

Saint Thomas Lutheran Church News

January 2020 XXXXII, Issue 1

Pastor's Column...

The hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

This line from the Christmas hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," has been haunting me this year. Like so many of the great Christmas hymns and carols, this one is couched in darkness, harkening to one of the central themes of Advent and Christmas: the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. As it says in this hymn, "yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light."

I heard it said once that the purpose of Advent is to help us come to terms with the darkness. The literal darkness of this season draws us to ponder the darkness harbored in our souls and embedded in the world around us. We are all of us afraid of the dark. Madeline L'Engle wrote about this in her book about the Church calendar, *The Irrational Season*, that our ancient forebears would notice the days getting shorter and shorter and managed to figure out that if this trend continued, it would never be light again, and this terrified them. So, when the days finally started getting longer at the Winter solstice, they decided a great party was in order to celebrate the rebirth of the sun. This is the primordial beginnings of the season of Advent.

In a tradition that goes back at least to the time when the Israelites began to populate Palestine, Judaism and Christianity have coopted the pagan festivals while giving them a different narrative, a narrative that conveyed the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God of Mary and Joseph, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, a narrative that conveyed new age of grace.

We do not know when Jesus was born, but there is a consensus among scholars that he was definitely NOT born at the end of December. So why celebrate the Incarnation at this time of the year? I must admit that I do not know all the historical facts that lead to this decision, but I do know that it has everything to do with bringing us this good news of great joy in a context where it can be received as such. And no light burns brighter than in the darkest night.

Besides the literal darkness that surrounds us, there is the metaphorical darkness that we get reminded of more frequently than ever in human history, thanks to 24-hour cable news channels, Twitter, Facebook and the like. We are bombarded by bad news, dark and ominous headlines, amped up and fed to a willing public whose ears have come to crave such cacophony. We complain about it, of course, but we feed off of it as well. It is almost impossible to avoid the flood of reminders of the darkness in the world and within the human heart.

A favorite book of mine, especially during Advent, is entitled, *Bright Valley of Love*, by Edna Hong. It is the true story about Gunther, a boy who was horribly neglected in his early years, who ends up at Bethel, a home for the handicapped in post-WW I Germany. We find that Gunther's upbringing was so impoverished in every way that he didn't even know what Christmas was until his arrival at Bethel. During Advent, as the Christmas draws nearer, his image of the beauty of this celebration grows larger and larger. At the same time, his best friend, Kurt, is slowly dying of severe epilepsy. The juxtaposition of these two realities comes to a head on the first Sunday of Advent. It is Kurt who is chosen to light the first candle, but before he can get it lit, he has a horrible seizure and is carried out of the room.

At this point Gunther cries out in his pain, “There’s a crack in everything!” and “What’s so great about Christmas?” The pastor then turns this question to the other children, hoping they can help their friend understand what is so great about this day. Eventually one of them comes up with the answer he was looking for: Christmas is so great because there’s a crack in everything. The pastor then says,

It is true, Gunther, that there is a crack in everything. God sees the crack better than we do, and the crack is ever so much worse than we think it is. That is why God sent his Son from the heavenly home to our earthly home. Not to patch up the crack, but to make everything new. That is why Christmas is so great, Gunther.

The Incarnation is the beginning of the work of making all things new, beginning with those who hear the good news of great joy which is to all people. The darkness can feel overwhelming at times, but the promise is sure that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not – nor will it ever – overcome it. Hallelujah! Come, let us adore him, Christ our Lord!

Joy and peace in Christ,
Pastor Darby

Christian Ed and Youth Group Schedules

Adult Forum

January 5 – No Sunday School Classes
Saving Jesus Redux meets

January 12 – **Jan and Pamela’s Talking Circle**

Jan Sinn and Pamela Smith can always find something interesting to talk about, and in this adult forum we’re inviting you to join a conversation about aging, choices, energy, and resilience. We don’t have answers, but we’ll bring interesting questions. You can, too!

January 19 – Saving Jesus Redux

January 26 – **Jan and Pamela’s Talking Circle**

Jan Sinn and Pamela Smith can always find something interesting to talk about, and in this adult forum we’re inviting you to join a conversation about how friends can support each other during an illness. We don’t have answers, but we’ll bring interesting questions. You can, too!

Youth Group

January 26 – Movie Night, Plan for Souper Bowl

From the Congregation Council:

Weather Closing Information: We hardly ever cancel Sunday services here at St. Thomas, but we also want all of our members to be safe--and sometimes the roads just aren't fit to drive on. Wondering on a snowy, icy Saturday night if St. Thomas will have services the next morning? Starting at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, go to WTHR Channel 13 and check the closings scrolling at the bottom of the screen or go to the WTHR website (www.wthr.com). We will also post, if at all possible, on the St. Thomas website and Facebook page.

Mission & Ministry News



Your contributions of coats, hats, gloves, scarves and other warm clothing filled six big bags amounting to approximately 250 articles!

