

The

EVANGEL

Advent & Christmas Edition





From the Editor

Welcome! We are glad you've joined us for this edition during this special time of year.

In this issue, several articles highlight a few people in the Christmas story. Each of these people were ordinary, yet God used them in their own way, as His plan of salvation unfolded.

But of course, the ordinary people are ultimately not the primary focus of the Christmas story. Our Savior coming to earth is where our eyes look. God's desire for all to be saved prompted this all to come about, even from the opening chapters of Genesis when sin first tainted the world.

I don't know about you, but this time of year, I get a bit reflective, thinking back on the past year. The word that strikes me every time, in the carols and in the Scripture readings, is "weary." Is that you? Are you weary after all of the ups and downs of the past year? Of the current issues in the back of your mind? I can think of those with health issues, relationship struggles, the ongoing weight of grief, and more.

Are you weary? Go to church this Advent and Christmas. Hear God's Word preached and taught, hear how God made peace for you in Jesus. Reflect on the hymns, savor the liturgy, bask in the fellowship of special Christmas meals and events with your Church family.

Look to the Savior: He came to bring peace to our weary souls.

In His peace,

Gretchen Baker

Gretchen Baker
The Editor

Note: The themes for the 2024 editions have been set and are listed on the back page. Would you prayerfully consider writing an article on one of the themes? If you are interested, let me know and I can share a specific topic with you. Email me at: theevangel@taalc.org.

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ADVENT & CHRISTMAS: TWO DISTINCT SEASONS

By Rev. Dr. Cary G. Larson

The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran church is liturgical. This means that our Lutheran piety (how we live out our Christian faith in life and in worship) is not just a random collection of pastoral preferences but is best characterized by the regular proclamation of the Gospel of Christ Jesus and the proper and salutary administration of the Sacrament of the Altar, within the structure of orderly, revered patterns of worship based on the Holy Scriptures and historical-informed traditions. What this means is our liturgical seasons have a purpose to edify our faith.

This is specifically spelled out in our Lutheran Confessions, “We on our part also retain many ceremonies and traditions (such as the liturgy of the Mass and various canticles, festivals, and the like) which serve to preserve order in the church. (Augsburg Confession XXVI:40)” and, “From this description of the state of our churches, it is evident that we diligently maintain church discipline, pious ceremonies, and the good customs of the church. (Apology XV:4).”

I bring up this point, because as we enter the liturgical season of Advent, we need to recognize a tension that, from my perspective, is getting more intense each year. It begins with an innocent question in early December, “Pastor, when can we sing Christmas carols in worship?” Regrettably, this seemingly harmless question is laden with the potential for conflict.

It is popular to begin playing Christmas songs and carols in the places we shop well before Thanksgiving. Entertainment

on screens, big and small, and live performances focus on the romance of the Christmas season early. Schools have winter concerts that may or may not have Christmas carols, but they point to the holiday. Then, we go to church on Wednesday or Sunday, and we sing songs that don’t seem...well...relevant by the calendar that society has set. Regrettably, I know first-hand that the earlier innocent question is a time bomb that can create conflict within the body of Christ.

I propose to you four points why we, as a Confessional Lutheran church, should enjoy the season of Advent in its entirety and then, at the proper time, enjoy and celebrate the season of Christmas, regardless of the pressure of the world outside the church:

1. **Theological Distinction:** In the Lutheran tradition, Advent is a distinct liturgical season meant to prepare for the coming of Christ, both His first coming (Christmas) and His second coming (the Last Judgment). Singing Christmas carols during Advent blurs this theological distinction and prematurely focuses solely on Christ Jesus’ birth rather than the broader Advent themes of repentance, anticipation, and preparation.
2. **Emphasis on Repentance and Waiting:** Advent is a time for reflection, repentance, and waiting for Messiah. Remember before the introduction of the Advent blue, the altar was adorned with the same purple of Lent? Advent and Lent are closely related.

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Advent & Christmas continued...

3. Historical Liturgical Practice: The Lutheran Church has historically followed a liturgical calendar that emphasizes specific themes during each season. Singing Christmas carols during Advent goes against this long-standing practice, disrupting the rhythm and purpose of the liturgical calendar. Simply put, Christmas carols celebrate the joy and festivities of Christ Jesus' birth, and may not align with the penitential and expectant spirit of Advent.
4. Delayed Celebration: By postponing the singing of Christmas carols until the Christmas season officially begins, typically on Christmas Eve, the Lutheran Church can maintain a sense of anticipation and build excitement for the celebration of Christ's birth, enhancing the depth and significance of the Christmas season.

Christians are "not of the world" (John 17:16); therefore, we should expect our church calendar to be off from what this world would stress and even celebrate. We are called to live in that tension and not demand, even in the nicest way, to have the church look like the world, for sake of the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

Blessed Advent and Merry Christmas season to you all. †

The Rev. Dr. Cary G. Larson is the Presiding Pastor of The AALC.

