

Dear Friend:

You are receiving this year's edition of our Christ Lutheran Church Advent Devotional Booklet. These devotions are written by ordinary people who have a wonderful faith in the way that Christmas, and in particular Christ, changes their world.

For nine years, we have put our Advent thoughts to paper and included a recipe, both to share with you. Our distribution of these devotionals continually expands and now includes addresses quite near and in many states. It is our hope that God will bless you as you use this common man's (and woman's) resource to lead you on a spiritual journey to the manger of Jesus.

Each year we receive back many comments from people receiving this devotional. We'd be pleased to hear how God blesses you through the book or just in general this Christmas. You can reach us by e-mailing your comments to clcbouton@aol.com. Through the US mail at Christ Lutheran Church, 22952 141st Drive, Bouton, IA 50039. Or become our friend, by posting them on our Facebook page (simply search for Christ Lutheran Church Bouton, Iowa and you'll find us).

If you are in the area and in need of a church home, please join us at our Christmas Eve Worship Services held at 5 pm and 11 pm. We also have a 6:30 pm Christmas Eve service at the Perry Lutheran Home in Perry, IA. Regular Sunday services are held at 10 am, preceded at 9 am with children and adult Bible studies. We also broadcast each Sunday on KDLS radio in Perry (1310AM or live streamed on the internet). Our programming begins at 8 am. Written copies and audio files of each Sunday's message are included on our Facebook pages and website (clcbouton.com).

Thank you for taking the time to read our humble thoughts on the "good news of great joy that will be for all the people..he is Christ the Lord." Our prayer is that God will richly bless you with the Savior. (He already has!)

Merry Christmas & God bless you!

Pastor Phillips

Cover Design by Hannah Kirvin – Paraeducator

Sunday, December 1, 2013

“What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of this world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.”
[1 Corinthians 7:29-31]

When St. Paul writes “the time is short,” many of us can relate as the Christmas season begins in earnest. There are presents to purchase, decorations to get out, meals to make, gatherings to plan. And if you haven’t even begun your planning, then indeed, the time is short!

Have you begun planning your eternal Christmas?

Wow! Most of us look forward to Christmas and even though we are anxious to have it come, we are worn out and ready for it to leave. Planning for an eternal Christmas seems beyond comprehension. What work must accompany that? The truth is planning for your eternal Christmas takes burdens away.

Because of the birth of the Savior, the cares of the world wither. The need to define ourselves as happy, successful, and healthy is gone. That frustrating desire to be in control of all the moving pieces of our life is gone, too. With Jesus as our center, life can come and go as it pleases; it matters not to the faithful. For we, who believe in Christ Jesus for eternal life, have joined the eternal Christmas celebration of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven and that rejoicing never ends.

Christmas isn’t a day. It is our new life.

O Come Let Us Adore Him, Christ the Lord!

Pastor Max

Cheesy Vegetable Medley (Lyla J. Seeman)

2 pkg. frozen California Blend Veggies

1 – 8 oz. Cheez Whiz

1 -10 oz. can Cream of Celery Soup

Cook vegetables as directed on pkg. and place in greased 3 qt. casserole dish. Blend Cheez Whiz, soup, 1 ½ tsp. of onion flakes, ¼ tsp. pepper, heating in microwave, pour over vegetables. Bake at 350 degrees until heated through. Approximately 25 minutes.

Monday, December 2, 2013

“Come now, let us reason together.” Says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are crimson, they shall be like wool.”

[Isaiah 1:8]

Advent: A sacred sequence of observances and celebrations that help us experience the fullness of our faith. (Lutheran Witness, November 2007)

As we begin our journey toward the birth of Jesus, we decorate our homes and churches with the colors of Christmas. **Red** (scarlet, crimson) represents the blood of Jesus, as well as fire and charity. Charitable hearts share food, clothing, gifts and words of good cheer. A warm fire to welcome loved ones on a wintry evening. **Green** symbolizes nature, youth and the hope of eternal life, which Jesus Christ offers. Trees and holly, children and hope surround us as we gather. **White** lights or candles symbolize warmth of spirit, purity of heart, joy of the season and glory to God for his precious gift (His Son) to us. **Gold** stars (lights or ornaments) are placed at the top of the tree to remind us of the Star of Bethlehem, guiding wise men to the Christ child. May we be led to share in the joy, warmth, love, light and hope for eternal life throughout Advent and the Christmas season.

May you decorate your home with a new spirit of Christian love as you contemplate these words and meanings. Blessings on your journey in Him, through Him and with Him. In Christ Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Eileen Clausen

Baked Mac and Cheese

1 cup dry macaroni (any shape)
1 cup cottage cheese or grated cheese of your choice (I use the latter)
1 cup sour cream
1 cup Velveeta (any flavor, I use the mild Mexican), cubed
1 cup grated cheddar cheese (not too sharp)
2 eggs, beaten

Cook macaroni per directions on pkg., drain. Combine all cheeses, sour cream, eggs. Fold in cooked macaroni to cheese mixture, thoroughly mixing. Bake in a 2.5 qt. buttered casserole dish at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. At the end of 30 minutes you can sprinkle with bread crumbs and a little butter—continue to bake 15 minutes. Serves 6-10.

Tuesday, December 3, 2013

“For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you...” [1 Thessalonians 1:4]

In this passage Paul is writing to praise fellow Christians who have remained strong in their faith during trials and persecution, and to encourage them to continue to be an example with actions and words. These words are also an encouragement for all brothers and sisters and believers in Christ.

Loved by GOD, how awesome is that?

In a world of violence, loneliness, depression, bullying, illness and uncertainty, it gets me out of bed every morning knowing I am loved by God and have been chosen for a purpose. I am chosen by Him to live my life daily reflecting the love of God to others and share the wonderful Gospel message in my actions and words. Yes! The baby was born on Christmas Day, but more importantly He died on the cross to forgive me of my sins and grant me eternal life with HIM.

Dear Lord, help me to live as one chosen by You, an example to those around me, as were the Thessalonians. Amen.

Karen Morfitt, wife, mother, surgical nurse

Upside-Down Cranberry Crunch

3 cups fresh or frozen cranberries, thawed
1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups sugar, divided
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped pecans
2 eggs
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter or margarine, melted
1 cup all purpose flour
Whipped cream or vanilla ice cream, optional

Place cranberries in a greased 8" square baking dish. Sprinkle with $\frac{3}{4}$ cups sugar and pecans. In a mixing bowl, beat eggs, butter, flour and remaining sugar until smooth. Spread over cranberry mixture. Bake at 325 for 1 hour or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean. Run knife around edges of dish; immediately invert onto a serving plate. Serve with whipped cream or ice cream if desired.

Wednesday, December 4, 2013

“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

When I first read the above words what came to mind was the idiom, “**You can take that to the bank!**” I double-checked the meaning and origin of that phrase with the great authenticator—Google—and verified my initial thinking. Some theorize its origin comes from a banking connection in which you could take a check to the bank and redeem it for its face value. Regardless of the origin, its meaning is clear – this information is absolutely trustworthy and the truth!

In this day and age when vows are broken, guarantees expire, intentions change, and a growing percentage of those who believe there is no such thing as absolute truth, wouldn't it be great to have something you can “take to the bank”? Paul is reminding us that we do! It's the word of God, which Paul shared with the people in Thessalonica and which we have preserved in the Bible!

When Pastor shares that word in worship or Bible class, when you read it in your daily devotions, when you recall it throughout the day, that word is working in you! God is using His Word to build your faith, to assure you of His promises and faithfulness, to guide you in the way He would have you go. Regardless of the challenges and changes you're experiencing, regardless of the sin you've committed, you can count on God's Word. It pronounces you forgiven, loved, and it assures you that God is with you and so much more!

This baby whose birth we're getting ready to celebrate is God's Christmas gift to you, whom He loves. This baby is true God and true man, sent to be your Savior from sin, death and the devil. By trusting in His work to pay for your sin, you have God's promise to see you safely through this life and into an eternal life of unending joy in heaven. You can take that to the bank!

