

December, 2022

**MARK: MY WORDS**

It is the “other Christmas story.” Every Christmas Eve we hear the familiar account of Jesus’ birth from the Gospel of Luke. All the well-known (and well-worn) characters are there: Mary and Joseph; the shepherds; and the angel choir. It is one of the most difficult passages to preach because it has been so sentimentalized and romanticized over the centuries that some of the hard political, economic, and social realities that drive it are lost.

But in this year of St. Matthew’s Gospel, we hear a much shorter version of the Incarnation that cannot be romanticized and in which some of those real-world difficulties come to light. There is no census, no decree from the Emperor Augustus, no travel to Bethlehem, no manger, no shepherds nor angels.

Mary and Joseph are “engaged” but are not yet living together. In Biblical Palestine, there were stages to the marriage process. When a couple became “engaged,” it served as a public declaration of their intent to marry. One scholar describes the process in this way: “A Jewish betrothal was an important part of the marriage process and was as binding as marriage itself. Those initiating the betrothal and witnesses to the event would likely sign a marriage contract called a *ketubah*. Therefore, if one or both parties wished to end the betrothal, they would be required to get a divorce.”

This was the situation described in Matthew. Though Mary was “found to be with child by the Holy Spirit,” Joseph believes that she has been unfaithful. To protect her reputation and prevent her from being labeled an adulteress, he decides to “dismiss (or divorce) her quietly.” Matthew does not describe Joseph’s feelings or state of mind, but one can only imagine how hurt and betrayed and angry he must have felt.

We can only also imagine what and how Mary was feeling. Surely, she knew that when it was apparent that she was pregnant there would be rumors and gossip and shame. Matthew does not include Gabriel’s visit to Mary to explain God’s choice that she become the mother of Jesus, so we are left to wonder if she understood what was happening to her. And if she was aware of Joseph’s intentions, surely there would also be fear for her about how her family, her relatives, and her village would respond to such a shattering event.

This is no greeting card version of Christmas. By choosing not to “dismiss” Mary (prompted, Matthew tells us, by “an angel of the Lord who appeared to him in a dream”), Joseph not only agrees to “adopt” a Child of whom he is not the father, but also to share in whatever shame or innuendo that came to Mary because of her pregnancy before they lived together.

And yet what a perfect model for the Child Who will be born and named, “Emmanuel,” that is, ‘God with us.’ Out of his deep love for her, Joseph will stay by Mary’s side through not just the physical pain of giving birth but also the social pain brought on by her circumstances. Jesus learned that kind of love growing up with Joseph and will embody that faithfulness throughout His life, death, and resurrection.

Matthew’s “Christmas story” is one that is grounded in the all-too-human experiences we daily face. That does not make it “better” than Luke’s version of Jesus’ birth; it just gives a different perspective that perhaps is more readily identifiable than talk of Emperors and shepherds and angels. On the Fourth Saturday and Sunday in Advent we are both drawn into this gritty story and the promise of an everlasting embrace by the Child Who arises from it.



**ADVENT SENIOR/QUIET COMMUNION**

For the first time in several years, we will return to a familiar and beloved Advent tradition of observing a Senior/Quiet Communion service. It will be held on **Wednesday, December 14, at 10:30 a.m.** A luncheon provided by the Altar Guild will be served in the St. Paul Room afterward, and we will be blessed by the kindergarten students bringing their Christmas songs to us. This service is not restricted to “seniors.” Anyone is invited and welcome to join us.

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I will be taking some time off in the week between Christmas Day and New Year’s Eve/Day to recharge for the season of Epiphany and then the busiest time of year as we enter Lent. As always, I am available by phone (630-450-1894) if there is a pastoral emergency.

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**CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SCHEDULE**

As posted in last month’s newsletter, here is the schedule of our end-of-Advent, Christmas Eve/Day, and following worship services. It was pointed out that I had forgotten to list the worship service and time for the Saturday after Christmas, and there was a question whether that service had been canceled. No, it was just an oversight on my part, which has been corrected and included here.

