



The Reporter

December 2020

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“Traditions and Truths”

by Pastor Proeber

Over the last few weeks I have been asked, “what are we doing for Christmas?” The question was regarding the preparations we would make for the inside of the church. In the past, a small group of dedicated people would put up the tree, stretch out garlands, and hang chrismons. There would also be poinsettias and a manger scene carefully arranged. Last, but not least, there was also a question about the candle light portion of the service.

At first I said I really wasn’t sure. I hadn’t thought seriously about Christmas or its accompanying services. Now that the time is getting closer, plans should be considered and communicated. So, what are we going to do? Are we going to follow through with all the traditional plans and preparations? The answer, following the Council meeting this past Tuesday, is not really.

I do not have to explain that this year has been different, and in many ways challenging. There was the hope that we could hold regular Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services. This hope was shattered with the latest shut down and stay at home order. So, what is the plan for this year? Well, it will be simple and subdued. It will not rely on the traditions of the past. There will be no tree in the sanctuary. No garlands along the walls. No wreaths outside. Also, there will be no candlelight service. Quite possibly the first response is, “That’s not right.” This is quickly followed by, “We have always done this before. It’s just not Christmas without them.” Think about that response, however. We’ve always done it that way, and it’s just not Christmas without them.

Traditions are a beautiful way of enhancing our celebration of Jesus’ birth. Even Luther attached meaningful explanations to all that accompanies this celebration—trees, lights, gifts and so on. Yet, we need to be careful. We cannot confuse the use of traditions with the importance of the truth.

I posed this question to a friend I see every few days. He was complaining because Christmas just won’t be Christmas this year. Somewhat naively I asked, “How so?” “Well, all the parades and celebrations are cancelled. All the concerts are on zoom. All the restaurants are closed, and all the shops have some kind of restrictions.” He finished his answer with the observation, “people don’t seem to be as much in the Christmas spirit because of the lockdown.” Somewhat naively I again asked, “and how does this really take anything away from the celebration of Jesus’ birth?” Because he knows me fairly well, he quickly said, “I get your point. But, you have to admit, this year is different.”

Yes, Christmas this year will be different. I’ll be the first one to agree. This special season is all about people gathering to praise the Lord for sending his Son into

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the world. You could take away just about everything else, and you would still have the message resounding from the angelic choir—"peace on earth and God's favor to all people!" Now that prohibitions have been placed on people gathering, it might not resonate the same way. Except, the truth of the season still remains.

The truth which surrounds and forms the foundation for Christmas is the birth of Jesus. Government mandates, stay at home orders, or even a break with tradition cannot diminish this truth. But try as hard as people might to silence the good news of great joy, they can't. It doesn't rest in trees, decorations, garlands, presents, lights, food, or cards. It is all about God's undeserved love sent to a world of rebellious sinners. In that love he commissioned his Son to take on our humanity, to carry our sin, and to endure our just punishment. This is the Truth of Christmas—God sent his Son to save sinners.

This is the truth we want to remember and celebrate this Christmas. And maybe in some ways we will have a better opportunity to focus on what God has done for us this year, rather than what we have to do to get ready for it.

This is more than being an optimist, and looking for a silver lining in a dark cloud. It is actually seeing the celebration for what it is. That is what is so amazing about the truth. Strip away the veneers and the facades which people have attached to it, and Christmas still joyously proclaims the birth of Jesus Christ.

So, what does that mean for our celebration of Christmas at Our Redeemer? As I said previously, it will be simple, subdued, yet it will lead us to celebrate the incredible truth of God's love for us sinners. This is the truth we hold dear. It is the same truth which brings comfort, joy, and supports us day after day. Even a pandemic cannot rob us of that good news of great joy. For us, the truth always stands—to us a Savior has been born—He is Christ the Lord!



The greatest treasure and the highest comfort we Christians have is the fact that the Word, the true, natural Son of God, has become a man who in every respect has flesh and blood as any other man has, and who has become man for our sake that we may be raised to the great glory of having our flesh and blood, our entire body, with all its parts and members, sit in heaven above, like God; that we may boldly defy the devil, and whatever assails us. For now we are certain that our bodies belong in heaven, and we are heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

What Luther Says, page 153, par. 455



December 20th + Fourth Sunday in Advent

Regular streaming and worship at 9:30 am

December 24th + Christmas Eve

Regular streaming and worship at 7:00 pm

December 24th + Christmas Day

Regular streaming and worship at 9:30 am

December 27th + Sunday after Christmas

Regular streaming and worship at 9:30 am

January 3rd + Second Sunday after Christmas

with the Lord's Supper



**Christmas Worship
Schedule**

“Come, Let Us Go!”