Mark Gerken, Pastor, Dad and soon to be Grandpa!

Gerken Cranberry Salsa

1 bag (12 ounces) fresh or frozen cranberries
1 Granny Smith apple, peeled & cored
½ large red bell pepper, cut in large chunks
½ med red onion, cut in large chunks
¼ to 1/3 cup apple juice
¾ cup sugar
2 T chopped jalapeno pepper or to taste
1 t. grated lime zest
2 T. chopped fresh cilantro
Tortilla chips for serving

Put cranberries, apple, red pepper, and onion in food processor or blender and pulse until chopped. Transfer to a large glass bowl. Stir in remaining ingredients until blended. Cover and refrigerate for an hour or more. Serve with tortilla chips.

Thursday, December 5, 2013

“Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.”
[Isaiah 1:27]

I chose this verse (from the list) for my devotion, because I have been studying Isaiah. It contains so many beloved verses foretelling of our Savior. Verses that have been part of the Christmas and Easter readings, which I remember hearing and loving all of my life.

In an effort to have a more consistent devotional life, I have been using the “Today's Light” devotional series. It progresses through the Bible with generally 2 to 3 chapters to read each day with the devotion. The problem with this sort of devotion series is what to do if you miss a day or two or more? Try to catch up? Skip to the reading for that particular day of the year? Or as I decided to do, continue from where I had left off? The study of Nehemiah went well, I learned a lot. I was almost caught up when the next “Today's Light” arrived focusing our devotions on the book of Isaiah all during January....of last year. I have yet to complete it, but I'm working on it!

I've had a very busy year, with endless excuses. On top of that I found the early going in Isaiah tedious to get through. There is just so much woe, destruction, death, anger, wrath of God and dire warnings to God's people who refused to obey. It became pretty easy to not have time for my devotions. Finally about a month ago in my meditation before communion, God made me see that I was starving myself by not studying his word. With a renewed effort to return to my devotions, I have even been evaluating how I use my time. Am I too busy for God's Word?

So, with diligence I plowed back into Isaiah and what Joy Joy Joy, to reach chapters 40 and 41 which in such wonderful language speak the loving promises of a Savior, of God's love and comfort. I truly would not have appreciated these blessed words of God if I had not seen Israel's and my own dreadful need. God has given me restoration and refreshment that I do not deserve, earn or merit. God's Word strengthens me for He does not faint or grow weary. He redeems me, cleanses me, and makes me his child. With even greater joy this Christmas, I will hold Isaiah 9:6 in my heart. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;...and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Note: I use the Lutheran Study Bible and absolutely cannot read any passage without also reading the notes. It takes more time, but I gain greater understanding. I really like the prayer in the notes for Isaiah 40:1-5. “Lord, as You have prepared comfort for all people through Jesus, prepare my mouth and heart to speak of that comfort and peace to those around me. Amen.”

Let God give you a great gift this Christmas. Simply study his Word daily and you will be blessed!

Sherrill Phillips, wife, mother, pharmacist

Walnut Apple Dessert

8 cups sliced tart apples (peel or not)

2 ½ cups brown sugar

2 tsp. cinnamon

1 cup butter (softened)

2 eggs

2 cups of flour

1 ½ cup chopped walnuts

Place apples in greased 9x13" pan. Sprinkle with ¼- ½ cup brown sugar and cinnamon and ½ cup walnuts. In a bowl, cream butter and 2 cups brown sugar. Add eggs. Stir in flour and ½ cup walnuts. Spread over apples. Sprinkle with 1 cup walnuts. Bake 350 degrees for 4-45 minutes.

Friday, December 6, 2013

“For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: “Seek me and live.” [Amos 5:4]

My Christmas memories take me back to when I was 12 or 13 years old and include a couple of yards of pink & white polyester fabric. As a 4-H member, I had learned to sew and had visions of a new dress for the Christmas Eve children’s program. The fabric and pattern were decided upon and purchased. The pieces were already pinned on the cloth in early December and soon were cut out and ready to sew. I had to share the sewing machine with my sister and if I remember correctly, she was also making a new dress.

Well, needless to say, I am a procrastinator then and now. As Christmas Eve day dawned, the dress was still not done. I began working frantically on it and finished hemming my new garment about ten minutes before we had to leave for the church. I’m sure I gave my mother several new gray hairs that Christmas—sorry mom! I was sure proud of that new dress though and spoke my part in the program with a smile on my face.

It isn’t important to God that we have brand new clothes or shiny shoes when we come to church. What is important is that we clothe ourselves with Christ Jesus. A favorite song of mine includes the line “put on the armor of the Lord” which encourages me to be in the Word, be knowledgeable of the Lord and ready to go to battle with him. We have a mighty tool which is our story of Jesus and how what he means to us as we tell others about Him and of His love for us, all so that they may know the Lord and be believers, too! My prayer this Advent season is that all brothers and sisters in Christ reach out in love to the unbelievers in their lives so that God’s message is spread to all. Amos speaks of these words when he says, “Seek me and live.”

Terri Cooper, wife, mother, business woman

Spritz Cookies (my mother would make these before Christmas every year)

1 ½ cup butter (no substitutions)
1 cup sugar
1 egg
2 T. milk
1 tsp. vanilla
½ tsp. almond extract
4 cups flour
1 tsp. baking powder

Mix all ingredients together. Dough can be divided and colored with food coloring. Use a cookie press and press on cookie sheets. Bake at 400 degrees 8 minutes. Makes about 6 dozen.

Saturday, December 7, 2013

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O Daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey. [Zechariah 9:9]

We are familiar with this scene, predicted by the prophet Zechariah more than 500 years before it took place, as Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The words in the prophecy that catch my attention are 'king' and 'humble'.

Our King of Salvation was born to humble parents, in a humble town, in a humble manger. Over the years we may have sentimentalized the place where the Christ child was born. Whether it was a cave or a stable, it was cold, dark, dirty, and filled with animal smells. This was a king? Lying in an animal trough? Doesn't sound much like the recent birth of the English king-to-be who will one day sit on the British throne does it?

Why did God chose to begin His earthly life lying in a wooden manger and end it hanging on a wooden cross? The answer simply is because He loves us! He was born to save all people and in order to do that He chose to live a humble life and die a humble death.

This Christmas season as we come to adore Him, let us remember that because of that humble birth and death, made for each one of us, we, too one day will make a triumphant entry ... into heaven where we will be greeted by none other than the King of Kings, Christ the Lord.

Marcia Gomulka, Retired Teacher &
Mission Haiti Missionary

Spinach Casserole

2 (10-oz.) packages frozen chopped spinach
¼ cup herb stuffing mix
4 tablespoons butter or margarine
1 envelope onion soup mix
1 cup sour cream

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cook spinach; drain and add soup mix and sour cream. Bake in greased 1 1/2-quart casserole for 30 minutes. Add the ¼ cup of stuffing mix which has been moistened in melted butter to the top. Return to the oven and bake 10 minutes more.

Serves 6.

Sunday, December 8, 2013

“Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’”
[Isaiah 40:9]

In this passage I hear an echo of the promise God gave Abram long before (Genesis 12:1-3) when He’d foretold how the people chosen, redeemed, and delivered by Him were blessed, to be a blessing. Now Isaiah declares how God’s people fulfill that prophecy in their time as they herald the Gospel Good News of what God’s coming to us to save us means for us.

We hold weekly worship services in our special care units at the Perry Lutheran Home. One of my favorite hymn choices is the carol, Let Us All with Gladsome Voice – even when it’s not the Christmas season! I find its melody easy to sing – and that’s important with me, a not-very-gifted singer! But even more important yet, the first two verses (which I always use) capture the “greater story” of Christmas so well. Their message goes beyond the coming of God’s Son. They herald the cause of God giving His Son. Christ is given, “to bid our hearts rejoice.” They herald the point of His coming. Christ comes so that we can be, “with Him in heaven’s fair homes.”