**Saturday, December 17** Fourth Saturday in Advent 4:00 p.m.

**Sunday, December 18** Fourth Sunday in Advent 9:00 a.m.

**Saturday, December 24** Christmas Eve 6:00 p.m.

**(No 4:00 p.m. worship; pre-service music begins at 5:45 p.m.)**

**Sunday, December 25** Christmas Day 9:00 a.m.

**(Please note time change from previous years)**

**Saturday, December 31** The First Saturday after Christmas 4:00 p.m.

**Sunday, January 1** The First Sunday after Christmas 9:00 a.m.

On the First Saturday and Sunday after Christmas, we will again offer a Service of Lessons and Carols with some traditional Scripture readings for the season interspersed with some beloved Christmas carols. There will be no homily on that day. On Saturday, December 31, and Sunday, January 1, we will observe the festival of The Name of Jesus, which falls on that Sunday.



**POINSETTIA ORDER 2022**

It’s time to start thinking about purchasing a Christmas Poinsettia from St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. Each plant will be a red 7.5-inch double plant containing 4-11 blooms. The cost of each plant will be $15.00 and can be put ‘In Memory or Honor of a Loved One’. Please place your order through the church office by calling 219-874-7293, or place your information on an envelope with a check made out to the church or cash and place in offering plate. All checks should be made out to St. Paul Lutheran Church. All plants will be available to take home after the Christmas Eve or Christmas Day Service. Orders must be placed by Wednesday, December 14; the final count is turned in that day!



**CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS**

We are blessed to have volunteers who are willing year after year to organize and put up the beautiful decorations for our celebration of Advent and The Twelve Days of Christmas. Normally, we list those generous and hard workers after the decorations have come down; but this year, it seemed good to honor them beforehand so that when you see them you might thank them for all their faithful work. Many of them have been doing the same jobs for a long time, and we are so grateful to them for their selfless service at a time of year when everyone is busy and weary.

Christmas Tree Bob and Karen Kiser; Larry and Judy

Litchford; Wayne and Suzann Dolson;

Kyle Petter; Casey, Kelly and Brad Neulieb

Advent Log Virginia Murray

Poinsettia plants Virginia Murray; Sue Koziel

Large wooden cross Janet Bakken; Sue Koziel; Karen Steinborn

Garland (outer narthex and Communion railings) Karen Steinborn; Sue Koziel

Window treatments (nave and outside) Mary Knaup

Upper narthex nativity scene and creche Pastor Mark Kloess; Jary Tannehill; Stacie

Crozier

It is easy to assume that these decorations will always be there at the right time and in the right way. We forget how much time and effort it takes to get them out of storage, put them up, clean up afterward, and then take them down after The Epiphany, and return them to storage. When you see these good folks, please be effusive in your thanks for their work and the blessing we all receive from the decorated worship space.

A person sitting at a piano

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**FAREWELL, ST. PAUL LUTHERAN**

When I mentioned to Pastor Reshan that I was thinking about sliding off the organ bench for good at the end of this year, I had not even looked at the calendar. Yes, I know January 1st always starts a new year but did not realize that this year it falls on a Sunday. And do you know what that means? I get to slide off the bench on Christmas morning Dec. 25, 2022. I could not have planned it better. I love the Advent and Christmas music and their liturgical services. I find them both hopeful and joyful. Advent gives us four weeks of anticipation and preparation for another blessed Christmas.

So, as I slide off the organ bench on Christmas morning, I will bring home a bundle of joyous and wonderful memories gathered throughout these past thirty years. A bundle of memories that I will unwrap for the rest of my life. The most treasured memories are those of your support, acceptance, and encouragement. These memories include directing the bell choir and senior choir plus accompanying congregational singing. Fond memories, indeed! I am most proud of steering the Council to update the mechanical workings of the organ console to computer control. And to celebrate such an investment, St. Paul had ten years of organ concerts by highly acclaimed organists.