To our AALC family

In Advent, we are called to prepare and to awaken to Christ's presence. We are reminded that this time of waiting is filled with purpose and certainty despite the chaos and struggles surrounding us. And we look to find peace and understanding as we prepare not only to celebrate the birth of Christ Jesus but also for His second coming.

John the Evangelist's account on the holy day of Christmas: "In the beginning was the Word... and the Word became flesh" (John 1:1, 14). We are reminded that God is not a God far-off. God is among us. Walking and worshipping and singing through the season of Advent and the festival of Christmas, we remember that God is with us in Christ Jesus.

This is the reason for our joy and hope. Jesus lived a perfect life for you; His passion and death on the cross redeems you and His glorious resurrection offers you the promise of eternity with Him in a whole and restored body.

The King of kings and Lord of lords came to us humbly, not with "shock and awe," to restore humanity to Himself. He desires to be our King in order to serve us as our divine Servant. Now, we wait for His second coming, which will not be as when He first came, overlooked and unnoticed. We wait with Advent excitement, where every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is indeed KING and our Redeemer!

Yes, this is undoubtedly a time filled with excitement and anticipation awaiting the coming of the Messiah. But it is also a time to calm our hearts and minds and spend some quiet time with God. During this busy season, that may be our most challenging preparation. For it is in this quiet place, dwelling on God's Holy Word, that we can find the peace of God that comes to us, beginning with the birth of Christ Jesus.

We wish you a most blessed Christmas from our home to yours.

~ Presiding Pastor, Rev. Dr. Cary and Connie Larson

RESTING IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS: ZECHARIAH & ELIZABETH

By Rev. Jerry Storrs

Just a loving couple who, throughout their lives, have taken on tasks and done them to the best of their individual abilities. They were of the tribe of Levi, thus they didn't own much property (if any), yet they had what they needed to get by. Unlike many of their tribe, they had dedicated themselves to serving in the traditional ways of their tribe. Zech was respected by the other men of his family, as was Liz. They both sought ways to help others in their communities. Zech likely taught in synagogue while Liz likely helped neighborhood young ladies, as they prepared for approaching responsibilities as mothers.

Of course, Zech and Liz were respected for their help and suggestions, yet they had not been blessed by the Lord with children of their own for Liz was barren. And unlike our society of today, no one tried to blame either of them. They simply took their childlessness as the will of God, Whom they both served in their individual ways. And in ways that they believed God would have them to serve. Even though their specific blood lines would come to an end due to their lack of children, they believed that, by helping expectant and recently blessed neighborhood families, perhaps God would keep those children looking to the Lord for strength and peace.

The Lord heard their prayerful desires to serve Him in the ways that would please Him and like everyone who focuses all their efforts on God and His plan, God gave them an important and unique purpose. A mission that no other couple of their tribe had ever had in the centuries since He brought Israel out of the land of Egypt.

Of course, if you read Holy Scripture, you know Zech and Liz. Yet, some might think it improper to address this important couple by these nicknames. After all, they hold a predominate place in Scripture even though they are never mentioned in the Old Testament and written of by only one of the inspired authors in the New Testament. They were the cousins to a carpenter and his young betrothed who lived in Nazareth.

Yet, by the time cousin Joseph and his future bride, Mary had a secret of their own, Elizabeth was, even in her elder years, expecting a miracle. Mary went to visit her cousin perhaps because Elizabeth had life-long experience of assisting young expectant mothers. Mary likely knew of the miracle that Elizabeth carried in her and felt that her older cousin would understand the fear that she experienced with her own miracle.

What is important in this story is that God does for us and to us what is necessary for us to walk close to Him in our daily

and life-long journey. Even with those things which seem to be the effects of sin and evil in the world (like being unable to have children), God uses us for His purposes. When we begin our daily lives giving thanks for the night just past, then work through the challenges the world throws at us, and finally relax in the evening before retiring knowing that God is watching over us, He knows what difficulties we will experience. Although He does not cause evil to befall us, He allows our problems because He knows how we will turn to Him and seek His presence to help us get through each of those difficulties.

Zechariah and Elizabeth did not know they would receive the blessing of the baby boy, John, in their later years. Zechariah did not know he would be stricken mute for nine months during his time lighting incense in the Holy of Holies (Luke 1:8-23). Elizabeth had no idea that her miracle son would cause her to proclaim the arrival of the Messiah even before his birth. And that her loud proclamation would come forth as the Messiah's pregnant mother would bring Him into Elizabeth's home (Luke 1:39-45). Elizabeth did not know that she would offer comfort and strength to the mother of God during Mary's time of need.

And, except for Elizabeth, no one knew Zechariah's son's name until the day that baby was circumcised (Luke 1:57-64). And neither Zechariah, Elizabeth, or Mary knew that John would be that prophesied voice (Isaiah 40:3) telling the world that the Messiah had arrived. They simply lived their lives, as we do each and every day, relying on God's peace and grace to get us through each day.

