



ONE VOICE



Churches: ♦Bethany ♦Immanuel ♦Lunder ♦Silver Lake ♦Winnebago

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From the Pastor's Desk

"While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child and she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." Luke 2:6-7



We look forward to family celebrations for this Christmas. Normally, more families get together to celebrate Thanksgiving than for Christmas. This year with the COVID virus peaking around here, I have heard most families have decided not to gather for Thanksgiving and looking to Christmas, hoping for a change in the COVID.

Christmas adds a whole lot more to the festivities for family gatherings. There is the fun of decorating the house with Christmas greens, Christmas trees, Christmas lights, bows, bringing out the manger scenes. The Advent candles and the devotions we will be using will help us count down the days to Christmas, building up the anticipation for Christmas, the celebration of our Lord's birth along with family celebrations.

It is fun to go shopping for the "just right" gifts for our family members. It can be fun to go shopping in the stores and in the malls together. Or some like to forgo the crowds and order on-line. Once again, the COVID may interrupt our shopping plans and more shopping will more likely be done on-line. Yet, to see the surprised and happy looks upon the faces as your loved ones open up their gifts is a special part of Christmas. Hopefully, we will get to see them in person. Once again the interruption of the COVID. In order to protect some of our most vulnerable and beloved family members, our whole family may not be able to gather for Christmas.

There was another family, who was going through major interruptions in their lives. *"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled in a tax census. All went to their own towns to be registered."* Joseph and Mary were busy making plans. Joseph was putting the finishing touches on a new cradle. Mary was busy making baby blankets and baby clothes. Mary could feel the baby move and she wondered about this child, whom the Angel Gabriel told her would be the Son of God. She talked with her mom and her sister daily, helping Mary prepare for the baby. Mary had asked Sharon to be her mid-wife. Sharon had helped many of the women in Nazareth. Mary was excited about the baby and everything was falling in place.

That all changed when Roman Soldiers marched into the town square and declared Caesar Augustus' decree about being enrolled in a census and each person had to return to their hometowns. This meant, Mary and Joseph would have to travel to Bethlehem while the Baby was almost due. What if it was time for the baby to come, who would Mary have as a mid-wife? She was so confident with Sharon helping her through her delivery of her first born. Who would be there for her now? It was an arduous trip when she was this close to her delivery date. The new cradle could go unused for awhile. Everything was being interrupted.

As we anticipate families traveling, there are interruptions of social distancing, masking along with the security precautions at airports. Hotels are working to disinfect rooms

and public areas. As people travel by cars, they will be discovering many restaurants are closed. Joseph and Mary experienced similar traveling problems. When they arrived at Jerusalem there was no room for them. Not one relative had space for them. Not one member of the community could offer them hospitality, because the town was overflowing. There wasn't even any room for them in the inn. But the innkeeper offered his barn. *"And she gave birth to her first son and wrapped him in bands of swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."*



On that first Christmas there were a lot of interruptions to lives, just as we are experiencing lots of interruptions. The Children of Israel were not happy with the Roman Government ruling over them and disrupting their lives. We just finished an election season and the election is over, but the political divisiveness is not. The COVID has the economy going up and down, mainly down as different businesses have to close or reduce the hours they are open. When the news gives the new COVID numbers, now they are more than numbers. Now they are faces of friends and loved ones. In this peaking of the virus once again, there is fear about this unseen foe of COVID.

Into this broken world, into this fear and pain and hurt our Lord answers the powers of sin and death and brokenness.



"Do not be afraid; for I bring you good news of a great joy for all the people, to you is born, this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!" To YOU is born a Savior. Our Lord Jesus became IMMANUEL, God with us. God came

himself to heal our hurts. God came himself to bring us comfort. God came himself to give us his peace to calm our fears. God came himself to defeat the powers of sin and death.

