**The Monthly Newsletter of Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church**

**Lindy, Nebraska**

**Pr. Thomas E. Jacobson: Email, tjacobson001@luthersem.edu; Home phone number in Menno, SD, 605-387-5196**

**The Rod and Staff**



**December 2016**

**“The most wonderful time of the year…”**

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us…* - John 1:14

“It’s the most wonderful time of the year,” at least according to the author of that well-known Christmas song. Advent, the roughly four weeks before Christmas, is upon us, and it will be Christmas before you know it. In the meantime, we get to participate in things that we normally neglect the rest of the year: exterior illumination, candy canes, hot cider, singing Christmas carols, gift giving, and being near family and friends, of course. All of these things are good, at least they have the potential to be. Even though many of our modern Christmas traditions have nothing directly to do with the Christian faith, I don’t think it is necessarily bad to engage in such holiday activities; being among family and friends with a spirit of joy plays a large role in our lives as Christians and as human beings in general. From nearly the beginning, Christmas has had secular “baggage” attached to it. As long as we do not let such secular things overshadow the main thing, we are free to celebrate this time of year and the things that go along with it.

However, I venture to guess that some might choose to openly disagree with the author of the song I just mentioned. Is this really “the most wonderful time of the year”? While Christmas may be joyous for some, others despise the season because of its commercialization. Others still observe the Christmas holiday grudgingly, feeling obligated to do so even though they take no joy out of being placed in stressful situations involving relatives. An added financial burden during the season causes some to resent the holiday. For others, Christmas is a reminder of what they do not have and what they would like to have and a reminder of what they would like to give to others but realistically cannot. Still for others, the powerful memories of Christmas open emotional wounds, reminding them of the company they no longer share with loved ones who are no longer with them.

Of course Christmas is commercialized. That’s the price we pay for living in a capitalist society. But Christians should not be surprised that a season like Christmas is filled with stress, pain, and confusion. That’s the reality of human existence, and this reality doesn’t take a vacation for the month of December. But it is into this reality that Christ comes. God the Father didn’t wait until all was “merry and bright” to send his Son to become one of us. According to our Christmas stories in the Bible, Jesus was certainly not born in a place that was “merry and bright.” In one of the Christmas hymns we learned last year by Hans Brorson, he writes, “This stable dark and dreary shall be a palace rare!” God doesn’t magically transform the world around us and make our lives in this world perfect. Rather, God enters into the darkness of our world and gives us the strength to persevere. God shows his love for us and gives our faith something to hold on to with the birth of Jesus in that dark and dreary place.

So celebrate during this season, if that’s what you want, of course. But remember that Christmas is not ultimately something that we make. All of our holiday preparations and celebrations can be good things. What really makes Christmas, though, is that we call to mind that we are recipients of God’s greatest gift to the world: Jesus Christ, our Lord. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

* Pr. T. E. Jacobson

**Commemoration of the Saints**

Lutherans do not venerate (pray to) special people called “saints.” Our Lutheran confessional documents speak against that practice. However, those same documents that prohibit the veneration of saints encourage Christian people to look to the lives of significant Christians of the past as a source of encouragement for our lives in the present.



For December of 2016, we remember the life of **Hudson Taylor**, a British Protestant missionary to China. He lived from 1832 to 1905.

Hudson Taylor was the founder of the China Inland Mission, a successful endeavor that established schools and missionary stations around China. Over the course of 51 years, Taylor’s China Inland Mission led to the conversion of just under twenty thousand Chinese people to the Christian faith.

Beside this, Taylor is known for his missionary strategy, which was to adapt himself to the customs of the Chinese people as he sought to reach them with the message of Jesus Christ. He wore Chinese rather than European clothing. He felt that it would be easier for people to relate to him if they could see that he understood and valued their heritage. He knew that being a Christian was more than being a European.

His practice of working within Chinese culture rather than standing over is appropriate to remember this Christmas seasons as we remember God taking on flesh and becoming one of us in Jesus Christ. God came to us in the flesh, became one of us, taking on our nature in order to give us his eternal life.

* Pr. T. E. Jacobson

**Hanukkah**

*Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! – Isaiah 2:5* ESV

The month of December is a time of celebration not only for Christians with the season of Christmas. Jewish people celebrate a season known as Hanukkah, and I am sometimes asked what Hanukkah means and how it relates to Christmas. The truth is that Hanukkah is most popular among Jews in the United States. In the rest of the world, it is not such a big deal. It is something that Jews in the United States have to celebrate when everyone else around them is engaging in Christmas activities. That Christmas and Hanukkah coincide with one another is more a coincidence than anything.