Isaiah’s words called Judah into God’s mission by heralding His Good News to her world. But that mission continues today. And now His words encourage us to fear not and boldly lift up our voices too in proclaiming to our world the Gospel’s Good News, the Greater Story in Christ’s coming! (Even if it’s not Christmas!)

Let us all with gladsome voice Praise the God of heaven,
Who, to bid our hearts rejoice, His own Son hath given.
To this vale of tears He comes, Here to serve in sadness,
That with Him in heav’n’s fair homes We may serve in gladness.

Rev. Dave Morfitt, Chaplain, Perry Lutheran Home

Swedish Glogg (nonalcoholic)

1 piece orange rind, 3-inch size
2 sticks cinnamon
6 whole cloves
5 whole allspice
2 cardamom pods, bruised
1 vanilla bean, split
3 cups Concord grape juice.

Combine ingredients in pot over medium heat; bring just to simmer, but do not boil. Reduce heat to low; cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Remove from heat. Strain mixture. Serve immediately, or gently reheat before serving.

Monday, December 9, 2013

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” [2 Peter 3:9]

Patience. It's one of the gifts of the Spirit that most of us have prayed for at times. Through Scripture, God allows us to know him and in this verse, patience is revealed as a part of His character. God is patient, not slow, and His patience is motivated by love. But patience can be a misunderstood as slowness. When we pour our hearts out to God, asking His intervention for ourselves or for others and circumstances don't immediately change, we are tempted (by the author of all lies, himself) to believe things about God's character that aren't true. Be assured that God is not uncaring or indifferent or disengaged or withholding – He is patient. He is not too busy with other matters to pay attention to us. He is God! Fully engaged with us, fully present, always aware and involved and working – with patience.

As we come to know Him, God wants us to imitate Him. That's a tall order! How often is patience not revealed as part of our character? How often in our most personal relationships are we guilty of pushing, bribing, or demanding that people be what we need them to be, when we need them to be it? In our fast-paced world, it is hard for us to be still and wait for situations to unfold, people to grow and circumstances to change. Maybe you can relate to this woman: When her marriage hit a rough place the little voice inside her head (enter the author of lies, again!) began to ask, “Why did I ever marry this man? Why do I put up with this?” Thoughts of her husband's deficiencies begin to consume her day. “This can't continue. What should I do? I will demand that my husband change or else...” When he doesn't immediately respond in the way she wants, she begins to think, “Another man wouldn't treat me this way. I deserve to be treated better.” She talks to a male friend about her problems and begins to see in him all of the qualities that her husband so obviously lacks. We all know where this road leads. Or perhaps you can relate to this man: When his teenage son began to challenge his authority and rules, the little voice in his head (yes, him again) said, “It's not okay for him to treat me this way. He should recognize and appreciate all that I have done for him and just do what I say. I will demand that he respect and obey me. He will change his behavior or else...” In both of these situations, our need to quickly fix what is causing us pain leads to destruction in relationships with those we love, not growth.

As we get to know God and desire to imitate Him, we are reminded that it causes God pain when His children don't recognize and appreciate all He has done for them. Likewise, it causes Him great pain when His bride, the church, isn't faithful. Yet how does He respond? He does not lash out in anger, send us away or leave us behind. He is patient. He is faithful. In love, He works in our lives and waits patiently for us to return to Him. He does not want us to perish, but to come to repentance. In recognition of and thankfulness for God's loving patience with us, we can imitate Him and begin to see our loved ones through His eyes. Through our pain, we can see the big picture, not just the immediate crisis. We can envision the positive, restored relationship with our loved one and, with patience and love, begin to walk with them toward that potential.

(Continued on next page)

Later in 2 Peter 3, Paul reminds us to guard against misreading God's patience as evidence that He is not true to His word. Just as God sent Jesus, born as a human baby, in the fullness of time as a fulfillment of His promise to redeem and rescue us, so too will He keep His promise to bring a day of judgment, a new heaven and a new earth. He will come again, just as He promised. Until then, spend time with God through His word, in prayer, and in fellowship with His people. Get to know Him, believe Him, trust Him, imitate Him, live in His peace and learn the blessing of patience.

Wanda Pritzil, Counselor and Director - Ministry Development
Lutheran Family Service of Iowa

Forgotten Cookies (A Missouri Favorite)

With patience the theme of 2 Peter 3:9, I am sharing a favorite Christmas cookie recipe that requires just that! "Forgotten Cookies" require patience as they are made one day, but have to bake and then stay in the oven with the door closed after it's been turned off until the next day before you can eat them. No peeking! Be patient!

2 egg whites, at room temperature
2/3 cup sugar
Pinch salt
1 tsp. vanilla
1 cup finely chopped pecans
1 cup chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Beat egg whites until foamy. Gradually add sugar and continue beating until they hold stiff peaks. Add salt and vanilla. Stir well. Stir in pecans and chocolate chips. Cover cookie sheet with foil and grease with butter. Drop cookie dough by teaspoonful's onto the foil. Put in oven then turn the oven off immediately. Leave overnight in oven with door closed.

Tuesday, December 10, 2013

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." [Revelations 1:8]

Caramels are a Tradition

My Christmas tradition begins with family gathering at our home in Perry. Many traditions have evolved here over the years. The guys stay up late while watching movies. The gals enjoy catching up over a cup of coffee or two during the early morning hours. Soon, the house fills up with traditional fun and games along with plenty of food, as we celebrate being together as family at the birth of Jesus Christ.

Long before anyone arrives, I prepare an assortment of goodies. At least one of those treats has become another tradition. This tradition was shared at our church's November 'Mission Kitchen' event. I loved showing those interested how to make my favorite caramels. I am also sharing the recipe with you (you will find it below). I encourage you to try them this Christmas. Who knows, they may become your tradition, too.

2013 has been filled with some health worries and many prayers, but I have much for which to be thankful. I know my Redeemer lives and that He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the beginning and the end. And since we know the end is near...why not enjoy another caramel?

Blessings in your 2014!

Shelly Golightly
wife, mother and grandmother

Easy Caramels

1 cup butter
2 1/4 cup brown sugar
dash of salt
1 cup light corn syrup
1 can Eaglebrand sweetened condensed milk 14oz.
1 tsp Vanilla

Shelly Golightly's family recipe

In a large heavy fry pan melt butter on low heat. Add brown sugar and salt; stir to combine all sugar into the butter. Add corn syrup and continue to stir. Gradually add milk stirring constantly over medium heat (until it reaches 220 degrees) 12-15 min. Remove from heat, add vanilla (it will foam up) and stir. When combined pour into well buttered 9x9" glass cake pan. Remove from pan and cut and wrap in wax paper.

Wednesday, December 11, 2013

“Therefore the Lord declares: I have returned to Jerusalem filled with mercy; my temple will be rebuilt, says the Lord of Hosts, and so will all Jerusalem.” [Zechariah 1 :17]

“No matter what, don’t give up!” These words were spoken by Ike, a three year old, to his daddy. Just a cute little phrase until you know the rest of the story:

Hank, Ike’s baby brother, spent his first seven weeks in the neonatal intensive care unit of the hospital. He came home with lots of complications, but at 6 months is vastly improved. Still, the physical demands on his mom and dad and the mental stress are telling. That’s when simple words sound like angelic instructions. Who wouldn’t want God on your side handing out encouragement?

This verse from Zechariah is much the same. For 70 years many of the people of Israel had been in exile. Now an angel of the Lord comes to tell them they will return to their homeland. This verse carries a second message for 100 years later. Mercy will return to Jerusalem through Jesus. And later, the holy city of Jerusalem will become the final home for all of us.

So, thanks Ike, for being God’s messenger. No matter what happens, never give up on God. He is always perfectly faithful. God speaks to me through the ones I love. How is he speaking to you this Christmas Season?

Dave Menz - Hank and Ike’s Grandpa

Cinnamon Rolls (like a promise of sweet things to come!)