I would like to thank you, the congregation, for allowing me to play a part in your church’s history. I thoroughly enjoyed working with my predecessor, an extremely talented organist, Elvera Precious. The musically trained and professional choir directors Dennis Kienitz and Lori Zylstra were also a joy. I owe Pastor Knappe, Pastor Stuck (Bishop), Pastor Matevia, and Pastor Reshan the greatest thanks for guiding and supporting me in my 30-year Lutheran experience. And best of all, I thank God for granting me the opportunity and time to be with you all. It has been a blessed spiritual gift.

I pray God continues to grant St. Paul Lutheran Church many more years of faithful service to Him and to the Michigan City community. Farewell, good and faithful servants!

John Remmel

11/20/22



**ORGANIST SEARCH UPDATE**

We have received an inquiry from a candidate interested in interviewing for our organist position. He will be moving to the South Bend area the week of Thanksgiving and will begin his new position on December 1. I had a brief conversation with him, and we agreed that once the move was complete and he felt at least somewhat settled in, he would contact me and we would set up an interview.

A copy of his resume was shared with the Church Council and the Search Committee for the position. At this point in the process, I would like to hold back further information until we confirm an interview and get a sense of whether there is a possibility of coming to terms with him. There is no sense in building hope and expectation if there is little chance that we can reach an agreement with him. He only knows a little about our position, and there are important questions we need to ask him (and any candidate) along the way.

It is exciting to have someone with whom to speak, and we will keep the congregation informed as to our progress. Thank you for your patience and understanding.



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**THE ARCHIVE ROOM AT CHRISTMAS TIME**

As hard as it is to believe, the Christmas Season is upon us. As you go about all your preparations and activities, you may want to take time out to visit the Archive Room.

Many years ago, Mr. Robert Murray painstakingly packaged in manila envelopes decades worth of Christmas bulletins. Not only are they in somewhat of a date order, they are all labeled!

Feel free to open the bottom drawer in the far right stack of metal drawers and look through these moments of past Christmases. Please try and keep them in order, but you are more than welcome to sit at the now-provided table and chairs and take your time reading about Christmases long ago. Some older Christmas bulletins have been found, and they are tucked into the front of this drawer. They are a bit delicate, but, again, please take the time and look at them.

On a totally different subject: the Archive Room’s media drawer! It is the top drawer in the center stack of file cabinets. We have decades worth of now retired media of sermons and special services; some are special events or visiting pastors. (There are also about 200 cassette tapes and VHS tapes in a different room that are recordings of church services of the 1970’s.)

The problem? They are not in a computer format! While you can go on Amazon or your favorite electronics store and purchase cassette players, VHS players, and even turntables, some of the media will be hard for you to view.

Does ANYONE want to volunteer for the job of converting this obsolete media into a digital format that can be enjoyed? While the technology is out there to do this, is it something we should even be doing? There are professionals that will do this, but is it worth the money? It may be quite expensive. Many of the tapes might very well shred from old age when handled to record them to digital format that can be enjoyed on a computer or tv.

A sample of what we have in this drawer: about 5 metal boxes of slides, subject unknown. There are scanners that can handle scanning them, so they could be viewed if a person has the time to dedicate.

Also found:

* Two 7 inch reels of radio shows and sermons.
* Two 5 inch reels of Pastor Knappe’s sermons from 1971
* Three inch reel of Luther Meyer marked “very good”
* Three inch reel from Jan 1968, contents are a mystery
* …and more, cassettes and film negatives from years gone by

So, take a step back in time this December and come and view the contents of the manila envelopes that Mr. Murray so painstakingly created, or peek at the media we have and perhaps offer a solution for what our congregation should do with this media. There are pencils and papers on the table for you to write your suggestions, and suggestions are ALWAYS welcome.

Merry Christmas to All from the Archive Room!