“Come, let us go to Bethlehem.” Imagine if “covid” would have been present when Jesus was born. Mary and Joseph would not have gone to Bethlehem because of “stay at home” mandates. The shepherds would not have been in the fields because of a “shut down” of non-essential businesses. The stable would have been closed because all indoor activities were prohibited. This certainly presents a ridiculous picture, but it does make us think about the times in which we live.

In less than two weeks we will have the opportunity to worship our new-born Savior. Nothing is more thrilling than to join with others to sing the cherished songs of Christmas, and to enjoy the blessed fellowship we have in Christ.

Sadly, this year is going to be different. Like the last month and one half, we will “stream” our Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services. These will be respectively broadcast at 7:00 pm—December 24th and 9:30 am—December 25th. The live stream of our services allows us to keep those with health concerns and pre-existing conditions safe and connected to the Word.

There is another option available. For those who are comfortable attending in person, it was decided by the Council to allow people into the church during the streaming. It is a small step forward, but there are some realities we need to understand and accept. The number of attendees will be limited to 20% of the building’s capacity—no more than 30. Overflow seating will be available in the fellowship hall. In order to safely occupy the building, we will follow all the current protocols—masks, distancing, and disinfection.

While we are in unprecedented times, and these are complicated by conflicting information, there is one truth which remains perfectly clear: the worship of God’s Son and our only Savior is essential.

Please note the worship schedule on the previous page. As a reminder, we will stream all the services through the end of the year. At the same time, the doors on the church will remain open during those same services.

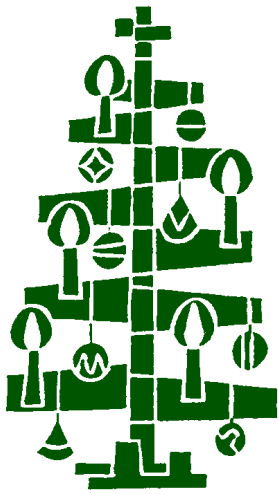
Just one more reminder, and that is in regard to the reception of the Lord’s Supper. If you would like to receive it privately—at church or in your home—please contact Pastor Proeber to arrange a time convenient for your schedule. This is one gift of God’s love we can never afford to neglect.

If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Proeber. May God’s richest blessings be with all as we worship our new-born Savior, Jesus Christ.



Oh, come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
 Oh, come ye, oh, come ye to Bethlehem;
 Come and behold him, born the King of angels.
 Oh, come, let us adore him, Oh, come, let us adore him,
 Oh, come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Christian Worship 55 st. 1



“**I** bring you good news of great joy which will be for all people.”

Outreach Opportunities

The Outreach and Fellowship Committee has had to cancel several activities through the months of November and December. While these have certainly created some obstacles to personally inviting people, or telling them about Jesus, it has not made it impossible.

Every Sunday we stream our worship service. For many of our members this is a blessing. Now, have you thought about sharing the link with others, or telling them to check it out through the course of the week? This is outreach. It is telling people about Jesus, and it is completely non-threatening. We do what Philip did for Nathaniel, “come and see!”

As we approach the birth of our Savior, take the time to tell people about the link. If they are interested, here are a few things you could do —

- Invite them over to your home;
- Share the link with them through the course of the week;
- Check a day or two later to see if they “signed in”;
- Pass their email address to the church office so they can regularly be contacted with the weekly link.

Outreach is the Christian’s life blood and life’s work. What better time of the year to share the good news of Jesus with those who desperately need to hear it. We live in a world that is uncertain, hopeless and fearful. What better message to share, than the one of the angels:

“Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord.”

Notes & News

Handbell Choir

The “ringers” are concentrating on our Christmas worship services. While the number of ringers is down from previous years, the level of commitment is just as high. We thank the Lord for their service to the congregation.

If you are interested in ringing in the New Year, please give prayerful consideration to participating in this special area of service to the Lord and Our Redeemer.

Wednesday Evening Bible Class

Although the Sunday morning class is not meeting at this time, the Wednesday evening class continues to meet regularly. Please check the calendar for times and dates. As a general rule, we meet every Wednesday evening at 7:00 pm. The current topic for study is the “End Times.” It is an appropriate study as we recall Jesus is coming again in glory.

Other Ministry Information

There are a number of programs and events on hold while we work through this pandemic. God-willing some changes will begin to take place in the New Year, and we can implement more of our regular ministry offerings—Sunday School, Sunday morning Bible Class, mixed voice choir, outreach and fellowship events, and more. Continue to pray for the Lord to work his gracious good will.

Reporters Wanted

Book review? Personal Story of Faith?
Event report? Potluck-gathering? Party? Field Trip?

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

Email to Pastor Proeber (pastor.orlcsb@gmail.com)

A simple and rewarding way to serve!