Thanks be to God for His faithfulness to us. †

The Rev. Jerry Storrs serves Sonland Lutheran Church in Casa Grande, AZ.



Christmas Chronicles



Mary: “I am the Lord’s Servant”

By Rev. Joe Christina

Throughout New Testament church history, Bethlehem’s Finest Baby has been one of the most maligned and attacked figures. It helps to explain why the second articles of both the Apostles’ and the Nicene Creeds are more worded. Christology had to be defended because Christ was so often misrepresented. And while there seems to be an increase of vitriol against the First Person with attacks on life and gender in our present day, the mother of our Lord is also an often distorted or misunderstood figure as well. But during this time of the Church Year, we Christians regard her with favor and a great deal of respect as the one chosen by the Almighty to give birth to the God man.

The fact of the matter is that Mary tends to mobilize Christians to draw lines in the sand among their various camps. Many Catholics insist on praying through her, and some even bestow on her the title of Co-redeemer. As confessional Lutherans, we reject these practices as Scripture gives us no indication that these are to be done. On the other hand, many other Christians are so opposed to the aforementioned that they will often regard Mary by practically ignoring her. “It’s all about Jesus,” they may say. As confessional Lutherans who often navigate that “narrow middle road,” we understand that Mary is not to be given divine adoration while at the same understanding that she’s important. That tiny Divine Zygote implanted in her blessed womb is the great I AM. And she would be the servant of the Lord through gestation, labor and delivery, and raising the Son of the Living God.

Theologians will often point out the contrast between Zechariah’s response to the angel in the inner sanctum of the temple and Mary’s response to Gabriel in her room. Zechariah: “How can I be sure of this?” Mary: “I am the servant of the Lord. May it be to me as you

have said.” Mary was first and foremost a believing child of the Almighty God of Israel who clung to His prophets’ many promises of future salvation. And her faith was remarkably on display as she simply took the Lord at His word and received His promise in the childlike manner her Son would one day commend. And while Scripture tells us that Mary was “highly favored,” it doesn’t give us the why details. This simply reminds us of how all of us are chosen by God through faith: He just does it. We add nothing to the process. Nevertheless, Mary’s election to be the God bearer in the mystery that is the incarnation was a way by which God blessed us immensely.

That Holy Unborn Baby would swim around in the womb of his mom with purpose. The King of Glory from Psalm 24 had officially passed through the ancient doors into the creation He created. That cold Baby who needed to be wrapped in strips of cloth for body warmth in the cold Bethlehem night would one day have His clothing gambled over at the foot of His cross where He ushered in the Lord’s plan of salvation. That young Boy who stayed back in Jerusalem would be perfectly obedient to His parents and God so that He could be the Unblemished Lamb Who takes away the sin of the world.

And it all started with this young maiden of faith living a quiet life at home. So yeah, Mary is kind of a big deal for us who are the redeemed children of God through the saving work of her Son. With the shepherds we Christians of today adore that Christ Child at his feeding trough bassinet. But we give a nod and a smile to the Baby’s exhausted Mom as well. †

The Rev. Joe Christina serves Christus Victor Ev. Lutheran Church, Fayetteville, NC.



Christmas Chronicles



Why Shepherds?

By Rev. Rich Eddy, Pastor Emeritus

“While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground, an angel of the Lord came down and glory shone around, and glory shone around.”¹ These words, an almost exact quote from Luke 2:8–9, form the first verse of the old Christmas hymn, “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night,” written by Nahum Tate in 1700. Anyone familiar with Jesus’ nativity story knows about the shepherds, how they were greeted by angels, and how they found the babe lying in the manger. And anyone who has set up a nativity scene has placed a few shepherds and their sheep somewhere near Mary and the baby Jesus. But, did you ever ask the question, “Why shepherds?”

Of course, the response of many people could be, “Why not shepherds?” Bethlehem was a locale known for sheep and shepherds, and they happened to be the people who were available and awake when Jesus was born. Sure, they were close at hand. But I think there was more to it than just that; God purposefully chose those shepherds to be the first witnesses to the birth of the Savior. There are three things that make this apparent.

First, Scripture tells us that God is not impressed by titles or social standing (Acts 10:34). It teaches us in 1 Corinthians 1:27 that “God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are...” He bypassed the political and religious leaders of the day and sent His angelic messengers to lowly shepherds instead. The shepherds came as they were: lowly, unwashed, wearing the rough clothing of their trade, the lay people of their day. But God’s call exalted them above society’s celebrities to be witnesses to the arrival of mankind’s Savior.

Second, it was fitting that shepherds, who had witnessed the birth of many lambs over their years of work, would get to witness the birth of the Lamb of God, the birth to which all the other births had pointed. Bethlehem was just a few miles from Jerusalem, so it is quite likely that many of the lambs raised by those shepherds were intended for sacrifice in the Temple. Likewise, the Baby

they saw born that night would one day be sacrificed for our sins, serving as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29 and 36). Revelation 13:8 teaches us that this was God’s plan from even before the beginning; that Jesus was “the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world.”

