

PASTOR'S PENNINGS

The Word Became Flesh

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

The smell of pine in your living room, the glow of colorful lights from the Christmas tree, gifts wrapped in shiny paper with decorative bows on top, and the sound of Christmas carols in the background. The Christmas season often brings a cheeriness and an excitement that isn't there the rest of the year. As the Christmas carol goes, "It's the most wonderful time of the year." But why? Why do people get so excited about the Christmas season?

Unfortunately, we often get excited about the small trivial things related to the Christmas holiday like shopping, gifts, and family get-togethers, but lose sight of the real reason to celebrate: "the Word became flesh." Here in this short verse we have the greatest miracle of all time. The Word that is the Son of God, took on human flesh and was born in a manger that first Christmas night. The Creator of all things came to live among His creatures here on earth.

How can that be? It is beyond our human ability to understand how God could take on human flesh and be both God and man at the same time. But that is what God tells us in His Word, and we believe it by faith.

Just as hard to understand is the reason why Jesus was born into our world. Jesus came to this earth because He loves us. In spite of all the terrible things we have done and continue to do every day, Jesus loves us so much that He was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for us. Jesus was born on this earth so that He could die. "The Word became flesh" to suffer and die on the cross in our place, so that all who believe in Jesus as their Savior will be saved from eternal death. Talk about a great Christmas present. We deserved eternal death in hell because of our sin, but Jesus suffered our hell for us so that we can enjoy eternal life in heaven! That is why the Christmas season is filled with so much joy! At Christmas time we celebrate the greatest miracle of all--God becoming a man to save us from the guilt of our sins and freely give us life with God forever!

What better way to celebrate this miracle than in God's house. We invite you to come to church this Christmas season to celebrate the miraculous birth of our Savior. Come and hear about how much God loves you. Come and raise your voice in praise and thanks in response to the greatest miracle of all time, the Word becoming flesh, the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

PRAYER LIST

Isaiah 30:19 -- "O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you."

--Please keep the soldiers and civil service people from our congregation, and from family members of our congregation who are deployed overseas or in other parts of the country, in your prayers. Those include: Rich Hammonds, son-in-law of Gene and Ada Hill, serving in Afghanistan; Adam Buzynskyj, son of Patti Buzynskyj, is serving in Iraq; David Eischen, California; Chad Walker in Afghanistan; and Arthur Wolf, a Civil Service worker in Iraq. Please thank the Lord for bringing Tom Oaks back from Iraq.

--Jeremy Zimdars lost his mother to cancer a couple of weeks ago. Ervin Winkel, the father of Mike Winkel and Becky Johnston's uncle, also went to glory. Please ask the Lord to comfort the survivors.

--Pastor Paul Johnston has asked for your prayers for his father who is 92 years old and has prostate cancer. Thankfully his health has stabilized and even improved this last month. Pastor Johnston would like to thank the members of Holy Cross for keeping his father and himself in your prayers.

--This last month the following people were hospitalized and have been blessed with various stages of recovery: Bernie Nelson who is taking membership classes; Gary Hahn; Doug Dinse; Dale May; and Kristy Eischen. Since her recovery, Kristy has taken a turn for the worse. Her kidneys do not function. Other people not doing well are Carol Crawford, cousin of Janice Gallarneau, who is not doing well with her breast cancer, and Jessica, Janice's daughter-in-law, who needs medical attention. Please continue to pray for Charlie Quam's brother, Carl, whose cancer is back in a big way.

--Please continue to thank the Lord for Jack Post who celebrated his 80th birthday. Please praise the Lord for the 37th anniversary of Butch and Bonnie Barnett, as well as for the new birth through baptism of Makayla Hope Hilliary. Please also thank the Lord for attracting over 80 people to our Reformation service in the after-noon at Gethsemane, as well as over 110 people to our Fall Festival and New Member Welcome. God is good!!!

EVANGELISM

You just never know when God will open up an opportunity to share our faith. That's why we always need to be ready. That's why we need to review the basics of what it means to be a Christian witness. A Christian witness not only talks about God's love and concern, a Christian witness shows it, often by simply being friendly, genuine, and kind to others, even if that person is a total stranger. A simple conversation and invitation can lead someone from someplace like a McDonald's fast food restaurant, to a church. If we're positive with our faith and church, we

just might give someone who is searching for God and a church a good reason to find out more from us.

