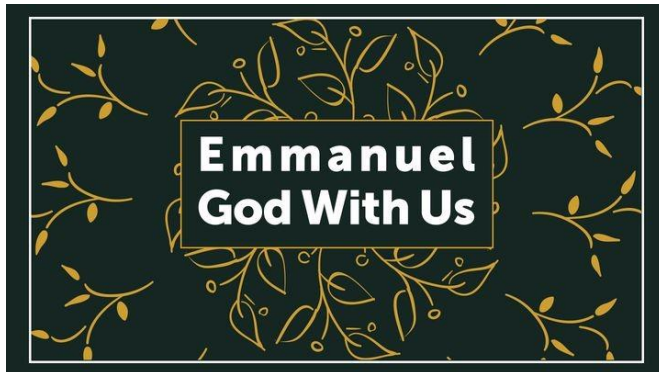


Covenant News



December 2021

Pastor's Spin



One of the eye-catching displays in our sanctuary this time of year is the Advent wreath. I still remember my first time trying to teach Confirmation students about the symbolism behind the candles. Although I had mostly heard and read about the order being hope, peace, joy (this being for the pink candle for the congregations who have one), love, and then culminating in the center Christ candle come the celebration of the Nativity of Our

Lord; there is also a different build-up possibility: prophecy, Bethlehem, shepherd, and angel before the Christ candle lit on Christmas Eve. And I'm sure plenty of other more creative people than myself have come up with their own order of candle things. All well and good. I'm pretty sure I "sold" those first two sets of symbolisms with the youth, since so many of them would be responsible in lighting those candles during worship. And yet, for some reason, they were more interested in the wreath.

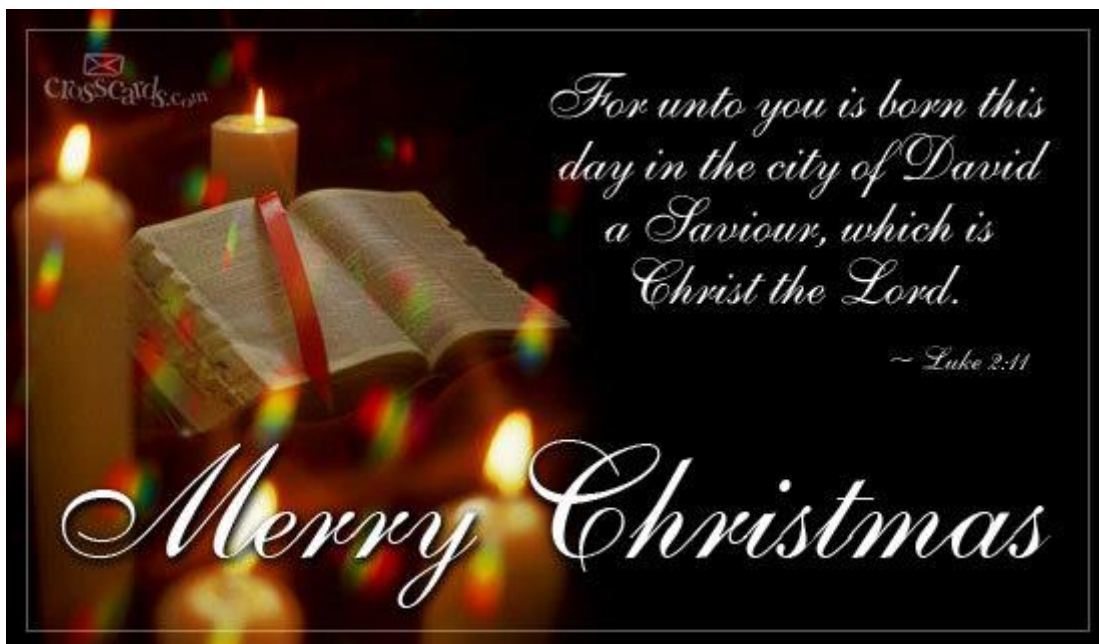
Of course, with the surrounding wreath itself, there are many interpretations for its meaning: the never-ending circle of time (that it may have been adapted from a pagan tradition of yearning for the return of springtime from the cold and dark winter months), or a victory crown, but I like the idea that it symbolizes being forever surrounded by the love of God brought to life in Jesus Christ. I could "sell" the Confirmation students on that Gospel/Good News. That, regardless of the difficulties they were enduring in middle school with fitting in, classes, home life, or whatever else; they could never break the almighty bond of God being around and with them each and every day.

That's a precious part of this Advent season that never gets old, no matter how many times we watch those candles get lit, no matter how many times we sing all eight verses of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," it's as if our Lord never gets tired of trying to "sell"/proclaim our worth of the Messiah coming into our life. No matter how down we get on ourselves this time of year for whatever the reason may be, our Savior not only believed we were more than worth coming into our humanity thousands of years ago, and even coming back for a majestic second time at some point down the line, but that the Christ has come into our own personal life and insists on being our Emmanuel ("God with us") forever. That has its soothing Incredible News not only for adolescents, but for other "big kids" dealing with whatever adulting that comes during these chaotic weeks ahead and for our whole life.