Third, it was also appropriate that God would choose shepherds to witness the birth of the Good Shepherd. The Scriptures proclaim God as our Shepherd many times, from Psalm 23 (written by David, a former shepherd) to Micah 5:4, which says the Messiah born in Bethlehem shall “shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD,” to John 10:11, where Jesus calls Himself, “the Good Shepherd.” The arrival of shepherds, rather than priests, kings, or generals, proclaimed the newborn’s main calling.

Finally, we need to recognize that God’s call on the shepherds was not just for their own personal blessing. What they saw and heard was not only for some spiritual high, what we would call a “mountaintop experience.” No, they were more than passive observers; they became witnesses to what they saw and heard from the angels, and of what they found in the manger. Their testimony to Mary caused her to treasure what they said in her heart, and their testimony to other people was such that “all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.” Then, they testified to the Lord, “glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” (Luke 2:17–20). And finally, they continue to testify to us today, as we marvel both at their experience, and at their faith that caused them to overcome their fear and obey an outrageous command.

May we also overcome any doubts or holiday distractions we may encounter, and follow the shepherds to the Savior born to us that day – and then let us tell others, that they too may wonder at the good news of great joy we share! †

The Rev. Rich Eddy, Pastor Emeritus, regularly writes on his blog: <https://pastor-richeddy.com>.

[1] Nahum Tate, “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks,” accessed Sept. 9, 2023, via www.hymnary.org.



Christmas Chronicles



Open Our Eyes This Advent: Simeon & Anna

By Rev. Robert Snitzer

After the birth of the long-awaited Messiah, Mary and Joseph brought Baby Jesus to the temple to be dedicated to God. This was a common practice for new parents as they were also offering the required sacrifice for purification.

While they were there two people, moved by the Holy Spirit, came with a word from God regarding their Son. Simeon, a “righteous and devout” man, was looking and waiting for God’s comfort upon Israel. The Holy Spirit told him he would not die before seeing the Savior of the world. At that time in the temple when Jesus was presented, the Holy Spirit moved in Simeon’s heart revealing to him that Mary was holding the Baby that would one day hang from a cross and rise from the dead to bring salvation to all who placed their faith in Him.

It is important to notice Jesus’ identity was revealed; Simeon did not reach that conclusion on his own. Jesus and Mary did not look any different than other mothers with their babies that would suggest His identity as the Son of God.

The promise given to Simeon was fulfilled and he was the first to witness the Messiah, believe in Him, and witness the inauguration of the end times. He is now able to leave in peace and joy. Who would have expected the Messiah to come as a Baby? Who would recognize Him wrapped in swaddling clothes. Who recognizes Him today, especially during the Advent season? He is not so much wrapped in cloth but buried in beautifully wrapped gifts in glittery paper with red and green bows. He is hidden behind the parties and elaborate spread of holiday goodies and drinks. For many in our society, in and out of churches, they are blind to the real meaning of Christmas.

We also see that Jesus came for all people and not just His chosen, the Jews, as Simeon says: “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” [nations] (Luke 2:32). For Jews and Gentiles alike, Jesus’ words and actions will be a revelation of divine truth regarding God’s plan of salvation for all mankind. So far so good. How would you feel if someone spoke such a prophecy over your son? Perplexed, intrigued, confused, or joyous?

There is a second part to Simeon’s message. “Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother: ‘This Child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too’” (Luke 2:34-35). These words indicate the type of life He will experience, one of rejection, hate, misunderstanding, and betrayal. Only after His resurrection will many understand and believe while others will grow in their rejection of His identity and ministry.

As a parent you know how it feels when one of your children suffers at the hands of bullies or when they become sick. It hurts, and you would like to take away their pain or take it upon yourself rather than have them suffer. So, Jesus’ mother would experience great and many sorrows until Easter morning when her eyes would be opened and come to realize the true identity and mission of her first-born Son.

What parents would like to do for their hurting children, Jesus did for his hurting creation. He took our pain, sin, suffering and death upon Himself so we could escape eternal death.

At the temple that day of dedication was an elderly prophetess, Anna, who prayed, fasted, and worshipped God for many years. She too was privileged to see the Savior and hear the message of Simeon. Overjoyed, she could not keep the message to herself, but like the shepherds forty days prior, she told everyone she could. “Coming up to them [Mary and Joseph] at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the Child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38b).

During this Advent season, we need eyes like Simeon to see Jesus for Who He is and how He is working around us and in us. We also need to be like Anna, even though she was in her 90’s, told everyone who would listen about Jesus. May we keep gifts, parties, and holiday food secondary and Jesus the primary focus this Christmas. †

The Rev. Robert Snitzer serves Pilot Knob Lutheran Church in Forest City, IA.

