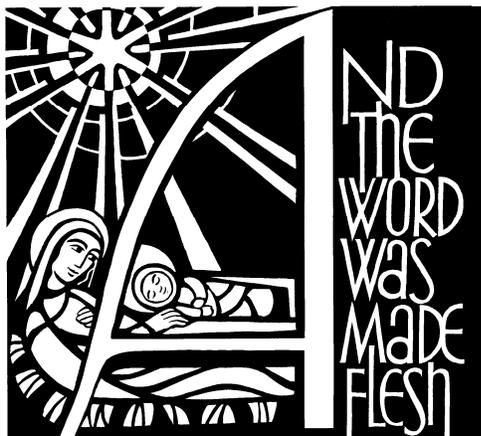
DECEMBER 2012



1st —Alan T.
11th —Isaac R.
12th —Bill W.
23rd —Barbara G.

And, of course:
25th—Jesus Christ
our new-born Savior!

Advent & Christmas Schedule



Christmas Eve Worship

On December 24th at 7:00 pm we will celebrate the Nativity of our Savior. The service will lead us from "The Cradle to the Cross." This is the message of Christmas, where Christ Jesus came to earth to be our Savior. Remember this is a great opportunity to invite your friends and neighbors to hear what God has done for them through his Son!

Time for fellowship and light snacks will follow the service in the fellowship hall. Plan to bring "finger foods," cookies, appetizers, etc.

Christmas Day Worship

On December 25th at 9:30 am we will consider what happened the day after Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Once again, plan to invite friends and neighbors to meet Christ the New Born King

Opportunities to Receive the Lord' Supper

As 2012 comes to an end we will have three opportunities to receive the gracious assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. This is one of the "gifts" Jesus gave us with his birth. As part of your worship of the new-born Savior, plan to make all these services. What better way to meet your Savior, and what better to end one year and begin the next!

December 23rd - 4th Sunday of Advent worship

December 30th - End of Year worship

January 6th - Sunday of the Epiphany worship

"Given and poured out FOR YOU!"

"God Sent His Son, the Savior"

As we continue with our Advent worship we are encouraged to be ready to welcome Jesus Christ. We want to be ready because he comes to bless us through his work as our Savior. This work is seen in how he serves as our --

Righteous Branch & Faithful Messenger
Mighty King & Loving Shepherd

Sunday morning worship is at 9:30 am

Mid-week Advent Worship

On Wednesday, December 12th we will have the final mid-week worship service. Through Scripture readings and songs we will hear how God declared the time was now --
"For the Savior to Come."

The service starts at 7:00 pm.

Ladies Christmas Get-together and Cookie Exchange

On December 11th at 7:00 pm the ladies of Our Redeemer, and their invited guests, will meet at Margaret's home for an enjoyable evening of food and friendship. Please remember to bring 3 - 4 dozen cookies and a gift to exchange.

Christmas Fellowship and Caroling

On December 16th we will gather at 2:00 pm to decorate the church, enjoy a chili supper. After dinner we will go caroling at Wood Glen Hall and the homes of our shut-in members. It is an enjoyable afternoon and evening of service, food and fellowship. The evening ends at Karolyn's home for dessert.

Make plans now to enjoy the evening!

Journey of Grace

This year we will set up the scenes which are part of our "Journey of Grace" depiction. The three sets will include the stable with Mary and Joseph, Jesus teaching at the temple on Palm Sunday, as well as the tomb and empty cross. If you would like to help set up the displays, please speak with John Favuzzi.

CORNER

DEVOTIONAL



“Construction Ahead”

The word of the Lord came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God’s salvation.’” *Luke 3:2-6*

Construction Ahead. The sign can’t be missed. It is large, orange, and the black letters seem to jump off the surface. It is a sign to which I need to pay attention, because it warns of obstacles, delays and detours. On the other hand, it also announces improvements are currently being made to make the road more safe and smooth.

Construction Ahead. The sign could easily have been placed everywhere John the Baptist went, because his ministry was one of rebuilding a damaged relationship with the Lord. The prophet Isaiah offers this vivid description of John’s work. “Make straight paths. Fill in the valleys. Smooth the rough ways. Straighten the crooked. Level the mountains and hills.”

John accomplished this important work through the “preaching of a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” For all who took John’s words to heart they came to see God’s salvation, namely a rebuilt relationship through repentance and forgiveness.

As I honestly and seriously look at my life I have to confess I need help. As I am, I can not approach God or even begin to see my way to him. Certainly I may try to reach him as best as I can, but there is always another obstacle, another delay, another detour. This is why I need to listen to John and take his message to heart. John points me specifically to Jesus and the blessed work he came to do. In Jesus I see how my reconstruction takes place. The crooked path of my disobedience is straightened. The deep valley of my guilt is filled in. The rough and rutted way of my selfishness is smoothed. The mountain of my sin is leveled. Jesus’ life, his death and his resurrection give me the assurance I will not only see God’s salvation, I will walk in it.

Construction Ahead. When I am driving, the sign may alert me to possible frustration and delay. When I am on the road the Lord has set before me, it alerts me to my need to repent and seek forgiveness. It also announces the joy and peace of a rebuilt relationship because of God’s undeserved love in Jesus.

Prayer Thought

Dearest Lord, I thank you for the gracious invitation you have provided through your messengers. Open my ears to hear their call to repent. Reconstruct my heart through your forgiveness. Strengthen my faith so that I travel on the road which leads to you and heaven.

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