This filled a tremendous need among the students (and their parents) enrolled in the Newcomer Program at Northwest Middle School in Indianapolis. The Newcomer Program supports recent immigrants and refugees. Every item was given away!

Many thanks to the Mission Committee for coordinating this endeavor!

Prayer Chain



Want to join our St Thomas email prayer chain? Do you have prayer requests? Contact Susan Colston skolston@aol.com for further information.



Sister Parish Connections

Celebrating our Hermanamiento (Town-twinning)

In a time of transition and change, I find it helpful to make a list of things that are not changing. Big or small, adding items to the list helps me feel grounded even as other things around me shift and settle. To put things in perspective, I start the list with "God's Love". I remind myself that God loves me and will always love me unconditionally, whether I feel worthy or not. This is not a love that I earn or jeopardize through my actions, and even if everything else around me is changing, God's love for me will not change. I acknowledge that I'll never truly understand the how and why of God's love, the natural world, or the diverse people God created. This gap in understanding distresses me at times. Yet the more effort I make to open myself to the inexplicable and unwavering love of God, the more grounded I will feel.

The remaining items on the list are shored up by the first. Today the second item I add to my list is my connection to our brothers and sisters in Guatemala. All I have to do to remind me of that bond is to look down at the friendship bracelet on my wrist. It has been there since Velma made it for me in Chichipate in March 2018.



I am thankful for my continued relationship with those I met in Guatemala and the ones they love. I know I don't show it or reach out as often as I think of my friends. I haven't shared my thoughts of our brothers and sisters in this newsletter as often as I intended. Still, I know they think of me. They pray for me. They share the love of God with me. And [even as their lives churn](#), they help me feel grounded.



Before you turn to creating a “grounding list” of your own, I’d like to share the next item on my list: prayer. Again, I look to my sisters and brothers in Chichipate on this point. These folks know how to pray! They pray often and with their whole hearts. Rather than compare my prayers to theirs in shame, I admire and learn from their example. I strive for the constant connection our sister community members seem to have with God.

Today, please join me in prayer. We give thanks, oh God, for our extended family in Chichipate and those who continue the work of the Sister Parish organization. Amen.



For more grounding, you can [visit the Sister Parish blog](#). Hear the stories of other delegations; see the faces of hardworking, indigenous peoples; examine the effects of government actions on our sisters and brothers; and learn more about Sister Parish, Inc. and other organizations that foster mutual understanding and commitment to peace and justice among people in the United States and Central America.

January Birthdays

1/2 Devonia Stein
1/5 Tim Kirsch
1/7 Dave Pavolka
1/10 Paul Smith
1/12 Phil May
1/14 Gwen Caudill
1/16 Jim Doering
1/17 Sandy Arnold
1/20 Dean Arnold
1/23 John Isaacson
1/25 Susan Krieg
1/28 Paula Ionescu

Coming in February

February 2:
Souper Bowl of Caring
Bach Cantata

**Unsubscribe from this list or update your preferences by emailing:
susank@stlconline.org**

JANUARY 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2 10:30 AM U Club Yoga 6:00 PM Blmgtn Neighborhood Boot Camp	3	4 10:00 Property Comm.
5 8:30 & 11:00 Worship 9:45 Saving Jesus Redux Take down Christmas decorations after 11:00 service	6	7 10:30 AM U Club Yoga 6:00 PM Blmgtn Neighborhood Boot Camp 6:30 PM Worship Comm.	8 6:00 PM St Vincent de Paul	9 10:30 AM U Club Yoga 6:00 PM Blmgtn Neighborhood Boot Camp 7:00 PM Choir rehearsal	10	11
12 8:30 & 11:00 Worship 9:45 Ed. Hour- SCS, Adult Forum 9:45 Women's Bible study	13	14 10:30 AM U Club Yoga 6:00 PM Blmgtn Neighborhood Boot Camp 6:30 Mission Comm.	15	16 10:30 AM U Club Yoga 6:00 PM Blmgtn Neighborhood Boot Camp 6:00 PM Finance Comm. 7:00 PM Choir rehearsal	17	18
19 8:30 & 11:00 Worship 9:45 Ed. Hour- SCS, Saving Jesus Redux 12:30 Council Mtg 2:30 LWV	20 7:00 PM Spinners & Weavers	21 10:30 AM U Club Yoga 6:00 PM Blmgtn Neighborhood Boot Camp	22 6:00 PM St Vincent de Paul	23 10:30 AM U Club Yoga 6:00 PM Blmgtn Neighborhood Boot Camp 7:00 PM Choir rehearsal	24	25
26 8:30 & 11:00 Worship 9:45 Ed. Hour – SCS; Adult Forum 5:30 Youth Group	27	28 10:30 AM U Club Yoga 6:00 PM Blmgtn Neighborhood Boot Camp	29	30 10:30 AM U Club Yoga 6:00 PM Blmgtn Neighborhood Boot Camp 7:00 PM Choir rehearsal	31	