St. Peter's Women of L.I.F.E. Annual Christmas Home Tour

By Laurie O'Brien

In 2004, St. Peter's Women of L.I.F.E. began a tradition of an Annual Christmas Home Tour to benefit our Members in Need Fund. This quickly became a beloved tradition for many. Over the years, thousands of dollars have been raised to directly help our members when they have a financial need. COVID interrupted the home tour, but it will be back in 2023.

The tour traditionally showcases six different homes each year. A home may be large or small. In the past, the tour has included large two-story homes with many rooms as well as a small apartment. Mostly they are just average homes. Decorations may be simple or elaborate. The only prerequisite is that the hostess loves to decorate at Christmas and would enjoy sharing her home and Christmas family traditions with others.

Decorating instructions for the hostesses are these: "Please, decorate your home the way you would normally decorate it for Christmas... except maybe this can be the year that you bring out all your decorations! Of course, we would like you to decorate as many rooms as possible, but if you choose to keep a few of your rooms off limits just close the doors and maybe put a ribbon across the doorway." When my own home was on the tour, I put ribbon around the office door with a bow and a large gift tag that read, "Do NOT open until December 25th."

Some hostesses borrow extra decorations from friends. One woman invited her friends over for a decorating party. The friends brought decorations, and each one decorated a different room. They had great fun doing it, and visitors had an amazing home to see. As a hostess, it was the year I started putting Christmas decorations in my bathrooms.

Tickets for the home tour are sold for \$15 each. Everyone, including children, must have a ticket to visit the homes. This is, after all, a fundraiser for a very important cause. Each hostess has a few extra tickets to sell should someone come without a ticket or bring an extra friend who needs one.

With the ticket, attendees receive a copy of the descriptions written by the hostesses along with directions to the homes from the church. Women of L.I.F.E. purchased reusable lawn signs for the homes, so they can be easily identified.

Hostesses also provide light refreshments for the visitors. Homes may be visited in whatever order they choose, so no home is inundated with too many people at one time.

Attendees write their name and phone number on their ticket and have the hostess sign it at each of the homes. The ticket is turned in at the last home they visit and placed in a drawing for a beautiful gift basket that is filled with items donated by other women. It often includes Christmas items and a few gift cards.

The Christmas Home Tour is a day of spending time with old friends and making new friends. Visiting each home is a fun way to get ideas for your own Christmas decorating. As a hostess, I really enjoyed getting to know church members I had not had opportunity to get to know previously.

If you think your women might be interested in beginning a home tour, feel free to contact me at lauriedapelo@gmail.com. I'd be happy to share sample material with you. †



Top: Hostess Lee Coffee with Christmas Tree she made from earrings and pins. Submitted photo.

Middle: Simple Décor

Bottom: Kitchen Decorations



Church News



St. Peter's Lutheran Church Celebrates 100th Anniversary

By Laurie O'Brien

Shortly after World War I, a group of German families settled in Elk Grove, CA. In 1920, having no Lutheran church in the area, a group of five families began meeting together to talk about organizing a church, eventually asking the pastor from St. John's Lutheran Church in Sacramento to conduct services for them.

St. Peter's Evangelical Church of Elk Grove was incorporated on May 17, 1923. Even before it was official, the church was active. The first marriage was conducted on December 18, 1920. The first baptism was performed on May 22, 1921, and the first burial was in September of that year. The first recorded confirmation was held on September 14, 1922, with five confirmands.

The first church building was located on the corner of Elk Grove Blvd. and Elk Grove-Florin Road, where a Shell station now stands. In 1956, that same building was moved south on Elk Grove-Florin. It was expanded, a fellowship hall was added and a parsonage was built. In May of 1987, St. Peter's moved to the current location where we worship and minister today. In 1994, we opened St. Peter's Lutheran School which has shared the love of Jesus with countless students over the last 29 years.

In May of 2023, we celebrated 100 years of St. Peter's – 100 years of people like us, sharing the gospel and serving our neighbors as Jesus has called us to do. But 100 years is not the end but the beginning of a new century of service. We are no different from those who began this church over 100 years ago. What will St.

Peter's be in another 100 years? It's exciting to think about. It will be even more exciting to see it begin.

To celebrate the past 100 years and also the next 100 years, St. Peter's held a celebration worship service on May 7, 2023. Presiding Pastor Rev. Dr. Cary Larson delivered the message, and video messages from previous pastors were shared. Following the worship service, a banquet was held in the fellowship hall where we heard from our pastor, Rev. Joe Dapelo, our council president, our school administrator, and the member who has been here the longest – over 75 years.