And, lest we forget, we are not surrounded by a circle of judgement and guilt and shame. The Advent wreath reminds us we are surrounded by awe-inspiring beauty, wholeness of peace, and never-ending new life. It's that infinite hope of God to not only convince us how wonderful the Divine is, but that God believes there's a wonderful in us, too. It turns out that no matter how many times Confirmation students are told God knows they are beautiful (even if others tell them otherwise), we still have our moments of struggle with God's belief in us throughout our life. So, God will stubbornly insist on showing us hope, peace, joy, love not only through the season of Advent and with every candle lit in a wreath, but for every day of our life, for Christ remains with us always, as if our Lord is still under the impression we are more than worth that Gospel reality. Thanks be to God, indeed!

In Christ,
Pastor Brad

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



HAPPY BIRTHDAY

12/8 Mary Kay Bernardo

12/8 Gwen Susanek

12/14 Jane Gradert

12/15 Peggy Smith

12/18 Heather Lasher

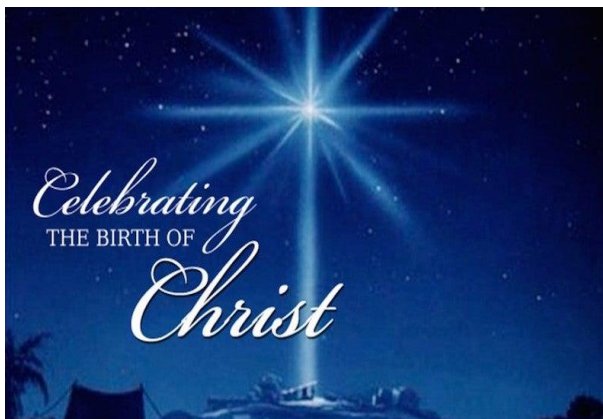
12/20 Kara Constant

12/24 Olive Evanofski

12/26 Courtney Wright

12/28 Dick Ptak

12/29 Sheila Werner



We invite you to join us Christmas Eve at 7pm, when we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior among us. We will sing some of the beloved Christmas carols passed down over the centuries, with the help of a brass quintet! We will also celebrate holy Communion and conclude our

time together with candlelight. So, "come, let us adore him!"



NATIONAL LUTHERAN CHOIR

website at 9pm on Dec. 10th.

The National Lutheran Choir: Christmas Festival

Join the NLC this holiday season online for their 36th annual Christmas Festival, *The Earth Adorned*. A livestream of the concert will be available for free to all on the NLCA.com

During *The Earth Adorned*, we will view the birth of Christ alongside the beauty of this world through works for choir and instruments including Aaron David Miller's *Chanticleer*, Paul John Rudoj's *Orbit Carol*, and the *Creation Suite* by Dr. Larry Fleming. *The Earth Adorned* will include singing of carols, recitations of poetry, and more from the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis, MN.

Christmas Festival: The Earth Adorned Livestream
Friday, Dec. 10th - 9pm
Free to all | Visit NLCA.com to watch

For more information, visit [the above site](#), or call 612-722-2301.

Adopt-A-Turkey Southeast Clergy Hunger Center Christmas Food Drive



The Southeast Clergy Hunger Center continues to feed families and individuals in increasing numbers. Because the U.S. Department of Agriculture is giving less food to the Cleveland Foodbank, the Hunger Center's funds do not go as far. As a result, the Center is asking member congregations to consider an "Adopt-a-Turkey" drive to provide turkeys for the families at Christmas.

To that end, Covenant has established an "Adopt-a-Turkey" fund. On average, turkeys run from \$12 to \$14 dollars each. If you feel so moved, please make a contribution to the Southeast Clergy Hunger Center, either directly or through the Lutheran Church of the Covenant. Thank you in advance for your generosity!



Website: goodgifts.elca.org

What are ELCA Good Gifts?

ELCA Good Gifts are a creative, meaningful way to support the ministries of the ELCA that mean the most to you and your loved ones. These gifts are real examples from projects currently supported through ELCA churchwide ministries...Each of these programs is a long-term, partnership-based ministry that focus on the needs identified by local congregations and global companion churches and their communities.

How does this work?

Your donation will be used where it is needed most within the wider category of each gift selected. For example, a gift of vaccinations may be used to support other health care initiatives. This allows our church to stay adaptive, flexible and effective in the work that we do.

What are the administrative costs?

More than 85 percent of your gifts directly support our programs; less than 15 percent is used for administration and fundraising. Because of our long-standing, local partnerships around the world, our administrative costs are significantly lower than other organizations.

What is the difference between ELCA Good Gifts and similar organizations?

Many other organizations are doing wonderful work around the world, and some do work in similar ways. A main difference between the ELCA and other programs is that this church receives almost all of the money to fund its work directly through its congregations and members, and almost all of the money that we distribute goes to support the work being carried out by our congregations, global companion churches and ecumenical partners. This is unique because the church is our delivery system. It is successful because the church is present in far corners of the world and already connected and trusted in communities. And finally, it is sustainable. Our churches and partners are the ones who identify local needs and solutions; we just help make those dreams a reality.

What about animals?