**IN MEMORY OF DIANE GIELOW**

**General Fund** from Virginia Murray, Fred Weiss, Dave & Nancy Squires, Jeff Timmrick,

Carol Radke, Pastor Pamela Thiede, Harbour Trust, Janet Bakken, Charity Circle

**Capital Improvement Fund** from Maxine Powell, Bob & Karen Kiser

**Radio Fund** from Lori & Herb Moore

**IN MEMORY OF HELEN STIBBE on her November 16th birthday**

**General Fund** from her daughters Kay Peglow, Pat Jones, Pam Sullivan, and Linda Strohacker

**IN MEMORY OF CAROL WEISS**

**General Fund** from Clarice J. Belling

**Organ Repair Fund** from her sister-in-law and nephew, Judith Miller & Andy

**IN HONOR OF THE JOHN REMMEL’S RETIREMENT**

**Organ Repair Fund** from Maxine Powell

**Hold the Door**

It’s a battlefield out there. Sure, there may be some sappy elevator music version of “Silver Bells” playing through the five-level department store, but don’t let it fool you. The shopping malls at Christmas can be downright war zones, and it’s every man for himself. (That’s why when my wife forces me to go with her to the mall, I usually camp out at the food court.) I suggest we change our tactics—show some kindness this Christmas by being aware of the little things. See the woman with three kids in tow walking into the store behind you? Stop and hold the door open for her and her small troop.

This kind of thoughtfulness can be contagious. There’s a good chance that woman will extend the favor to someone else down the line. If you’re in a hurry, this will be a good way to slow yourself down. And even if that woman you were courteous to grabs the very last Elmo Live! before you do, the world’s not going to come to an end. Can I get an Amen?

*The seeds of good deeds become a tree of life. (Proverbs 11:30)*

From *101 Simple & Thoughtful ways to Give This Christmas Away* by Matthew West, © 2009, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.



**December Birthdays December Anniversaries**

2 Paul Brooks 27 Mark & Mandy Robbins

Amy Maesch

3 John VanGemeren

4 Jeffrey Galinowski

Mark Reshan

Emily Sebesta

6 Donna Ottersen

Dawn Pagels

Jenny Wysmier

8 Judith Gleason

9 Pamela Thiede

12 Pamela Henderson

13 Doug Kienitz

14 Karen Steinborn

15 Maxine Powell

James Summers

17 Carol Radke

19 Christopher Eldridge

Sean Hapke

Kara Sebesta

20 Stephanie Summers

26 Barbara Fulkerson

27 William Hackett

28 Benjamin Robbins

29 Sherry Payne

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**Long-Term Prayer List**

Robert Atwood Audrey Beyer Irene Bohnstadt

Donna Bostater Laura Dovey Laura Eilers-Straight

Marta Furness Jim Gleason Ed Gustum

Dolores Hackett Heidi Happel Terry Hygema

Jess Kalvaitis Christine Kiser Ryan Krueger

Tom & Larry Leuth Pastor Al Lorentzen Bethany Manning

Christian Martinez Laura Moore Shane Nevels

Duane Ormsby George Ottersen Jan Paholski

Kay Peglow Dan Pursely Cameron Rackard

Wally & Betty Ratliff Ryan Sirk Erik Tannehill

Jary Tannehill Kathy Thielman Jean Thomas

Lee Timm Margie Torres Valerie Waltz

Venia Wendt



Monday 8:00 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Tuesday 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon

Wednesday 8:00 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Thursday 9:00 a.m. – 12 noon

Friday 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon

**St. Paul Lutheran Church & School Staff**

Pastor Mark Reshan

Organist John Remmel

Accompanists Jary Tannehill, Mark Tannehill, Jacob Tannehill

Choir Director Lori Zylstra

Office Secretary Libby Pollock

Custodian Mark Kloess

School Principal Tracey McCay

School Office Coordinator Christina Woodard

School Custodian Tara Soto-Garcia