On June 4, we extended our celebration to our Elk Grove neighbors with a community picnic. We provided carnival type games for the kids as well as cornhole and washers for the adults. Wiffle ball and basketball were also enjoyed by many. It was a hot day, but there was plenty of shade for lunch and visiting. Along with hot dogs, chips, and water, members donated over 1,000 cookies for everyone to enjoy. †

Top Left: In 1987, St. Peter's moved about 2.5 miles up the same road. The fellowship hall was built first, followed by the sanctuary (pictured here), and then the offices and school. **Top Middle:** The table is set and ready for the banquet. Each guest received a centennial mug and pin, along with a 100-year history book of St. Peter's. **Top Right:** The original sanctuary was moved about a quarter mile down the road. The front door was moved to the side and a narthex and offices were added. A second building – fellowship hall, kitchen, and classrooms – was added and eventually a parsonage was built on the property.



Letter from CDCR

CDCR Report on Resolution Concerning Sanctity of Human Life

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The AALC's 28th General Convention tasked the Commission on Doctrine and Church Relations (CDCR) to review the "Resolution Concerning the Sanctity of Human Life in the Left and Right Hand Kingdoms" brought before the convention floor on June 22, 2022. After review of the resolution and the video of the convention where the resolution was discussed and ultimately delegated to the CDCR, the Commission has determined that the already adopted Statement of Faith concerning "The Sanctity of Life & Abortion" (found printed below) more than adequately expresses the stalwart position of the Association on these matters and in keeping with God's Holy Word.

The Commission on Doctrine and Church Relations

The Sanctity of Life & Abortion

In dependence upon God, with love for those who are fearful of bearing children and with charity toward those holding differing opinions regarding the sanctity of life and abortion, we of The AALC:

- 1. Affirm** that human life from conception is created in the image of God and is always sacred. Galatians 1:15, Jeremiah 1:5
- 2. Understand** that an induced abortion is a sin before God against mankind because it ends a unique human life for which God has a plan that would bring glory to Him and benefit to fellow human beings. Psalm 139:1, 7, 13
- 3. Advocate** the exercise of sexual and procreative acts only within the framework of marriage in accordance with the teaching of God's Word so as to diminish the temptation to turn to abortion.
- 4. Deplore** the legal permissiveness that denies protection to the weakest and most defenseless of the human family, the unborn. We view this as an irresponsible and morally reprehensible neglect of God's gift of human life.
- 5. Reject** the practice of induced abortion.
- 6. Acknowledge** that there may be rare cases in which the mother's physical life is clearly and directly threatened and where all other possible alternatives to saving the lives of both mother and child have been exhausted, that abortion may be a tragic option.
- 7. Recognize** that civil law is a significant factor in shaping the judgement of citizens concerning that which is right and wrong.

The current legal climate of total permissiveness regarding abortion, teaches that human life has diminished significance or value.

8. Urge that pastors, counselors and others dealing with the "other victim", the mother herself, as well as fathers and others responsible for and involved in the practice of abortion, be knowledgeable and sensitive about the profound guilt, remorse and shame that accompanies abortion and be diligent in ministering the Gospel of forgiveness and new life through Jesus Christ to them.

9. Urge pastors to lovingly counsel women with problem pregnancies to avail themselves of options in dealing with the child other than abortion and that we strive to provide loving care, guidance and means to facilitate such options to the mother.

10. Urge Christians everywhere to patiently strive through prayer, proclamation of God's Word regarding the sanctity of human life and all Christian and legal means to effect the changes in law necessary to provide full protection for all unborn and born children.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

That The AALC, here meeting in convention, urge its congregations and members to take a strong stand against abortion and become actively involved in supporting those groups and ministries that are endeavoring to protect the sanctity of human life and are providing positive support and ministry to men and women who are experiencing crisis pregnancies or otherwise need Christian care and comfort and the forgiving love of Christ. †



“LO, HOW A ROSE E’ER BLOOMING”

By Rev. Steve Klawonn

There are many places in the world, especially in the northern states of the U.S., that winter can be a long, dreary, and cold time to endure. One aspect of this winter season is the deadness of all the trees, plants and flowers as the earth scales back for a long winters nap. The tree branches are bare; as you survey the landscape, there is very little green to be found and certainly no new sprouts or flowers to offer a splash of vibrant color to see as we peer out our frost encrusted windows. Wouldn't it be encouraging if we could see a vibrant flower in the middle of winter, a bright and beautiful summer bloom to give us hope that the freezing temperatures and bleak weather wouldn't last forever?

This beautiful hymn presents us with the birth of Jesus in descriptive terms that would show us just such a flower. As we are reminded of the Nativity of Our Lord, it doesn't dispel the gloom of bad weather, but instead, it shines a ray of hope through the darkness of sin and eternal sadness. Jesus Christ is the prophesied rose that blooms and brings forgiveness and life to all who believe.



November 2023

PRAYER BOOKMARK

This hymn finds its origins in an anonymous fifteenth-century German carol that originally stretched on for twenty-three stanzas. Can you imagine singing them all today? That original text guided us through the entire story of Christ's incarnation and birth, from the visit of the angel to Mary and on to the visit of the Magi. This hymn was also originally centered around the Virgin Mary. From that point of view, it was Mary whom the rose and the branch pointed to in Isaiah. Mary was the branch that flowered and gave birth to Jesus.