2/3 cup milk scalded (then cooled to lukewarm)

Add and stir in: ½ cup sugar
 1 ¼ tsp. salt
 6 TBS shortening

In another bowl, put 2/3 cup lukewarm water

2 TBS sugar

2 pkg yeast (about 4 ½ tsp)

Let stand until yeast dissolves.

Add warm milk mixture and 3 beaten eggs
 3 cups flour

Beat until smooth. Then add in another 3 cups of flour(about...you want the dough to be workable, not sticky). Turn dough out on floured board and KNEAD until nice and smooth. Place in greased bowl and brush top with melted shortening. Cover with clean towel and place in warm place. Let rise until double. Then roll out into a 12 x whatever rectangle. Spread soft butter on entire surface and then sprinkle brown sugar and cinnamon on top of that. Roll up then cut into rolls about an inch thick. Place in buttered pan. Let rise again. Bake at 350 till done...not too brown! Frost with powdered sugar frosting. (Powdered sugar, butter, milk, and a little vanilla...who measures for frosting???)

Thursday, December 12, 2013

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” [Matthew 3:1-2]

John the Baptist plays a big role in the Christmas story. He was the cousin of Jesus and like him, also a miracle baby. His very old and barren parents were blessed with John in the natural way, an answer to forgotten prayer. He grew to be a prophet heralding the news that Messiah was coming and “the kingdom of heaven is near.” That got people’s attention! A new king and an eternal kingdom were on the way, and it was exactly what they needed; though not in the way they envisioned.

This prophecy has been fulfilled and three decades later Jesus had a kingly entry into Jerusalem, so that he could be crucified and take up his rule on the throne of life. By that, the faithful live.

Advent (and Christmas) has always been my favorite time of year. The more that I grow the more meaning this really has. The more I see the darkness of the world, the sadness that life brings; death with no hope, wars, and natural disasters, there is only one place we can go to for the absolute truth and solid hope. We need that king and his kingdom that John proclaimed to any who would hear; it is exactly what each of us needs! We have a great king to worship and live our lives for. John taught that God will keep his promises and this brought the people of that day hope. We are blessed to have seen God’s promises of a Messiah and his kingdom come. We have a manual of hope (his Holy Word) which keeps John’s words of promise and hope alive today. This is the season to remember and celebrate all that God has done for us and for our salvation. The kingdom of heaven is ours! Thanks be to Jesus, the Messiah who rules!

Kate Phillips,
High School Teacher/Administrator
Valley Lutheran High School – Phoenix, AZ

Queso Blanco Dip (White Cheese Dip)

Ingredients:

1.25 lb block White American Cheese*, cut into 1-inch cubes
1 (4 oz) can diced green chilis
2 jalapenos, chopped
2/3 cup half and half (fat free is fine)
1/2 cup cold water

Directions:

Toss all ingredients into a microwavable-safe bowl. Microwave on high for 5 minutes, stopping to stir after every minute. It might appear runny at first, but it will thicken up as it starts to cool down.

Serve immediately with tortilla chips. Serves 10.

Friday, December 13, 2013

“And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.” [Luke 1: 26-27]

The baby for whom it was the “sixth month” had been announced with special “angel visitation”, too. The angel of the Lord had come to Zachariah to tell him his barren wife Elizabeth would give birth to a son, John. The angel Gabriel was now on his way to tell Mary that she, too, was going to have a baby, and He would be named Jesus. God does indeed use powerful ways to communicate with His people. He used angels to communicate with Zachariah and Mary; each a communication about a special baby.

This year God used a powerful way to communicate with our family, too....but it wasn’t about a baby, it was with a baby.

“Baby Hank” was born in April, our third grandchild. Doctors immediately began to communicate with his parents that something was amiss...pediatric specialists of all kinds converged on his N ICU room...neurologists, nephrologists, gastroenterologists, cardiologists, ENT specialists: and for seven weeks daily communication often involved confusing, contradicting, and disappointing news.

Daily communication with God (from an astounding number of people outside our family, too) helped keep our family going. Besides multiple daily prayers, my particular “go to” verse was Psalms 139:14. *“I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works: my soul knows it very well.”* And it seemed to me, that Baby Hank knew this verse, too. Even as doctors poked, prodded, stuck, and performed any number of invasive tests, the determined light we saw in his little eyes the day he was born never went out! He seemed to know God had made him just right... for him.

Baby Hank has continued to “do” everything he can to deal with his medical issues. To say a baby doesn’t complain seems ridiculous, but Hank really only cries when his gastro-intestinal issues cause pain...which seems to us quite often, but when those pains have been relieved, he totally delights in his world and the people around him. That determined little light in his eyes seeks out your eyes....and I know “Goo” from him communicates to me that he is totally content with who he is. He is God’s new creation because in his “sixth month” Hank has been baptized! God has communicated to him through the Holy Spirit that Hank belongs to Him. And God has reminded us, through Hank, that His plans don’t always match our plans....but through that same Holy Spirit, we are able to have faith that His plans in all things are... for our good.

Prayer: Help us trust your plans, Lord. You know what is best for each of us; you hold each of us in your loving hands. Through the waters of Holy Baptism you fill us with your Holy Spirit and make us yours. Thank you for loving us so much you sent Baby Jesus to be our Savior! Amen.

Karen Menz, Grandma

Honor and Praise Hamballs

(These are the Hamballs that have made Christ Lutheran Church – Bouton famous for its holiday celebration of Honor and Praise to God...we also served them at Baby Hank's baptism dinner.)

1# Fareway's Hamball mixture
1# lean ground beef
1 cup crushed crackers (I use mix of graham and saltine, heavy on graham)
1 egg
1 cup milk

Mix all ingredients. Shape into round balls and put in 9 x 13" pan.

Makes 12 nice hamballs: I use a ½ cup measuring cup.

Bake at 350 about an hour, drain any grease
Cover with sauce last 20 minutes or so and bake uncovered (I heat the sauce and add it hot)

1 can tomato soup
1 cup brown sugar
¼ cup vinegar
1 tsp dry mustard, if you like. (I like)

You can double, triple, quadruple this recipe.....I bake the balls and then freeze them.....without the sauce. Add it during the last part of reheat.

Karen Menz

Saturday, December 14, 2013

“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.” [Matthew 1:18]

I remember my husband and I being absolutely delighted to find out we were expecting each of our four babies, especially our first, a son. It was early in our marriage and we were young. It was scary not knowing what to expect, but exciting too as we both looked forward to becoming parents. There were so many questions: Will we know what to do? What will it be like? What if...? It was quite daunting at the time.

I cannot imagine what Mary, at an even younger age, felt when she learned that she was expecting a son, the Savior. She was only engaged and had never come together with any man. How could this even be possible? What would Joseph think, say and do? How would everyone else in her life react? What would she do?

Mary was a good and faithful servant. Throughout those impending days of pregnancy she took it all in stride. She didn't have all the answers. Her unwavering faith gave her the strength to take each day as it came, knowing God was with her and that was answer enough. May that same unwavering faith be yours in all of life's questions.

Linda Friedrichsen,
Retired Teacher

Roasted Sweet-Potato Casserole with Praline Streusel

5 lbs sweet potatoes
½ cup orange juice (about 1 ½ oranges)
1 ½ tsp. orange zest
½ cup granulated sugar
3 large eggs, lightly beaten
10 T. unsalted butter, melted, plus more butter for dish
1 ½ tsp. baking powder
2 ½ tsp. vanilla extract
Salt
2 cups chopped pecans (about 8 oz)
1 cup light-brown sugar

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Using a fork, prick sweet-potatoes all over, then roast on a baking pan until soft, about 1 hour. Let cool, then peel and discard skins. Place sweet-potato flesh in a large bowl and mash until smooth. Add orange juice and zest. Stir in granulated sugar, eggs, 2 T. butter, baking powder, 1 ½ tsp. vanilla and 1 tsp. salt until combined. Transfer sweet-potato mixture to a buttered 3-quart casserole dish. (At this point the casserole can be covered and refrigerated over night.) In a large saucepan over medium heat, combine pecans, brown sugar, 1/8 tsp salt, and remaining butter and vanilla and bring to a boil. Cook for 2 minutes more, then pour over sweet-potato mixture. Bake until bubbly, 40 to 45 minutes.