Christmas is an awesome time to share the love of Jesus. Our Outreach Board wants to invite and encourage all of you to share a little Christmas spirit with our neighbors by going out with them on Sunday, December 12th and 19th, to invite our neighbors to our Christmas and New Year's Eve services. They will provide pizza on the 12th after church and chili on the 19th. After eating, everyone is invited to canvass from 12:30-3:00PM.

ADVENT SERVICES

Today marks the beginning of the Advent season. It is also the New Year's Day of the Church year. The word ADVENT means "Coming." During the Advent season the Christian Church centers its thoughts upon the coming of Jesus Christ into the world as the Savior from sin. We prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ as foretold by the angel to Joseph: "She shall bring forth a Son and you will call His name Jesus; for He will save His people from their sins."

The Christian Church also emphasizes the coming of Jesus into the hearts of men. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and open the door I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me." Christ has come to the heart of every believer and fills the believer's heart with peace, hope, and joy.

During the Advent season, we also speak of the coming of Christ at the end of time. Jesus has very definitely told us that He will come to judge the living and the dead. He bids us Christians to watch and pray lest He come upon us unawares. We make ready our hearts to receive Him at His second coming by faithfully using His Word and Sacraments.

May our prayer be that of the hymnist on this New Year's Day of the Church year:
"REDEEMER, COME, I OPEN WIDE MY HEART TO THEE; HERE, LORD, ABIDE! LET ME THINE
INNER PRESENCE FEEL, THY GRACE AND LOVE IN ME REVEAL; THY HOLY SPIRIT GUIDE US ON
UNTIL OUR GLORIOUS GOAL IS WON. ETERNAL PRAISE AND FAME WE OFFER TO THY NAME."

2010 is the fourth year we have had Advent services. Every year the attendance has grown and we pray that this year will see continued growth. Once again, there will be a rich smorgasbord of opportunities for connecting with Jesus through worship. Holy Cross will have three Advent Wednesday night services beginning at 7:00PM. They will be on December 1st, 8th, and 15th. The format will be similar to previous years. There will be three brief messages surrounded by lots of Advent and Christmas hymns. The theme on December 1st - "My Soul In Stillness Waits." The theme on December 8th - "Christ Is Our Prophet, Priest and King." The theme for December 15th - "Come Lord Jesus."

ADVENT BY CANDLELIGHT

This year the women of Gethsemane are sponsoring their second Advent by Candlelight for ladies and their female family members. Holy Cross women are invited. It will be December 5th at 6:30PM at Gethsemane Lutheran Church. The Holy Cross ladies will meet at Holy Cross and drive together to Gethsemane. If you would like to share a ride, please contact Joy Hahn 632-4524.

ESTABLISH A CONTEXT FOR FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP

List positive and negative influences that impact giving within a congregation: a) ethnic; b) maturity level; c) local economy; and d) level of spiritual growth within the congregation.

A. Keep the Focus on people.

1. See things from member's eyes by listening.
2. Understand influences that affect how people see finances.
3. Keep in mind the pressures and stresses impacting lives (and respond to them).
4. Recognize congregational factors that impact giving.

5. Recognize their level of spiritual life--Who is your focus in the structure of a typical congregation (compiled from an average WELS congregation)?

- A) Core Leadership--5%
- B) Action-oriented--10%
- C) Regular members--50%
- D) Elusive--35%

B. Communicate the Value of the congregation's ministry.

Clarify the core value of your congregation:

1. Administering the Means of Grace: Gospel in Word and Sacraments.
2. Seeing how it touches lives: How has it touched the lives of others? How has it touched my life?
3. Equipping people to live out Christ's love through us.
4. Proclaiming Christ to the world--beginning at "home."

5. Building on the heritage of the Reformation.

We are a church of free grace--no strings attached. Telling about free grace is essential. Showing others free grace in our attitudes and actions toward them is its companion.

C: Be Driven by a Clear Vision of Mission and Ministry

1. Move away from "survival goals."

A) Some "survival goals" often heard: make the budget balance; get through the summer drought; and wait until next year.

B) The effect of "survival goals" - distraction; short-term giving; and need-response giving.

