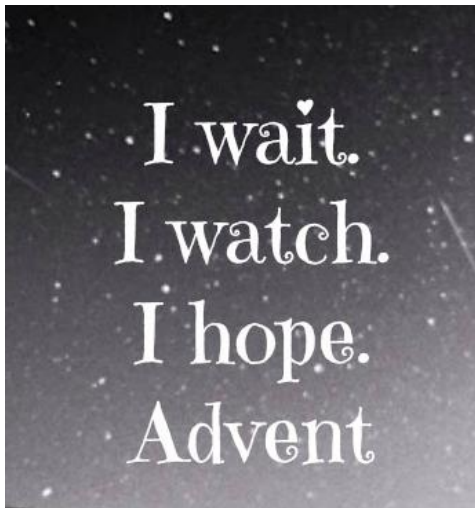


# Covenant News



December 2020

## *Pastor's Spin*



Sisters and brothers in Christ of Covenant,

Talk about a “December to remember,” to remember for a lifetime, at that. Come to think of it, we’re really about to test the whole *waiting* emphasis of Advent, when we are called to “wait” for Christ’s Second Coming, in particular (may not be such a bad idea if That comes sooner rather than later, actually). But, of course, every year we in the church must have our little Sunday school-esque pep-talk about that *wait* word not just for during the Advent season, but as called disciples of Christ throughout our lives. After all, God is not desiring for us to just sit back and wait from our rather comfy reclining chairs in the living room, and all we have to do is pray for God to take care of all matters under heaven

for us. No, this kind of wait-call from God includes asking us for a bit of anticipation, so much so that we cannot help but get off our chair and bring a glimpse of it to life right here and now (with God’s help, to be sure).

Except, during these COVID-19 times, God, and our neighbors, wouldn’t mind us staying home more often than not: minimizing our trips to grocery stores and other random errands, as well as the “it’s no big deal” social gatherings. Unfortunately, it’s turning out to be a significant “big deal” for many infected with the virus, and God only knows what the long-term health consequences will be for those on the receiving end of domino-effect socializing. We’re waiting not just for the end of a Stay-at-Home Advisory for this “December to remember.” We’re waiting for it *all* to be over with: we’re waiting to sing to the rafters, we’re waiting to get up close and personal in all forms of celebrating, we’re waiting to not have to wear those wretched masks whenever we leave our house. We’re waiting with...perhaps, an Advent-eque anticipation.

So, yes, we hope to bring a glimpse of such hope that seems so incredibly distant at times by wearing our masks, staying home more, maintaining the physical distancing, washing hands, etc., yes, but this Advent season does not compel us to just focus on our own personal welfare (Second Coming or everything leading up to it). Year after year, we hear from all these Hebrew prophets (Isaiah and Amos and on and on) insisting we check in on others, too; that, how we treat the vulnerable “other” means a significant “big deal” to God. There will be plenty of vulnerable people during this month and beyond: more isolation, more fear, more worry during this time of year that has a propensity to increase depression and hopelessness.

I have a feeling those Hebrew prophets would go along with us staying home more, but they would urge us to still do our eager anticipating holy activity within our cozy walls: phone calls to check in on family, cards to the homebound of our church family, emails to friends we haven’t heard from in a while, and on and on we could go. It’s quite possible we could make this a “December to remember” in a wide variety of ways. That’s what hope does to people, still. Yes, we will wait for all this coronavirus to come to an end (or, at least, make it more manageable). But, in the meantime, we’ll do our Advent part in waiting with such an anticipation as if to believe that Christ is already here empowering us with the same hope that will come to its ultimate fruition in the distant future, yes, but...what already happened in Bethlehem wasn’t so bad, either, to carry us through our own lifetime and beyond. Thanks be to God, indeed!

In Christ,  
Pastor Brad



It is with saddened, yet determined, hearts that we continue suspending in-person public worship through the next few weeks at the Lutheran Church of the Covenant. Given the Cleveland and Cuyahoga County Stay-at-Home Health Advisory, with the recommendation to only leave home for essential services (work, school, groceries, pharmacy), and with the overall surge of COVID-19 cases and increased hospitalizations, our Covenant council believes it is our responsibility to do our part in curbing the spread, not just for the sake of you as our most beloved Covenant family, but for your own family and friends, our neighborhoods we call home, not to mention for our local hospitals during this critical period of time. The advisory is in effect until December 17, so we hope to re-gather in-person the weekend of December 19/20 (unless the circumstances improve before then). We also hope by doing our part now, we may be able to celebrate together on Christmas Eve. Regardless, our call remains to love and serve our neighbor. During these COVID-19 times, this is how we do exactly that. So yes, we are sad, to say the least, to not be able to worship together in-person for the time being. And yet, we are determined in our ministry of sacrifice for the good of our neighbors.

In the meantime, we continue to provide weekday devotions through email, as well as offering recordings of worship that will be posted on our website and Facebook page and also emailing the link to our YouTube page. Continued blessings to all of you!