Sunday, December 15, 2013

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Just as I had determined to bring disaster upon you and showed no pity when your fathers angered me,” says the Lord Almighty, “So now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid.”
[Zechariah 8:14-15]

Bad News and GOOD News

Every family has “good news” and “bad news” dialogs. Examples: “The good news is that everyone is okay; the bad news is that the car is totaled.” “The good news is I found some wonderful snacks at the grocery store; the bad news is I forgot the milk you sent me for.” “The bad news is that I have to work the weekend. The good news is I have an extra day off at Christmas.” Some of these family dialogs only express inconvenience; others of them express great relief and blessings.

God has bad news to share through Prophet Zechariah, *“I purposed to bring disaster to you when your father provoked me to wrath.”* Throughout the Old Testament God’s judgment against sin is bad news. However God’s ultimate message of salvation is good news, *“I purposed in those days to bring good to Jerusalem and the house of Judah.”* God’s promised “good” is the Messiah who would come through the family of Israel and bring salvation to the world.

Christmas is God’s good news to shepherds and us. *“And the angels said to them, ‘Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’* [Luke 2:10-11] Because of sin we live in a bad news world with disappointment, disaster, disease, and death. The birth of Jesus assures us of God’s ultimate good news—our salvation. We trust that God’s good prevails even in our bad news situations.

Celebrate the good news. Live in the good news. Share the good news.

Rev. Bob Riggert,
Director of Customer Services – Lutheran Church Extension Fund
Iowa Districts West and East

Candied Popcorn

Pop 2 packages light microwave popcorn
Melt together 3 squares of white almond bark and 1 pkg. (large) white chocolate chips
Stir together popcorn and melted mixture
Add (if desired) any kind of nuts and/or “m & m’s (seasonal colors red and green at Christmas; orange and brown in the fall; pastels at Easter to add to the snack’s eye appeal.)

Monday, December 16, 2013

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” [Matthew 1:21]

New parents, it seems, are often looking for that unique baby name from Aiden to Zoe. I was proud that our daughter Katie chose the Biblical names Marcus, Lydia and Hannah for her children. Names are important and surnames often denoted a man’s profession such as Mr. Baker, Mr. Taylor, or Mr. Fisher. Jewish names were chosen carefully—Jesus is the short form of the Hebrew Joshua meaning ‘the Lord saves’. That name is fitting since the angel declares that, *“He will save His people from their sins.”*

Matthew’s gospel is universal although skewed to his Jewish audience. He speaks directly to that crowd throughout his hard-hitting Chapter 1. He starts by tracing 14 generations, *“to the time of Christ (Messiah or Savior)”* and details that Jesus’ ancestry is the tribe of Judah, from the line of David. He credits the Holy Spirit’s role in the incarnation, notes Joseph’s concerns and relates the angel’s message that calms his fears. Matthew brings his message home with a reference to Isaiah’s prophesy that, *“they shall call His name Immanuel”* which translated means ‘God with us.’ Indeed it is the perfect name, and the only Name by which we are saved—Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Jim George,
County Engineer

Strawberry Balls

2 pkg 7 oz Coconut
1 Can Sweetened Condensed Milk
2 pkg Wild Strawberry Jello
1 tsp vanilla

Mix. Chill well. Roll into balls and roll in red colored sugar

Tuesday, December 17, 2013

“Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.” [Luke 1:29-30]

Although these are familiar words which I have read and heard so often, reading the passage this time the word “favor” caught my attention. I guess I always thought it meant to deserve or earn something...that God had chosen Mary because of something SHE had done (maybe the way SHE had lived her life, HER attributes, HER faith, HER ancestry). I pulled up an on-line dictionary and found these two definitions:

1. Something done or granted out of goodwill, rather than from justice or for remuneration
2. Excessive kindness or unfair partiality

GRACE.

It wasn't anything that Mary did or didn't do. It was purely God choosing Mary and bestowing on her the ultimate, though incredibly difficult, honor: to be the mother of Jesus, the One who would deliver God's grace to us!

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for finding favor with us. Help us to find favor with each other every day and be living examples of Your grace. Amen.

Anita McVey
Homemaker

Hamburger Soup

1 ½ lbs. ground beef	1 cup diced onion
32 oz. crushed tomatoes or tomato juice	6 cups beef broth
¾ cup diced celery	4 large carrots, diced
3 or 4 large potatoes, diced	1 bay leaf
1 tsp. salt	½ -1 tsp. black pepper
½ tsp. dried thyme	

Brown ground beef and onion together and drain. Combine all ingredients in large stock pot and bring to a boil. Simmer 30-45 minutes or until all vegetables are tender. Remove bay leaf.

Wednesday, December 18, 2013

“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” [Zechariah 9:9]

In today’s digital age, we are more inundated with messages and communications than ever. During the Christmas season in particular, the cheerful cards and heartfelt “Merry Christmas” greetings often get lost among the many commercials, advertisements, spam emails, and junk mail we receive. And now we even get notices on our cell phones when an important event or weather concern is announced. Sometimes it’s hard for us to tell when a message is really important.

Years ago, announcements were made a little differently. Jesus’ birth was foretold many times in the Old Testament, but like today, not everyone paid attention. The prophesy was a life changing promise that everyone needed to hear. Today Christians need to delete the “spam” received in their daily lives and “file” those things that are important. We have the blessing of daily Bible study, a good church and prayers to help us decide what needs to be “filed” and what needs to be “deleted”.

Hear is really important news: Behold, Thy King Cometh! That’s what makes it a Merry Christmas!

Dale West, Service Manager
Iowa National Guard

Ice Cream Oreo Dessert

1 large pkg of Oreo’s	1 jar Mrs. Richarson’s fudge topping
1 stick margarine	1 jar Mrs. Richardson’ Carmel Butterscotch topping
1 half gallon Butter Crunch ice cream	1 container of Cool Whip

Using a rolling pin, mash the Oreo’s into crumbs. Place in a bowl and mix with 1 stick of melted margarine. Place approx. ½ of the crumbs into a 9x13 cake pan. Slice ice cream and layer on top of the cookie crumbs mixture. Stir the two toppings and pour over the ice cream (microwave heat ½ - 2/3 toppings for 30 seconds and then drizzle with a spoon.) Spread Cool Whip on top of toppings and ice cream then sprinkle remaining cookie crumbs over all. Freeze until firm.

Note: other flavors of ice cream can be used such as chocolate chip, butter pecan or even vanilla if you prefer.

Thursday, December 19, 2013

"You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus." [Luke 1:31]

These words are the famous words of the Angel Gabriel, telling Mary that she will have a baby and name him Jesus. Mary could not believe that she, unmarried and a virgin, was going to give birth to a child...to her this was shocking, but after the Angel told her that she had favor with God and that her relative Elizabeth was having a child as well, then she believed him. Mary was a servant of the Lord, and faithfully told him, "may your word be fulfilled."

The news of an upcoming birth is common and spoken to many happy couples today, as well. The news is delivered by doctors instead of angels. Unlike Mary most parents have the choice to decide when they want to start a family, and even so, pregnancy has its own fears and anxieties. Mary didn't make this choice to have a child, but believed that God knew what he was doing and followed what the angel had told her. What incredible faith!