The animals of God's Global Barnyard are among some of the most popular gifts in the catalog. Your gifts to God's Global Barnyard support the sustainable development ministries of ELCA World Hunger, which include training, education, resources (and much more) to help the community care for animals and create new market opportunities like starting a small business selling eggs, meat or dairy products. Your gifts support this comprehensive approach to animal husbandry.

Have a question? Please call 800-638-3522 or email giving@elca.org.

Deeper Understandings: Christmas—God “Deep in the Flesh”

Thus it is rightly and truly said: God is born, was nursed or suckled, lay in the crib, felt cold, walked, stood, fell, wandered, ate, drank, suffered, died, etc. (Martin Luther’s Table Talk).

Such “talk” around Martin Luther’s table that day is not heard as much around our tables. Perhaps this is because it’s about the body, which comes uncomfortably close to topics we are taught to avoid in polite conversation: religion, sex, politics and even money.

As we prepare once again to celebrate the joyous festival of the incarnation, our rich heritage can draw us deeply into a sometimes avoided meaning of Christmas. Luther’s theology has often been characterized as a bold proclamation of God “deep in the flesh.” This clear and consistent emphasis on the bodily dimension of our faith continues to be one of the hallmarks of our Lutheran tradition.

In her book *Enfleshing Freedom* (Fortress, 2009), author and theologian M. Shawn Copeland reminds us: “In theology the body is a contested site—ambiguous and sacred, wounded and creative, malleable and resistant—disclosing and mediating ‘more.’ ” This seems to be true not only in theology but in anthropology, in our lives. That we struggle with, for example, female bodies, black bodies, older bodies, disabled bodies, transgender bodies, deteriorating bodies, covered bodies, naked bodies, dead bodies suggests these are all “contested sites.”

The challenges we have in addressing the complexity of our bodies (as individuals and as communities, even as the body of Christ), make it difficult for us to address the complexity and mystery of God’s body, conceived by the Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, “made man.”

Made man? Yes. What divine being is also willing to be human (Philippians 2)? Our God, our incarnate God.

There is no denying that

Christianity is the religion of the incarnation. Christians’ core belief is that God entered the human world of bodies and senses in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whose historical life is normative in its claim about the nature of God and possibilities for human existence (Margaret Miles, ; Wiley-Blackwell, 2004).

It matters for our theology, yes, but also for our faith and for our lives that we have an incarnate God, an enfleshed God, who became human—not just a human, in general, but a human with particularities that make a difference. The Word was made flesh in what some have called “dubious circumstances” and what another, a hymn writer, has called a “mean estate” (you’ll likely be singing the latter this Christmas season). It’s important and helpful to name a few of the particularities:

- Our God had an unwed mom.
- Our God was born “without the agency of a man.”
- Our God had a human dad who had to be convinced to adopt one that was not his own.

- Our God was a homeless refugee born in a makeshift delivery room.

We name the fleshy particulars to help us avoid the temptation to prioritize the “soul” as our true selves. God is the prototype for our life together, which makes the body central.

- We believe the Word became flesh.
- We believe God was “nursed or suckled, lay in the crib, felt cold, walked, stood, fell, wandered, ate, drank, suffered, died.”
- We believe we are made in the image of an incarnate—an enfleshed—God.
- We believe in the resurrection of the body.

The incarnation is as edgy and scandalous as the crucifixion and resurrection. The incarnation is as edgy and scandalous today as it has been for 2,000 years. To counter our tendency to render Emanuel’s body-ness a taboo subject around the dinner table, we boldly declare in our weekly meal: “The body of Christ given for you.” God with you. Emmanuel. God for you. Jesus.

Ultimately, the Word becoming flesh is not just table talk—it’s a way of being. God’s willingness to “empty himself by being born in human likeness” by “being found in human form” (Philippians 2) changes how we encounter and interact with other bodies. We are changed by one whose ministry focused on the care of actual bodies, as Jesus proclaimed release to captives, gave sight to the blind and let the oppressed go free (Luke 4).

As people of the incarnation, we take our lead from God as we embrace the fleshiness of the world and of our own experiences. We are freed for being grateful for our bodies. We are freed from denying our body’s aches and pains. We are freed from having to prioritize one type of body over another. We are freed for being the body of Christ.

Originally published December 20, 2016, on LivingLutheran.org, where you may find this article and other resources for the journey of faith.



Shauna Hannan is associate professor of homiletics at Pacific Lutheran Seminary of California Lutheran University, Berkeley, California.

Our next FREE community meal will be Thursday, December 16 (a week earlier than usual because of Christmas) from 4:30-6. Again, we continue this ministry in a drive-thru format from the back of the church. So, if you need a night off from cooking dinner or you wish to help out during this season of giving or you know of someone else who needs it, help us spread the word. It is FREE for anyone and everyone!

FREE
community
MEAL

Covenant News

The Lutheran Church of the Covenant
19000 Libby Road, Maple Heights, Ohio 44137



Quiet Blessing for Advent

*May shortened days and colder nights
invite deep stillness into our bones,
open space for listening in our hearts,
and kindle hope
for the newness
of the endless birth the Holy One
within and through us.*

Christine Hall 2018