- 12/6 Laura Cibella
- 12/8 Mary Kaye Bernardo
- 12/8 Gwen Susaneck
- 12/14 Jane Gradert
- 12/15 Peggy Smith
- 12/18 Heather Lasher
- 12/20 Kara Constant
- 12/24 Olive Evanofski
- 12/26 Courtney Wright
- 12/28 Dick Ptak
- 12/29 Sheila Werner

We hope that we will be able to join together in-person to celebrate our dear Savior's birth for Christmas Eve at 7pm. The same protocols will remain in place, if we do: masks will be expected to be worn, we will not sing together as a group, you will pick Communion up as you come in, and we will space out our seating in the pews. It will not feel the same, but it will still be worshipful in adoring the precious Messiah for the world!



*From all of us at the Lutheran Church of the Covenant,  
we wish you and yours a most wonderful Christmas!*

*Good news from heaven the angels bring,  
Glad tidings to the earth they sing:  
To us this day a child is given,  
To crown us with the joy of heaven.  
- Martin Luther*

*Have a blessed*  
**CHRISTMAS**



## ***Finding Home: No Crib for a Bed***

Among the first Christmas hymns learned by children is the 19th-century text “Away in a Manger.” Whether one knows the earlier melody or prefers (as I do) a later arrangement by English composer Sir David Willcocks, the lyrics and music illustrate a hauntingly iconic image of the Christ child’s birth—far from home, in a manger stall meant for animals because there was no room anywhere else. There was *no crib for his bed*.

As a young child, I imagined this scenario by creating a manger in an old hollowed-out tree stump outside our home in Western Washington. In that soft cradle of leaves, moss and pine needles, I spent hours playing with my doll—making for her a bed and a home, a manger in a rotted stump. Even as a 3-year-old, there was some latent awareness of the pathos of *no crib for a bed*.

It’s not a stretch for us these days to picture fleeing families, young children and babies in tow and, yes, pregnant mothers, risking their lives as they seek safety, asylum and shelter for themselves and the people they love. Perhaps for the first time, the graphic images of refugees and immigrants—of children separated from their parents—have been seared into the collective psyche of many in our land, poignant reminders of fear and desperation most of us can’t begin to fathom.

As Christmas draws near, maybe we can challenge ourselves to stop the frenetic buying and frivolous preparations that too often have little to do with the coming of Christ. Maybe privileged, “first-world” Christians can consider what it means to make room in the inn, a soft place in the hay, shelter for all who flee oppression, persecution, tyranny. It’s a good time to stop and imagine how *we* might make room for the Christ child, how *we* might make a home where compassion and kindness and love create space for unconditional acceptance and grace.

Christmas is homecoming—making ready our own broken lives and preoccupation with ourselves; making room for a crib big enough to cradle the mystery of God, shown to us in a baby; putting aside all the distracting and befuddling obsessions of our culture; making space for the mystery of God, the very presence of Christ, to be born anew in us.

Preparing for Christmas is, most of all, about seeing the face of God in all the forgotten faces and broken places, and hearing God’s heartbeat in our own. It’s about making space—accommodations—for strangers, those who know no home, those with *no crib for a bed*. Christmas is a way of coming home, finding home, being home.

“The Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14) means that God dwells in us. The living God is in our midst, making God’s home among us. Christ is our life and Christ is our home. Thanks be to God!

*Christ is the path and Christ is the door. Christ is the bread and welcome cup. Christ is the word and cleansing bath. Christ is the robe and Christ is the fire. Christ is the dawn and blazing sun. Christ is the light and Christ is the star. Christ is the beginning and the end. Christ is our life and Christ is our home*

—Samuel Torvend, professor of the history of Christianity, Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Wash.

*Originally published through Living Lutheran December 6, 2018 (LivingLutheran.org)*

*Julie K. Aageson is the former coordinator of ELCA resource centers. She is the author of Benedictions: 26 Reflections (Wipf and Stock, 2016) and Holy Ground: An Alphabet of Prayer (Cascade, 2018), among other books, and wrote a column for Gather magazine for 10 years.*

Greetings to all members of the congregation!

Recently I became involved in the Lake County Messiah Chorus, which has presented a full (or nearly full) annual presentation of Handel's glorious oratorio, The Messiah, since 1949! This year, for the first time, they have been forced to cancel the production due to the pandemic. As a result, the steering committee has been looking at other ways to continue to offer the beauty and inspiration of this wonderful music. For example, a radio broadcast of the CD of the 2016 concert is in the works for Christmas day on several local stations.