After giving birth, parents have several choices... one of which is baptism for their new baby. This is the way that God chooses us and God grows their child into the family of God. I have had the opportunity to witness many baptisms in our church and there really is no better feeling than to welcome another little servant into God's family.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for letting your family grow with new life. Also thank you for eternal life that baptism grants us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Faith Hanson, 10th Grade student

Yellow Cake

½ cup+ 1 tablespoon Flour
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup + 1 ½ tablespoons sugar
¾ cups Milk

1 ½ teaspoon Baking Powder
½ cup Butter or Crisco
1 Egg
½ teaspoon Vanilla

Mix Flour, salt, and Baking Powder. In a mixer, mix Butter or Crisco, and sugar. Add the vanilla to milk in a separate bowl. Add the egg to the Butter and sugar mixture. After that add the Flour, salt, and Baking Powder to the egg, butter and sugar. Pour into a greased 9" pan. Bake at 375 for 25-35 minutes. Cool and Enjoy.

Friday, December 20, 2013

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” [Luke 1:34-35]

The angel's reassurance comforted Mary. The Christmas season provides the comfort and the reassurance we need—even amidst the stress of shopping and gatherings.

When I was a youngster, the tradition of home and church provided the predictability that promoted that sense of security. At home, these were the given: our far flung family would join together to eat, sing, and share gifts; after my cousin Greg unwrapped a new pair of pajamas from Grandpa and Grandma, he would be unable to conceal his disappointment; I would join two other cousins who couldn't sing either in a painful rendition of “We Three Kings”; my Grandpa Adair would share his Whitman sampler with us, and I would always mess up my candy pick and get the oozy pink center. Church also provided givens: we would perform in the Christmas program by reciting “pieces” that I never quite had memorized; I would get a brown paper bag after the program filled with the same treats the other kids got who gave polished performances; featured soloist Barb Dennler would sing “O Holy Night.”

I hope that everyone takes time to reflect on those Christmas memories that bring warmth and comfort to the soul. More than that I pray that your faith in Jesus is your comfort all year round!

Damon Adair,
Teacher & Grandparent

O Holy Night, The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Til he appeared and the Spirit felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees and hear the angel voices.
O night divine. The night when Christ was born.
O night, O night divine.

Moon Pie (Anna Mae Seeman)

Heat in pan on stove 1 stick of butter and 1 cup water, add 1 cup flour and pinch salt all at once and beat until mixture follows the spoon. Beat in 4 eggs-1 at a time. Spread on large jelly roll pan and bake 40 minutes at 400 degrees. This forms a crust that puffs up. Cool crust.

Mix 2 boxes of Vanilla instant pudding with 3 cups milk, add 1 tsp. vanilla. Pour onto cooled crust. Put one small carton of cool whip over pudding. Drizzle chocolate syrup over top.

Saturday, December 21, 2013

“For the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.” [Luke 1:49]

How are you blessed? Take a moment and think of some of the blessings that you have received...perhaps they may be a successful career, or perhaps a wonderful home, marriage, possessions, or one of many other blessings. Now...think about where they come from. In our society it is easy to feel we get what we have by working hard, or being special and winning favor in some way...that we deserve the blessings we receive. How scary and potentially spiritually deadly that thinking can be.

Now think for a moment about Mary's news from the angel Gabriel... an angel comes to her with news this big...this confusing...this scary, that she...a virgin will conceive and give birth to the son of God. Unlike many of us might do, Mary didn't view this blessing as something earned, but rather knew it was a gift from God. Her faith was strong and her reply to Gabriel was "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Being chosen to carry and give birth to the son of God I am certain was nothing Mary felt she deserved or earned. Mary knew from where this blessing came and humbly accepted it...the words of Mary's song stated it loud and clear...for the mighty one has done great things for me- holy is his name!

As we all prepare for this holiday season I encourage everyone to take a moment and count your blessings for it is not wrong to count them as long as we are sure to give praise and thanks to the one from who all blessings flow.

Gracious lord...thank you for the blessings you so freely give us...may we always remain humble by them and never take them for granted. In Jesus name...Amen

Merry Christmas!

Kevin Hanson, Mechanic

Lemon lush

2 cups flour	1 cup softened butter
2 (8oz) packages cream cheese	1 cup sugar
2 (3.4 oz) packages instant lemon pudding mix	3 ½ cups of milk
1 (12oz) cool whip	

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a medium bowl combine flour and butter using a pastry cutter until a ball forms. Press onto a 9x 13 dish.

Bake for 25 minutes or until lightly golden. Remove and let cool completely.

In a medium bowl beat cream cheese and sugar until smooth and well blended. Spread evenly over the cooled crust. In another bowl whisk together the lemon pudding mix and milk for 3 to 5 minutes. Spread over the cream cheese layer. Chill until set, then top with Cool whip.

Sunday, December 22, 2013

“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife”. . . [Matthew 1:24]

Marriage and Christmas don't seem to go together too well. If someone were planning a wedding on Christmas day, they might need to celebrate alone as people would be distracted by their Christmas activities. But if you look at it another way, perhaps marriage and Christmas does go together. A godly marriage is a life-long commitment of love and relationship between husband and wife “for better, for worse.” It reminds us of God's eternal lifelong commitment to his people to love us “for better, for worse.”

Gary and I had 10 chances to remember this throughout 2013. We were invited to 10 weddings and hosted our daughter's wedding. There's nothing I like better than a beautiful wedding. But, now, after being the bride's mother. . . I certainly appreciate all the planning, work and money that is spent on a wedding. It's not your mother's wedding anymore . . . with only a piece of cake and punch or coffee served in a church basement.

I thought I'd run you through our year of weddings and those things that stood out in my mind regarding each.

1. Sept. - Niece Courtney married Dan in Washington State. A “hippie” wedding, held in a clearing, on family land. The bride was beautiful in a simple vintage knee-length wedding dress and her long hair in braids.

2. March – Niece Amy married Mike in Westminster, CO. Beautiful wedding on a golf course. The bitterness of losing twin boys earlier in the year was made sweeter by Mike's announcement at the end of the speeches that Amy and he would be having a baby in Nov.

3. February - Neighbor boy and Kyle's classmate Zach married Elle in Grand Fork, ND. Gary and I didn't go; too far and too cold. The bicycle enthusiasts held a reception nearby for Iowans.

4. June- Family friends Ashley and Ezra were married in a most traditional wedding at the Methodist Church in Ogden. We all chuckled as her little brothers were unrolling the white carpet runner and it only went half way down the aisle. Oops!

5. June –The same day, Mark and Lee married in Spencer. Mark was one of Kyle's best friends in high school so he and Kelsey attended. It was a large Catholic wedding and elegant reception.

6. June – Daughter Kelsey married Brian, at Seven Oaks, Boone. While corresponding with my cousin Kurt Hanson about the music, he kept saying, “The special music.” Kelsey and I were a little confused about what that was because it had been months since we spoke to him. So during a downpour I take an umbrella and make my way to the tent. I hear Kurt announce that this is the special song that I had requested. He plays, ‘Blessings’ by Laura Story and Stephanie sings . .

Monday, December 23, 2013

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)” And everyone went to their own hometown to register.” [Luke 2:1-3]

...and since that day going home at Christmas either in body or thought has been the norm.

This verse about Mary and Joseph traveling makes me think of "all hearts go home for Christmas". I am a big fan of going home, wherever your home may be. My "home" is my family. Home, I first learned about Jesus, about love, and about faith. I went to church and Sunday School during my very young years at Christ Lutheran..along with my cousins, and neighbors, and wonderful brothers. We learned about about the wise men, the star, Mary & Joseph and the baby Jesus. We sang Christmas songs and memorized verses and our parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles all encouraged us and applauded our efforts in learning and telling about the birth of Jesus and what it meant for us. The Holy Spirit used our church home to forge a little spark in our heart that would grow into the faith we have now.

So maybe we don't go to church to be counted on Christmas..but I go to church on Christmas to be "home" . Home, with the people who share our love of the Christ Child born in a manger. Home, with our Christian family where we gather to celebrate by singing carols, memorizing bible verses, and encouraging each other to keep the spark of faith in our heart kindled around the manger and cross.

No matter where you are, I hope you travel “home” with Mary and Joseph. One day we will (think about it!)

Merry Christmas!