The version we find in the *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB) has many changes to the text from what was originally written. Obviously, it was translated into English for our benefit of understanding, and it was thankfully trimmed down to just four stanzas that focus our attention on the birth of Jesus and the salvation it brings to us. But the most important change is that it makes Christ the rose, the fruit of which Isaiah chapter 11 speaks of.

The hymn begins with the old-fashioned interjection "Lo!" as if the author of this hymn is trying to get our collective attention by saying "Look and what is happening, pay attention to what I am telling you! The prophecy we have been waiting for all these generations has now been fulfilled!" From what had appeared to be the dead stump of Jesse's line grew forth a new branch. The time has come for the fulfillment of God's promise of the Messiah.

In stanza 2, we see the linking of this prophecy as found in Isaiah 11:1-2 with the birth of Jesus. We are brought into the incarnation story by personalizing the hymn. The singer, the hymn author and the virgin mother are all called to look upon God's love in the form of a baby, who is the promised Savior of all.

Stanza 3 presents parallels of poetic images of the incarnation with the direct truth of the Gospel. The first image is of a sweet-smelling rose whose fragrant aroma saturates the air. The next image is of the glorious splendor that illuminates the darkness of sin's night. Then, building upon these images, the text proclaims that the rose is "true man, yet very God,"¹ or in other words, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. As the Gospel is proclaimed worldwide, God fills the air with sweetness as He spreads fragrance of knowing Jesus. Among those who believe in Him, this is an aroma of life that gives life to us. The image of wonder and darkness is fulfilled as Jesus, the light of the world, chases away the night of sin and death.

This carol concludes with a prayer to the Savior, as we are reminded that as a child of Mary, Jesus feels our distinctively human woes. He has experienced the woes of man while on this earth, and now is exalted and He reigns in kingly glory at the right hand of our Heavenly Father. It is then that this hymn moves past being a mere Christmas carol and points us and Christians everywhere forward to that day when the Lord brings us into His heavenly kingdom.

The text of this hymn is so effective largely because of the biblical imagery it uses to convey a saving truth. The dominant image is that of a rose blooming from a chopped-down tree or bush. From a lifeless stump comes a beautiful rose. This picture proclaims to us the wonderful news that God has become flesh. Christ is that rose. He has come, the Son of David from the line of Jesse, to be our Savior. From such humble roots God has taken flesh, a mighty Savior.

The birth of Christ is the flowering of a bloom that is eternal and is for us, a bloom of grace and mercy. Christ is the human branch, descended from David but also the divine Son of God, the Word made flesh. He brings light to our darkness and the warmth of His love to our cold lives. We praise Him forever for His coming to us, our rose of salvation. †

The Rev. Steve Klawonn serves Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Evansdale, IA.

[1] Unknown, tr. Harriet R. K. Spaeth, "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming," *Lutheran Service Book* (Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2006), #359.

1. Prayer of Thanksgiving for all the Saints who have gone before
2. Christ Lutheran Church, Germantown, MD
3. Unity in the church
4. Board of Trustees
5. Rev. John Hallock
6. Clergy Commission
7. Poplar Lake Lutheran Church, Fosston, MN
8. Rev. Paul Hueter
9. Mountain View Lutheran Church, Thornton, CO
10. New Hope Lutheran Church, Newfolden, MN
11. For our veterans
12. Commission for American Missions
13. For those without family
14. Rev. Orlando Hash
15. Protection for our military
16. Rev. Dr. Richard Shields
17. For those struggling financially
18. Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Evansdale, IA
19. Rev. Matthew Fenn
20. For those who volunteer in soup kitchens or serve holiday meals
21. Commission on Doctrine & Church Relations
22. Holiday travels
23. Prayer of Thanksgiving for God's blessings during the past year
24. Rev. Jon Holst
25. For strained family relationships
26. To remember what Advent is all about
27. Redeemer Lutheran Church, West Union, IA
28. Evangelism Commission
29. Rev. Thomas Jahr
30. National Mediation Board



December 2023

PRAYER BOOKMARK



American Lutheran Theological Seminary

Meet the Students: Introducing a few from our growing student body at ALTS

1. Pastors and Church Workers
2. Rev. Paul Johansen
3. Military Chaplains
4. Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, Sidney, MT
5. Nominating Committee
6. Holiday season ministries
7. Rev. Steven Klawonn
8. St. John's Lutheran Church, Pocahontas, MO
9. For peace and comfort that only God can give
10. Pensions Commission
11. Rev. Leon Knitt
12. For those who are homebound or in nursing facilities
13. St. Luke the Evangelist Lutheran Church, Jurupa Valley, CA
14. Publications Commission
15. Rev Gary Koutsopoulos
16. Holiday stresses
17. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Napoleon, OH
18. Standing Committee for Men
19. For those unable to be with family
20. World Mission Commission
21. Trinity Lutheran Church, West Hempstead, NY
22. For those grieving during the holidays
23. Rev. Dr. Duane Lindberg
24. Gretchen Baker, Evangel Editor
25. To remember what Christmas is all about
26. Rev. Ray Lorthioir
27. AALC Leadership
28. For those who need food and/or shelter
29. Trinity Lutheran Church, Galata, MT
30. For struggling congregations
31. To give our worries to God

Son Kramarczyk

Audit Student

My name is Son Kramarczyk; my maiden name is Yi. I have been married 39 years to my husband Michael, and we have two children.