There is always a standing invitation to provide material for the *Reporter*. Throughout the past volumes, articles authored by members have made every issue more interesting. If you have an idea, and you are not sure whether to act on it, please don't hesitate to speak to Pastor for advice. Thanks!



Meetings for December

Church Council	Tuesday, December 8th at 7:00 pm
Committees	Tuesday, December 8th at 8:00 pm
Outreach Committee	No meeting at this time

If you have a question regarding a specific area of ministry, please contact a member of the appropriate Board. He will be happy to help

**Congregational Annual Meeting for 2020
January 17th following the worship service**

Work to Do!

The Building and Property Committee (Jim Brown, chairman) wants to remind people there are always little jobs to be done around the property. Leaves can be raked, planting beds can be weeded, shrubs can be trimmed. Most of this is not time consuming, but it helps keep the property looking good. It is even in keeping with personal distancing practices. Also in the works is the conversion of the men's bathroom to full handicapped accessibility, as well as pulling video wires from the church into the fellowship hall, and some electrical work in the sanctuary. Please speak to Jim if you can help.

December Birthdays



We rejoice in the many blessings God has given the members of our family of faith. May the Lord continue to bless them richly.

1st	Al T.
12th	Bill W.
23rd	Barbara G.
25th	Our Savior, Jesus Christ

Devotional Corner

"It's Not About Me"

After me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. *Matthew 3:11*

One could never forget meeting John the Baptist. His clothing was unusual. His message was unparalleled. Even the place where he carried out his work was unorthodox. Yet, even though everything in his life called attention to him, he would be the first to say, "It's not about me!" John freely confessed everything he did and said was about the "one who would come after him." This one would be the Promised One. This would be the Powerful One. This would be the One to follow.

I need to take John's message seriously. It's easy to think everything should be about me. People should pay attention to my schedule, my accomplishments, as well as my likes and dislikes. Unfortunately, this self-centered attitude also makes its way into my relationship with the Lord. God should see me the way I see myself. He should love me the way I am. He should even accept my attitude and good intentions for what they seem to be.

The problem is, it's not about me. If it were, I would be doomed to eternal punishment. I have to accept the truth there is nothing I could ever do to stand in the presence of the One who is more powerful than I.

This is why John's message is so necessary, and so precious. It leads me to look away from myself and look to the Savior God provided. In Jesus, God's Son who came into the world, I find perfection for my imperfection. I find unqualified obedience for my questionable intentions. I even find humble submission for my self-serving and selfish ways.

John's message is clear and it is what I need to hear. My life here, and my hope of life in heaven has everything to do with Jesus and his precious work. And honestly, I am thankful it's not about me, because Jesus is the One God the Father sent into the world to save me.

Prayer

O gracious God and Father, I thank you for the promise you gave concerning your Son. Help me look past my selfishness and self-centered ways to see the unselfish and undeserved love of Jesus my Savior.

Devotional Corner

"The Beginning"

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. *Mark 1:1*

There are some phrases used in the Bible which can quickly catch my attention. One is "in the beginning." These are the very first words of the very first book of the Bible, and they explain how everything came to be. Similar words are used by Mark, but not in the context of creation. They are used to signal the beginning of God's work to rescue the lost.

Prior to the coming of Jesus into the world, God used promises to guide his people. He also used many visual helps which included a system of sacrifices. As people faithfully listened to the promises and offered their sacrifices, they expressed their trust in the Lord and what he would do for them.

Mark's record of the life of Jesus signals a dramatic change. He shifts the believer's focus away from the sacrifices and promises to their fulfillment. Mark announced the coming of Jesus and the good news of God's forgiveness and peace. It wasn't that the assurance of forgiveness and peace didn't exist prior to Jesus' coming, but now there was no mistaking what God had begun. Today, I need to rely on this precious proclamation to address my sin and guilt.

Where do I look when my guilt gnaws at me? Where do I look when my conscience is seared by the blazing testimony of God's justice? Where do I look when my self-serving goodness leads only to despair? There is only one answer, and it is Jesus.

This is the answer Mark provides and proclaims. His words are the call to look at what God has done. With his gospel account he reveals what Jesus did from the beginning of his earthly ministry to the end of it. He reveals his humble coming and his faithfulness to his Father's will. He reveals his powerful acts of love and unsurpassed words of compassion. He also reveals his suffering, death and resurrection. This is the good news I desperately need to hear.

The beginning. These are very specific words and very descriptive words. The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus is the beginning of my hope, my comfort, and my peace with God. It is also the beginning of my confidence of life in heaven.

Prayer

O dearest Lord, I thank you for sending Jesus into the world to be the Savior of all, and I thank you for revealing him to me as my Savior. Give me the faith I need to trust him in all things for this life and for the life to come. Amen.