Alene Kirvin,
School Nurse

Turkey Terazzini (serves 8-19)

Butter, 4 Tablespoons	Turkey, 3 cups, cut up in chunks
Flour, 6 Tablespoons	Spaghetti, 2 cups of cooked, broken into pieces
Milk, 2 cups	Cream of Mushroom Soup, 1 can
Salt, 1 tsp	Grated cheese, 1 ½ cups
Pepper, ¼ tsp	Buttered cracker crumbs, ½ cup
Celery Salt, ½ tsp	

Heat butter, blend in flour and cook for one minute. Gradually whisk in milk to make a smooth white sauce; stir seasonings into sauce. Stir soup into sauce until blended. Fold in turkey and then spaghetti. Heat through. Place in buttered 9x13 casserole dish. Add cheese to top, and then add buttered crumbs. Bake at 350 for 30 minutes, until cheese is melted and cracker crumbs are brown.

Tuesday, December 24, 2013

“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.”
[Luke 2:4-5]

Wise men may not have known where the Christ child was, but Micah did.

In a portion of scripture that was written over 700 years before Christ’s birth, the Prophet Micah spoke these words, *“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be a ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days,”* (Micah 5:2). Micah boldly spoke that Christ would be born in Bethlehem.

This truly is something only God could pull off. I find it amazing that, centuries before Jesus’ birth, a man spoke on behalf of God declaring these things. But there’s more.

The timing of this prophecy is more fascinating than the actual words spoken by Micah. Get this, Mary was very pregnant. The road from Nazareth to Bethlehem was roughly 90 miles away. We aren’t certain if Joseph and Mary actually used a donkey for travels. They had to travel through the wilderness to get to Bethlehem. Based on the average walking speed it would take around 30 hours of walking time to get there. The timing and the journey were all in God’s hands already long before it ever came to be.

God knows each of our journeys. We need to be faithful and trust Him in our own travels. He knows what we need and blesses our road wherever we are headed. The same God who sent Micah to profess the birthplace of Jesus Christ puts people in our lives to profess His Word. The same God who timed things perfectly and blessed the newlywed’s journey blesses our paths and knows the timing that’s best for us. The same God who sent His own Son to be born in that stable sent Him to die so that you and I may live eternally with Him.

Caleb Taylor,
High School Teacher
Valley Lutheran High School, Phoenix, AZ

Chocolate Haystacks (Lyla Seeman)

2 Cups granulated sugar

6 Tablespoons cocoa

½ cup milk

½ cup butter or margarine

In heavy sauce pan, bring first four ingredients to a full boil. Remove from heat and stir in 1 cup flaked coconut. 3 ½ cups quick rolled oats, ½ chopped nuts (optional) dash salt and ½ tsp. vanilla. Drop quickly from teaspoon onto waxed paper and let cool. Makes 3 to 4 dozen.

Wednesday, December 25, 2013

“And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” [Luke 2:6-7]

Last night was Christmas Eve again and we're filled with so many happy memories of this most holy night that we have shared with loved ones through the years. When the boys were small were the busiest times for me; with all the baking, sharing goodies with neighbors, friends and family. Then came the grandkids... great grandkids... and just last year we were blessed with a great-great granddaughter! The happiness increases!

As I was thinking of all the wonderful Christmas's we've been blessed with, I'm reminded of a devotion a few months back in Portals of Prayer. I quote, “There is a difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is fleeting, based on a pleasurable moment in time. Joy, on the other hand, is deeper and more enduring. Joy is based on a condition rather than an experience.”

There is no denying the happiness we know sharing gifts and trying our best to make Christmas such a happy and memorable time for our loved ones. And then there is the real joy we know when we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the long promised Son of God. He came to rescue us from our sins and assure us of true joy everlasting. Christmas is more a celebration of eternity in heaven with our God, than just his birth.

What a privilege we have to be able to celebrate our Christmas with all the fun of decorating, shopping, cooking and sharing thrilling times with family, friends and church. I pray that the joy of Advent, Christmas Eve and now Christmas Day may be your happy memory until the Lord comes again.

“Joyful, joyful we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of Love!...
Joyful, we Thy heaven inherit! Joyful we by grace are Thine!” (LSB 803)

Virginia White,
Child of God

Pineapple Cheese Ball (Sandy George)

2 – 8oz. Cream Cheese	2 T chopped onion
1 (8 ½ oz.) can crushed pineapple	1 T seasoned salt
¼ Cup chopped green pepper	1 Cup chopped pecans

Drain pineapple very well. Mix first five ingredients and shape into a ball (or two smaller balls). May add some chopped pecans into the mix. Refrigerate. Roll in chopped pecans when ready to serve.

Thursday, December 26, 2013

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.” [Luke 2:8-11]

Can you imagine getting news that could change your whole life for the better?

An attorney’s letter informing you of a sizeable, unplanned inheritance and all of your money stress was lifted. Good news for sure, but what about receiving the news that you were expecting a child and knowing that it would change your life for the better? Perhaps best, would be news of a God – child who would change the world, permanently! Enter the shepherds...

I cannot imagine how these shepherds felt when the angel came to tell them this great news. There are many differences between now and then. Today if someone claimed to see an angel come to them we would probably all think that person was hallucinating or crazy. If that angel had told them something we also wouldn’t believe or trust in their “news”. This helps remind me that we need to put all of our trust in God at all times. If we believe in Him great things will happen. We need to be more childlike in our ways, especially with our faith. Children believe without having doubt. So did the Shepherds!

The birth of Jesus was the most joyous thing to happen on his Earth. A new mom looked on with wonder into the eyes of her child, angels sang, shepherds danced and ran to see. You too have received world changing news: May we join in the faithful celebration as we spend time with family and loved ones, remembering that our Savior was born for us!

Madison Taylor
Tax Analyst

Quick Grilled Cod fish (5 minutes tops)

1 filet of Cod
Sesame Oil
Oyster Sauce
Salt seasoning mix

Coat the filet with Sesame Oil and Oyster Sauce. Sprinkle generously with salt seasoning mix. (any spices listed as good for fish will work). Place a sheet of tinfoil on grill with all edges turned up. Slide cod onto tinfoil, making sure that you can easily move it with a spatula. Grill over low heat and check after a few minutes. When done, the Cod should easily flake into large pieces. Remove from tinfoil and serve.

Friday, December 27, 2013

“This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” [Luke 2:12]

The signs were all there.

The Christmas program was fast approaching, and the anticipation of it all was so exciting. When the calendar turned to November, the focus in my elementary school turned to the Christmas program. Four congregations support my parochial school, and each congregation conducted its own program on Christmas Eve.

My friends from Immanuel received our music and our “piece”, all of which would be memorized. As the time grew closer, we were bused to our rural church several times that week before the program, where we had marathon practices. The thirty foot tree was being decorated by the men and women, the microphones were being adjusted so everyone in the church could hear our parts. The seating arrangements were tested for the most efficient crowd flow and the treat bags and boxes of fruit were already orderly placed on the kitchen counters. The signs were all there. We looked forward to our Christmas program as if it were the biggest night of the year.

You know, it actually was the biggest night of the year! The signs are still evident. Let us anticipate with excitement Christ’s birth, and His return to take us to heaven with Him!

Kaye Adair,
Elementary teacher

Yum Yum Dollie Bars (Lori Carroll)

Mix 1 ¼ to 1 ½ cup crushed graham cracker crumbs

1 stick oleo

Press into 9 x 13 cake pan

Sprinkle over this crust in the following order:

1 – 6 oz. pkg. chocolate chips

1 – 6 oz. pkg. butterscotch chips

1 Cup flaked coconut

1 Cup chopped pecans

Spread or pour evenly over this 1 can of Eagle Brand Sweetened Milk. Bake 25 minutes at 350 degrees. Cool and cut into bars.

Saturday, December 28, 2013

“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” [Luke 2:13-14]

Thinking of Jesus birth, wow! Can you imagine a multitude of angels praising God and singing their hearts out to the glory of Christ’s birth? One day we won’t have to imagine.