I got married and immigrated to the United States of America in 1985. I was born in Inje, South Korea.

I homeschooled my two children, and I taught music in school.

Now I would like to learn more about the statutes of Jesus Christ and learn to lay the foundation of God's Word rightly and divide the Word of God. My goal is The Christology. I want to know Him, His suffering, death, and resurrection. †



Son Kramarczyk with her husband Michael. Submitted photo.

James O'Flannery

Degree Pursuing: Master of Divinity

My name is James O'Flannery and I'm an active member of Immanuel Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Lima, Ohio. I'm attending The American Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS) to pursue a Master of Divinity. I have felt the call into ordained ministry since high school.

I was raised by my grandparents, Larry and Rozella Smith, at Garden City Christian Union Church in Lima, Ohio. I was baptized and confirmed in the ELCA. After multiple encounters over theological differences with that denomination, I switched to Immanuel Lutheran Church (LCMS) in 2018, and I've been there ever since.

I live with and help out my grandparents, Larry and Rozella. My girlfriend, Shaina, also lives in Lima; she started Catechism Class at Immanuel LC on Flag Day 2023.

I run two small businesses called Ohio Irish Lutheran Press (OIL Press) and Ohio Book Mart & More (OBM&M). I write and publish books and sell used books as well. I'm a vendor at The Menagerie in Dieker Castle in St. Mary's, OH. I'm able to use the books, which I've written and published, for the purposes of evangelizing the lost and edifying Christians from various traditions.

I graduated in 2015 from The Ohio State University with a BA in Classical Humanities, aka Ancient Greek and Roman Civilizations. I graduated from American Military University on April 1, 2023, with an MA in Ancient and Classical History. †



James O'Flannery with his girlfriend, Shaina King. Submitted photo.

MEMBER OF ST. PAUL'S NAPOLEON MAKES WORLD RECORD

A member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church Napoleon Twp., of Napoleon, OH, is making his way into the Guinness World Records book.

Barry Behnfeldt is a Delta Airlines pilot, who heard about another pilot attempting to land in each of the 48 continental states in under 48 hours. Barry decided to give this feat a try. After much planning and practice runs of the takeoff and landing routines, Barry and his crew, co-pilot Aaron Wilson and in-flight technician Thomas Twiddy, took off Sunday, June 4, from OH, and ended Tuesday, June 6, in Maine, finishing in 44 hours and 13 min.

Besides the three in the cockpit, eight flight coordinators back home were "essential to what we did," Barry said, including watching the weather and calling ahead to airports along the flight path.

Each stop had to be documented. The crew was occasionally met by some excited fans on their stops in various states. One such state was Kansas, where they decided to take a little extra time than planned to meet the group gathered there.

One of the goals of the trip was raising money for Veterans Airlift Command (VAC), which, according to the website;

"provides free, private air transportation to our nation's combat injured veterans for medical or other compassionate purposes through a national network of volunteer aircraft owners and pilots." Donations from individuals and sponsors totaled \$34,848.48.

The trip was recently verified as an official Guinness World Record in two categories: "Fastest Journey Through the 48 States" and "Team Effort," which allows for unlimited crew members and gives credit to the entire team of 11 people.

While getting the flight verified as a record was exciting, Barry commented, "All the other stuff we did trumps that; we were able to promote aviation, inspire kids, and give the \$30,000 donation to the veterans' organization. The record is just the cherry on top."

More information and photos can be found on the 48N48 Facebook page and website: 48n48.org. For information on the Veterans Airlift Command, visit <https://veteransairlift.org/>. †



Top Left: The team of Thomas Twiddy, Aaron Wilson, and Barry Behnfeldt flew for 44 hours and 13 minutes, landing in each of the 48 continental United States. Top Right: Rev. Dan Dapelo pictured next to the plane. Bottom Left: The flight pattern followed by the team as they landed in each of the 48 states in under 48 hours. Bottom Middle: Co-pilot Barry Behnfeldt enjoying the view of the mountains on their flight. Submitted photos.

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Mar/Apr: The Lutheran Confessions (*deadline Jan. 1*)

May/June: The Lutheran Distinction (*deadline Mar. 1*)

Jul/Aug: Lutheran Worship (*deadline May 1*)

Sept/Oct: Convention Edition (*deadline July 1*)

Nov/Dec: The Lutheran Home (*deadline Sept. 1*)

Church News:

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