2. Trust and live under God's providence, promise and power. Matthew 16:18 - And I tell you on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 28:18-20 - Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS FOR 2011

The newly elected Officers and Board members, along with the present Officers and Board members will begin their 2011 term of office January 1st. They are:

President: Al Cardwell –

Treasurer: Bill Shoumaker

Secretary: Pat Roberts –

Financial Secretary: Gene Hill

Board of Elders: Don Chaddock, Doug Hahn, Butch Barnett and Scott Peters

Board of Education: Phillip Class, Fred Jenkins and Byron Shoumaker

Board of Outreach: Kris Timm, Craig Ballinger, Kahle Mayfield and Dean Thomas

Board of Stewardship: Terry Eischen, Paul Barnett, Cliff Gallarneau and Tony Taylor

Board of Property Management: Tom Finney, Duane Stuever, Rick Poulin, Gerald Cartwright,
Robert Barnett and Lance Barnett

Thank the Lord that these men may serve Him during the coming year and ask the Lord to guide them in His ways as they do their duties.

MARY-MARTHA NEWS

The decorating of the church Christmas tree has been scheduled after church on Sunday, December 5th. All members of the church are invited to assist. The ladies will also be putting a Christmas tree in the church narthex for members of the congregation to bring and hang a Christmas card.

Once again the ladies have been invited to an Advent Candlelight service at Gethsemane Lutheran on Sunday, December 5th at 6:30PM.

The Youth Group of Holy Cross will be assisted by the ladies in baking cookies to be packaged and mailed to the men in our congregation who are overseas in the military.

The Central Africa Medical Mission is needing pill bags, toothbrushes, toothpaste, sun screen, sun hats, and cotton balls. There will be a pill bag posted on the bulletin board and patterns are available for those who would like to help sew them. The ladies will be collecting the other items after Christmas.

Joy Hahn was voted by acclamation to serve another two year term as Chairperson for the Mary-Martha Guild. Diana Ritter-Coco volunteered to serve another two year term as Guild Reporter. She will receive the National LWMS Newsletter and transmit the information and local circuit news to the congregation in cooperation with the Pastor.

The next meeting of the Mary-Martha Guild will be Saturday, December 11th at 9:30AM. All ladies of the congregation are invited and encouraged to attend.

MARY-MARTHA CHRISTMAS CARD PROJECT

Remember to bring a religious Christmas card during the month of December for your "church family." The Mary-Martha ladies will be placing a Christmas tree in the church narthex, to which you may attach your Christmas Card. After Christmas, the ladies will remove the cards from the tree and place them with the cards they are collecting and make them into cards for the prisoners. If you have questions, please contact Darlene Kidd (794-4213).

CHRISTMAS CAROLING

Come and give some Christmas cheer to some of our elderly and sick members by Christmas caroling with the choir on December 19th at 3:00PM. There will be fellowship afterwards.

SEASON OF CHRISTMAS SERVICES

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|---|--------------------------------|
| * Dec. 1st - Advent Service - Wednesday at 7:00PM - (COR) | Offering - Committee on Relief |
| * Dec. 8th - Advent Service - Wednesday at 7:00PM | Offering - COR |
| * Dec. 15th - Advent Service - Wednesday at 7:00PM | Offering - COR |
| * Dec. 24th - Children's Christmas Eve service - 6:00PM | Offering Apache Pals |
| * Dec. 25th - Christmas Day Service - 10:00AM | Offering – COR |
| * Dec. 31st. - New Year's Eve service at 7:00PM | Offering - World Missions |

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS SERVICE

The first practice for the Children's Christmas Eve service was held November 27th. The remaining practice dates are December 4th, 11th, and 18th. If your children were not able to attend the November 27th practice, there is still plenty of time for them to attend. Please note that ages 3-6 will only need to be at church for 30 minutes - from 9:30-10:00AM each Saturday morning. All other ages will practice from 9:30-11:30AM each Saturday morning. Participating in the service will also include post-confirmation age teens for those who are interested.

What a wonderful opportunity for our children to share the story of the love of God through His Son Jesus.

MONDAY/THURSDAY NIGHT BIBLE CLASSES

During the season of Advent and Christmas services, the Monday and Thursday night adult Bible classes will not meet. The next Monday night adult Bible class will be held January 3, 2011 at 6:30PM and the next Thursday night Bible class will be January 6th at 6:30PM.

2011 OFFERING ENVELOPES

The offering envelopes for the year 2011 will be distributed in early December. We do not plan to change your envelope number for 2011 but to avoid confusion, please destroy the 2010 envelopes after January 1st. Please place your box of envelopes where they can serve as a regular reminder to give to the Lord's work.

The offering envelope provides a method for you to designate the specific area to which you want your offering to go. It also enables the Financial Secretary to keep a record of your offering and provide you with a statement of contributions for Internal Revenue purposes. If you are sure you or your children will not use envelopes for your offering in 2011, please notify the Financial Secretary, Gene Hill.