Merry Christmas!

Joan Schnoor
Homemaker

Copper Pennies

2 lbs. carrots sliced thick – cooked, drained

Bring to a boil the following ingredients:

½ Cup salad oil

1 can tomato soup

1 small onion (minced)

¼ Cup celery minced

2 tsp Worcester sauce

½ Cup vinegar

1 Cup sugar

Bring to a boil and add the carrots. Chill.

Sunday, December 29, 2013

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you. One whose origins are from the distant past.” [Micah 5:2]

Over 700 years before Jesus’ birth, Micah prophesied that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It’s just a few days after Christmas 2013, and all the joys of celebrating the birth of that little boy are fresh in our minds. Isn’t it fun reminiscing of past Christmases? Doesn’t it bring a smile to your face when you think of all the gatherings with friends and family, the caroling, the food, the church services and programs? Christmas Eve services are always so special. I love all the music and it brings a tear to my eye, every time I see the little children reenact the manger scene. What a gift God gave us in that little baby!

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to look into the future? It might be fun to know what was going to happen tomorrow, or next year, or maybe even 700 years from now. We would already know what next Christmas would be like. Just think, we wouldn’t have to worry about all the stresses that life here on earth brings. We would already know what happens. We would know all the answers in advance and we could just make wise decisions...right? Well it doesn’t take long to figure out how that would work. Maybe it wouldn’t be so much fun after all.

God in His perfect wisdom actually has given us everything we need to know for the future. He has given us the Holy Bible. Everything we need to know about the future is contained in its chapters. In John 14:1-2, Jesus said, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you.”* Jesus also tells us in John 14:6, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

That little baby born in Bethlehem, so many years ago, IS our future. Jesus is Savior! He tells us in the last chapter of the Bible, Revelations 22:7, *“Look, I am coming soon! Bless those who obey the words of prophecy written in this book.”*

Christmas is the sign from God of our wonderful future!

Connie Sheeny,
Administrative Assistant

Quick Cookies from Cake Mix (Anna Mae Seemann)

1 box of your favorite cake mix

¼ cup oil

¼ cup water

1 egg

Mix ingredients thoroughly, drop by teaspoon onto cookie sheet. Bake 350 – 10 to 12 minutes (test with toothpick), don’t over bake. Remove from cookie sheet and cool on rack or wax paper.

Frost with your favorite powdered sugar frosting.

Monday, December 30, 2013

“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.” [1 John 4:9]

I’ve talked to people who have asked, “if God is so powerful, or if there is a God, why does he allow sin in the world? Why does he allow bad things to happen?”

God is certainly powerful! He created the heavens and earth and all the inhabitants in seven days. The world was perfect, there was no sin, and there was no death. We humans brought that into this world first with Adam and Eve and each of us still bring sin into this world today. While God made us perfect and in his own image .. he also gave us a perfectly free will. That free will has given us the power to turn away from God. The question then becomes “Why did God give us free will to sin and allow all these bad things to happen in people’s lives?”

I believe the answer is love. It may seem strange, but if people were built with no free will, could they truly choose to love God? Our Creator-given free will gives us the choice. Joshua was leader over Israel and he made this clear. In Joshua 24:15 he tells Israel, *“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”*

God loves us even though we are sinful. Just like the verse for today says God shows his love by bringing his Son into the world so that we might live even though we deserve death because of our sin. God wants us to love him in return and has given us the free will to choose him. So in this Advent season in which our lives can get hectic and stressful remember that God loves you and with his free will chose you to be His forever.

Aaron Phillips,
High School Teacher and Band Director

Easy Grilled Vegetables

2-3 Peppers (green works, but red and yellow make it interesting)
Small box fresh mushrooms
Onion
Stalk of Broccoli

Slice peppers and onions, half mushrooms, and slice off small heads of broccoli. Combine in a bowl with a fair drizzle of Olive Oil. Mix thoroughly, then salt and pepper (or another seasoning) to taste. Place over a low grill heat in a vegetable grill basket stirring frequently until vegetables are seared. Remove and serve.

Tuesday, December 31, 2013

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” [Galatians 3:26-27]

Christmas time always brings warm memories to mind. This memory fills my heart with warmth, pride, and joy.

Two of my dearest friends had a teen-age daughter about 14 or 15 years of age who thought the world revolved around her. She was spoiled and had an attitude that looked down upon the less fortunate.

Her parents were very concerned about her attitude and blamed themselves for giving her so much as she was growing up. One year, close to Christmas, they drove to the poorest, roughest neighborhood in a large city and the three of them entered a K-mart store. They could tell there were many struggling young families out trying to make Christmas happen for their families with little or no money to spare. The young girl was told by her parents to approach a young family and tell the Mom and Dad to pick out a big toy for each of their children and she would pay for it. It took a little coaxing, but she witnessed the tears in the parent's eyes and the joy of the children's faces when they accepted the messages. Over the span of 3-4 hours she approached young parents again and again to buy toys for their children. Her previously spoiled heart melted and her tears matched those of the young parents to whom the help was being given. From that day on, the girl's attitude changed for the better. Her parents sighed with relief and joy. She learned that one of the ways God loves people is through us.

This family continues their Christmas tradition anonymously; for they believe the only way to give a true gift is to not ask for recognition. Their Christmas motto is “the only way to keep the precious gift of the love of God is to give to others.” What a wonderful Christmas thought.

Deb Koelln, RN
Director of Nursing
Perry Lutheran Home

Recipe: Caramel Puff Corn (Delicious to eat during church!!?)

Ingredients:

- 1 (8 ounce) bag puff corn
- 1 cup butter (do not substitute)
- 1/2 cup light corn syrup
- 1 teaspoon baking soda

Directions:

Place puff corn in a large roaster. In 2 quart sauce pan bring the butter, sugar & corn syrup to a boil, then cook for 2 minutes.

Add baking soda- this will cause the caramel mixture to foam up.

Stir well and remove from heat.

Pour over puff corn in the roaster and bake in oven at 250 for 45 minutes, stirring every 10-15 minutes.

Remove from oven, spread out onto wax paper to cool.

Wednesday, January 1, 2013

“And the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.” [Isaiah 35:10]

Christmas is now a week past. What moments must have been being silently shared between Mary and her week old baby!

Have you seen a newborn or “pretty freshly born” baby look at its mother? Nurses in the maternity ward have this little chart that shows exactly what a baby can see for the first few weeks...and what they can see is pretty much nothing. Mama, whose voice baby had heard all those months, is now just a shadowy haze above their fresh little face.

The intensity in those little eyes those first few days so contradicts that little chart! I have recorded that look on all three of my grandchildren...and for all three it was the same: a non-blinking intensity filled with adoration and amazement that went both ways across a beam of love. Anxious maternal eyes that had waited nine months now locked with those tiny fixed watery orbs.

What is communicated in those wordless moments?

Both Elizabeth and Mary shared that same moment with their newborns: a look of overwhelming love on the part of the mother, the look of amazement on the part of the newborn son. Imagine how much the mother “held in her heart” as she pondered on the miracle, but also wondered at the future. Elizabeth’s son would have an interesting future; Mary’s a world changing one. One son would witness to the coming of the Savior; the other son would be that Savior. But both began with a bonding moment sharing that look between mother and child; maybe that’s why God chose the form of a baby to present his son to Mary (and to us). Mary’s look surely included, “I am here for you, little one.” Jesus’ was, “I am here for you, lost one.”

The love that passes from those first post-umbilical connections between mother and child, as powerful as it is, pales in comparison to the love that God beams on us when he sees us through the gift of that baby. When God looks at us, he should see our awfulness: our greed, our selfishness, our hate, and our wickedness...but he looks through those baby eyes of Jesus and he sees his beloved family.

God says to us, “This is my son.”
Jesus says to us, “I am here for you, lost one.”

For this reason, it is a most Happy New Year!

Karen Menz
Retired Teacher

No Recipe.....Time to lose weight!! God bless!