They have also asked choir members to contact their own churches and ask that they offer links to YouTube videos (disk 1 and disk 2) of the 2012 production. Following are the links:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6\\_GL4nfvb9E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_GL4nfvb9E)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1di-WXyadw0>

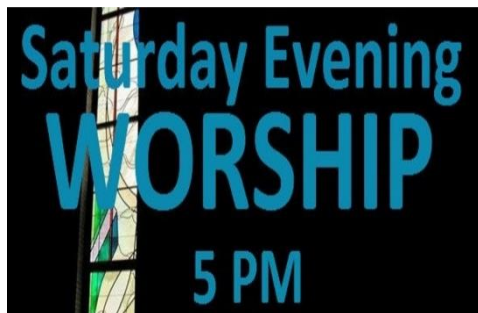
You can also go to the chorus website to pick up the hyperlinks: [www.messiahchorus.com](http://www.messiahchorus.com)

There is no cost to listen via these links, or on the radio. However, if you are so moved and able, donations are happily accepted to make up for the freewill offering collected at the concerts and patron ads placed in the program.

Messiah Chorus of Lake County 1121 Riverside Dr. Painesville, OH 44077

Thank you so much for your support and have a blessed Advent/Christmas season!

-Robin



We were hoping to re-start our worships on Saturdays (5pm) in December, but given our current in-person worship suspension, we hope to do so in January.

## *What are the 12 Days of Christmas?*

Christmas, according to the liturgical calendar, isn't just a day, but a season. Many Christians know the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" or recall that Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is about the last night of Christmas. But what defines the Christmas season?

The 12 days of Christmas are a reversal of the season of Advent. Traditionally, Christians have fasted during Advent as we await the celebration of the birth of our Savior. The period from Christmas Day to the day before Epiphany (the celebration of the magi visiting Jesus, the baptism of Jesus and the beginning of his earthly ministry) is a period of daily feasting. This is surprising, given the reason for celebrating several of the days.

The first day of Christmas, the Feast of the Nativity, is obvious enough as a reason to celebrate. The Messiah has been born into the world! The next day, however, is the feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who was killed under the authority of Saul of Tarsus/Paul (Acts 8:1). The emotional whiplash of celebrating the birth of the Savior and then the next day celebrating the life and martyrdom of the first person to die for Christ is stunning. However, tradition calls for a joyful feast to celebrate the faithfulness of Stephen, even unto death.

The next day, the third of the 12, celebrates the life of St. John the Apostle. He was, traditionally, the only disciple who wasn't martyred. Tradition holds that John took care of Mary, the mother of Jesus, made disciples, grew old and finally died a natural death in Ephesus.

The fourth day of Christmas is the most shocking. The Feast of the Holy Innocents commemorates the death of all boys in Bethlehem, aged 2 and under, at the hands of Herod the Great's soldiers (Matthew 2:16-18). Again, we feel the emotional rollercoaster, as we're reminded that the Christian life isn't simply one of sweetness and joy, but also of pain, hardship and injustice. Nevertheless, the fourth day of Christmas is the *Feast* of the Holy Innocents, rather than a fast, because we celebrate the One who has conquered sin and death and doesn't surrender these precious little ones, or any others, to the grave forever.

The following days celebrate Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket's resistance to injustice; the holy family; Pope Sylvester, who resisted the Donatist and Arian controversies (in many Germanic-speaking countries, New Year's Eve is still called "Sylvester"); the circumcision of Jesus; St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen, who defended the doctrine of the Trinity; Jesus' presentation and naming in the Jerusalem temple; the hermitage of St. Simon on the pillar; and even two American saints: Elizabeth Ann Seton and John Neumann.

These 12 days help Christians remember that the life of faith is full of challenges and hardships but also contains plenty of reasons to celebrate as we remember the heroes and heroines of the church, and most importantly, our Lord and Savior.

*Originally published through Living Lutheran December 27, 2019 (LivingLutheran.org).*

*Cory Driver is a minister of word and service, and the director of the Transformational Leadership Academy in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. He earned his doctorate in Jewish religious cultures from Emory University, Atlanta. Cory lives with his family in Indianapolis.*

# *The Lutheran Church of the Covenant*

## **December 2020**

Server Schedule	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
AG: Joan Garvin, Marie Zahn, Jen Garberich	11/29 Advent 1 Service with youtube video	11/30	1	2	3	4 Registration deadline for virtual St. Nick	5
AG: Sheila Werner, Annie Copeland, Paula Hohenstein	6. Advent 2 Service with youtube video	7 Pick Up for virtual St Nick Nite	8 Pick Up for virtual St. Nick Nite	9 Pick Up for virtual St. Nick Nite	10 Pick Up for virtual St. Nick Nite	11 Pick Up for virtual St. Nick Nite	12
AG: Sheila Werner, Annie Copeland, Paula Hohenstein	13 Advent 3 Service with youtube video	14	15	16	17	18	19
AG: Gavin, Zahn, Garberich, Senderak, Rusher, Susaneck	20 Advent 4 Service with youtube video	21	22	23	24	25 7:00 Christmas Eve Eucharist	26 Christmas Day
AG: Garvin, Zahn, Garberich, Senderak, Rusher, Susaneck	27 First Sunday of Christmas Service with youtube video	28	29	30	31	Jan. 1 New Years Eve	Jan. 2 New Year's Day
	Jan. 3 Epiphany Service with youtube video	Jan. 4	***** Office Closed - December 25 - January 4*****				

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