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

There will be a concert at Holy Cross on December 14th at 7:00PM by a group of musicians who call themselves "Branches Band." Since the band played at Gethsemane last year, Pastor Born of Gethsemane was asked about what type of band it was and what kind of music they played?

His response was: "We had them about a year ago. One of them is related to one of my members. They play mainly hymns with different settings many of their own making. The band consists of one guitar, piano, and voice. They do add a few other instruments I believe, but those two plus singing are the main ones.

When they came by us it was for a Sunday. They played for all the music of worship plus an additional concert in the afternoon. It was really great. Because they are taking hymns the text is all doctrinally sound. I believe during the concert they may have included some other pieces but they are all doctrinally sound stuff. This is not like a contemporary praise band. They are a confessional sound WELS band that is very talented. I would highly recommend them. I was the one that suggested they contact you to play the concert because we did have them here just last year. We would take them again no problem, but I thought we would share."

GRACE NEWS

Attendance has picked up since September. A new family has started attending, and many Sundays bring new visitors. Several grant requests have been made to various foundations with the hopes that the mission can relocate to a store front in the target area and, if possible, get the funds needed to call a pastor. Pray for this mission effort. If another pastor can come to the area, it will probably mean a far greater number of souls will be reached and served in Oklahoma than with the current three pastors. If many congregations in WELS are led by God to begin new mission efforts, it may mean a reversal of membership losses in WELS. Of course what is most important is that many new people will hear the Gospel, believe, and end up in heaven.

CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

Everyone is invited to help decorate the church for Christmas after church on Sunday, December 5th. We need men to help set up the tree and get down the decoration boxes. It will be great if the youth would join the adults.

When the church's Christmas tree is put up, notice the white religious symbols on the tree. They are called Chrismons. The Christian symbols and letters were different ways of stating the name of Jesus and showing unbelievers the foundation of their faith. Here are a few examples:

IHC - Iota Eta Sigma in a circle. These letters are the first three letters in the Greek for Jesus. The circle is a symbol for eternity. Jesus gives eternal life for those who believe in Him.

X superimposed over P. - Chi Rho, are the first two letters in the Greek word for Christ.

X with a + superimposed. X is the first letter in the Greek word for Christ, and the + is a Greek cross. Together they show what the baby Jesus came to do with crowns on each end and a circle in the middle with the work NIKA. The cross and the crown remind us that if we would have the crown of eternal life we must take up the cross of Christ. The letter NIKA spell the Greek word for "Victor."

A ball with a fish and the word IXTHUS. IXTHUS is the Greek word for fish. Each letter is the first letter in Greek for the following words - Jesus, Christ, God's, Son, Savior. (The TH is one letter in Greek.)

THE DATE OF JESUS' BIRTH

In the western world the birthday of Jesus Christ has been celebrated on December 25th since AD 354, partly to replace the pagan worship that was commonplace in those days. However, we can be fairly sure that Jesus wasn't actually born on that date.

The Bible tells us that shepherds were staying out in the fields overnight when Jesus was born (Luke 2:8), but in that part of the world it would have been far too cold at night to do so in December. What is more likely is that He was born in the Spring, perhaps between March and May. Whatever the time of year, it is virtually impossible to identify the actual date.

This situation is further complicated by the fact that the Christian scholar, Dionysius Exiguus, was asked by the Pope in AD 525 to calculate new cycles for fixing the date of Easter. However, he decided to base his calculations on the date of Jesus' birth. Unfortunately, it wasn't discovered until the 9th Century that he got it badly wrong, by which time it was too late to change the calendar.

He fixed the birth in the year 1BC or AD 1 (Historians apparently can't agree which), and began counting from the latter. But both earlier and later scholars agreed that Jesus was born at an earlier date. Indeed, it was eventually established that Herod the Great died in Spring of 4BC. If Jesus had been born at the start of AD 1, as we currently have it, then Jesus would have been born some 4 or 5 years after Herod died. There is no way of accurately establishing the actual date of His birth, but it is most likely to have been between 5 and 6 BC.

The important thing is that He was born as our Savior. Unlike any other baby, He was unique. He had no human father. He is God the Son - Creator of the universe (Philippians 2:5-

11). When He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary He became fully human. This is why Christmas is called the "incarnation," a word which means "in the flesh." As God and man, Jesus became our Savior.