Especially during this time of COVID and other brokenness intruding into our lives, we need to hear the good news the Angel declared to the shepherd. Even if we can't be together like normal; even if shopping and giving gifts is different, even if loved ones have COVID or we are protecting them from COVID, Christmas comes. Jesus comes. Jesus is Immanuel. Do not be afraid! For unto us a Savior is born, who is Christ the Lord. God is with us.

Have a blessed Christmas!

Pastor Randy



WANDERINGS AND WONDERINGS



Like Lent and Easter this past spring, Advent and Christmas will be not be as we are use to and have come to expect. Some of our congregations have at least temporarily suspended worship. All of our Sunday School programs have been cancelled. And if we have our Christmas worships – there will be limitations of number of people and spacing, and singing.

So we need to strengthen some of the other things we do, particularly at home, so we don't miss the "Meaning of the Season" and so we do not leave "Christ – out of Christmas." Let us make our home Christmas experience more intentional and meaningful. Here are some ideas and resources. The resources will be available at your churches/narthex beginning Sunday, November 22nd whether you have worship or not.

Advent/Christmas - Home Devotional Resources

Make the Advent and Christmas seasons by starting on Day 1 spending time with God and your family. We have some resources to assist you in this – for families and individuals.

Advent Calendars

Everyday take time as a family to lift up the theme for the day. We have two different calendars – Pop-up Calendar "One the Road to Bethlehem" – reveal a surprising message and see talk about the image. The second is a Sticker Calendar "The Way in the Manger" – you pray your way through the song "Away in a Manger" and add a sticker to the calendar.



Trivia Card Devotions

"What do I Wonder about Christmas?"

These are addictive trivia cards that make celebrating this season one will not forget. Learn about God's plan, worship the Savior, and enjoy togetherness. Tear off one page each day – 25 days. Read the questions on the front and turn the card over to discover the answers. See who scores the most over 25 days or just learn as you go. Categories – Bible Characters, Decorations, places & Events, Songs & Carols, or answer a challenging "True/False" questions about Old and New Testament events.

Devotional Booklet - "Prepare Ye!"

A traditional journey based on our weekly themes. Read a verse(s), read the reflections and pray a prayer.

Advent Wreath/Log

(We do not have these for your taking, but you can make one at home (makes it even more special) or buy one in the store or dig through your Christmas decorations and bring an old tradition back to life.) It is a simple tradition like we do in church of lighting one new candle each week. Light it while you do use your Advent



calendar, trivia cards, or do your daily devotions. There is something about lighting a candle that reminds us who is the Light of the World.

Christmas Play/Program at Home

We are not going to have our SS Christmas programs but that does not mean we can't have a Christmas play/program at home. Read the Christmas story, gather some homemade costumes (bathrobes and canes and stuffed animals work wonders), give family members parts (to act out and recite lines, even if it is repeat after me style), and sing some Christmas songs (most of us can get through the first verse of Silent Night and Away in the Manger, maybe even O Come All Ye Faithful) and take some time in the midst of presents and food to center the family on the Christmas story. My mom began this tradition when me and my sisters were kids, and when our kids were kids (it was always special to have the youngest baby – they were baby Jesus), and then when our kids began to have kids. My mom has been dead for 13 years, and this is one tradition that has not been lost. It still takes place – 4 generations have made this a tradition. These days, it is our kids who make sure we do not forget about the Christmas play – costumes, scripts, everyone has a part and songs. And there are stories that are told every year, with much joy, and laughter, and reverence about past years. When Dad died and we were cleaning out his/our home – the most sought after tote (at least the one we all wanted to make sure we knew who had) was the one with the costumes and scripts in it.



Try it, you will not forget the experience – primarily because God will be there with you – Jesus will certainly be in your midst. Earthy ... simple .. and powerful.

Maybe this year, more than any, we need to restore the "Meaning of the Season" in our homes, on a daily basis, so no matter what external circumstances we are dealing with – we are reminded and know that "God is with us" – always



This year will be different, but that does not mean it has to be any less meaningful. For that is why we call him Emmanuel – God is with us! We know that ... let us live it as well!

Wanderings and Wonderings,
Pastor Bill Peters