"Best Friends for Life" - 2011 WELS Marriage Retreat is coming next spring. NEW - There are two retreat options this year! On February 11-13, 2011 a retreat will be held at The Stagecoach Inn, Salado, TX (max 35 couples). On March 18-20, 2011 a retreat will be held at Hampton Inn and Suites, College Station, TX (max 30 couples). Strengthen your two most important friendships for life -- your friendship with God and your friendship with your spouse. Cost for either retreat is \$250/couple. To register, after December 1st go to www.votl.org and click "Marriage Retreat Registration" or contact Pastor Nate Buege at pastorncb@gmail.com or call 281-395-0544.

SOUP CAN LABELS/CEREAL BOX TOPS

Please continue to bring your Campbell Soup labels and box top coupons and give them to Dina Shoumaker.

HC - DECEMBER GREETERS

Dec. 5 - Al & Carol Cardwell

Dec. 12 - Tom & Janet Finney

Dec. 19 - Marlon & Karen Henry

Dec. 26 - Paul & Aimee Barnett

HC - DECEMBER CLEANING LIST

Dec. 4 - Chris & Mindy Chaddock

Dec. 11 - Mary-Martha Guild

Dec. 18 - Jack & LaVon Post/Andy & Jeanie Quam

Dec. 24 - Scott & Carole Peters/Kris Timm

FIRST CHRISTMAS IN ARIZONA

I thought at first my heart would break

To be so far away
From those I loved so tenderly
On Christmas holiday.

To see no snow or frosty morn
Or sing with family;
Or have them gather 'round for gifts
Beneath our Christmas tree.

But God in loving kindness
Turned my sorrow into joy
When once again I heard
How Jesus came, a baby boy;

And in a lowly manger laid
On that first Christmas night
While angels sang of "Peace on Earth"
Amidst a glorious light!

His promise of a Savior
Was fulfilled to you and me;
That He would die upon a cross
From sin to set us free.

The carols we were singing
Made my spirit want to shout!
I remembered once again
What Christmas really was about!

And as we left the church
Beneath the shining stars above;
I felt our hearts united
In the bond of Christian love.

No longer did I feel
That we were very far apart;
For Jesus came that quiet night
To satisfy my heart!

BIBLE QUIZ

Directions: Read each of the following statements carefully. Each statement is either "true" or "false." If the statement is true, draw a circle around the "T" -- If the statement is partly or wholly false, draw a circle around the "F."

- 1) T F -- Sinners troubled on account of their sins may derive comfort from the Law.
- 2) T F -- God is the only being who has existed from eternity.
- 3) T F -- God is simply an idea in the mind of man.
- 4) T F -- Since God is a spirit, we cannot know Him at all.
- 5) T F -- The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.
- 6) T F -- The Christians believe in the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Godhead.
- 7) T F -- The Bible tells us that there is more than one true God.

- 8) T F -- The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are separate persons in one divine being.
- 9) T F -- God is a union of three separate beings.
- 10) T F -- When the Scripture says that God "repents," or changes His mind, it is only adapting itself to our way of thinking.
- 11) T F -- To say that God punishes sins and forgives sin is a contradiction in the Scriptures.
- 12) T F -- The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit act together in all things they do for our salvation.
- 13) T F -- The heathen know nothing about God's Law.
- 14) T F -- The Moral Law was written into man's heart.
- 15) T F -- All our knowledge of right and wrong is based on God's Law.
- 16) T F -- We need to study God's Law in order to keep our conscience from erring.
- 17) T F -- Those who are ignorant of God's Law are blameless if they transgress it.
- 18) T F -- Our duty according to the Ten Commandments may be summed up in the one word, "love."
- 19) T F -- It is impossible for any human being to keep the Ten Commandments.
- 20) T F -- Man in his natural condition is always inclined toward that which is evil.

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ANSWER KEY: 1) False - 2) True - 3) False - 4) False - 5) True 6) True - 7) False - 8) True - 9) False -- Question 10) is a false statement. It says "only" and to answer true would also imply God does not repent or change His mind. A person reading the question may see the question as merely a statement that Scripture uses anthropomorphism and could answer true on that basis. 11) False - 12) False - 13) False - 14) True - 15) True - 16) True - 17) False - 18) True - 19) was intended to show sin -- and to be read as a true statement. A person thinking of Jesus might answer false reasoning that to be true the statement should read -- any human being born of sinful parents, for any human being in our natural condition. 20) True.

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