Jewish people refer to the festival of Hanukkah as “the festival of lights.” The Jewish celebration of Hanukkah dates back to 165 BC, when the Jerusalem temple that had been desecrated by the Greek ruler Antiochus IV was rededicated. According to the story, there was only enough oil to burn for a short period of time, but the oil ended up lasting nine days, which is exactly how long it took to prepare and consecrate new oil. On Hanukkah, Jewish people light a different candle in a menorah every day of the festival. It is a way of remembering God’s faithfulness in a difficult time. The story behind the festival is told in the book of 1 Maccabees, one of the books that Roman Catholics consider a part of the Bible but Protestants generally do not.

Christians have a different reason to light candles in this season. At Christmas, so long ago, we believe that a special light entered our world: Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world, according to John chapter eight. In church, in the weeks leading up to Christmas, we light more candles than we do at other times of the year. In the church I grew up in, our Christmas Eve service was filled with actual burning candles on the window sills – not the safest thing in the world. I doubt the fire department knew about it. If you didn’t know better, at first glance you might think that the church was on fire.

Lights are all over the place in this season. They are in church, they adorn electrical posts in towns, they adorn trees both inside and outside, and they adorn our houses. A legend says that Martin Luther put candles on his Christmas tree to remind his family that Jesus is the light of the world. Again, not the safest practice.

As you see so many lights this season, you can reflect on their beauty in the midst of a dark and dreary season. But you can also reflect on what the Christmas lights ultimately point to. These weeks before Christmas can be an opportunity to reflect on the ways that the light of Jesus is drowned out by the many other lights that surround us. When we do so, we can then say with the prophet Isaiah, “Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”

**Reminder: the Christmas Eve worship service will be held at 5:00 PM on December 24. This is a time change from last year.**

**We will still have Sunday morning worship on Christmas Day at the usual time of 10:30 AM.**

**Featured Hymn for December**

***Bells are Calling***

*Lutheran Hymnal for Church and Home, 122*

1. Bells are calling, ringing, tolling, ringing, tolling from steeple spires. Sounds of salvation, kind salutations, kind salutations from angel choirs. Bells are calling, ringing, tolling. Ringing, tolling from steeple spires.
2. Songs are ringing, angels singing, angels singing with glorious sounds. Hear them resounding over the boundaries, over the boundaries and all around. Songs are ringing, angels singing, angels singing with glorious sounds.
3. Angels voicing, songs rejoicing, sings rejoicing that Christ is born. See light is streaming; Christ has redeemed us, Christ has redeemed us this glorious morn. Angels voicing, songs rejoicing, songs rejoicing that Christ is born.
4. Dawn is breaking as we waken, as we waken to all things new. Let bells be ringing, joyfully singing, joyfully singing for all that’s true. Dawn is breaking as we waken, as we waken to all things new.
* Elias Bix, 1836-1902; translated, Gracia Grindal

*Note: Bix wrote this hymn in the “New Norwegian” language rather than the more traditional “Book language.” It contains vivid images of nature and the church.*

**Monthly Watchword for December**

“Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.”

* Isaiah 49:13 ESV

**Ushers for December:**

* Head Ushers:
	+ Denise Yule
	+ Leslie Yule
* Ushers:
	+ Lyle and Myva Scott
	+ Gene Eckmann
	+ Tony and Brenda Petersen
	+ Kris True

**For Further Information on LCMC and the NALC:** You can download and read the newsletters of both organizations at the following addresses:

* **http://www.lcmc.net/newsletters**
* **http://thenalc.org/newsletter/**

**Website:** The web address is as follows:

* **www.gselclindy.weebly.com**

**New Addition to Website:** The North American Lutheran Church (NALC) has daily devotions written by various pastors and lay members. You can now access these daily devotions on the Good Shepherd website under “NALC Devotions and News.”

**Sunday School Christmas Program:** The Sunday School Christmas program will take place on Sunday December 11 during worship at 10:30 AM.

**From Martin Luther’s Small Catechism:**

**The Sacrament of Holy Communion**

***What is Holy Communion?***

*It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and drink, as it was instituted by Christ himself.*

**December 2016**

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| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|  |  |  |  | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4Sunday School, 9:30 AM Worship, 10:30 with Holy Communion at altar railBlue | 5 | 6 | 7Pr. Tom in LindyConfirmation class, 5:00 PM | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 11Sunday school, 9:30Worship, 10:30 with Christmas programBlue | 12 | 13 | 14Pr. Tom in Lindy Confirmation class, 5:00 PMChurch council meeting, 7:00 PM | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| 18Sunday School, 9:30Worship, 10:30 with Holy Communion, continuous lineBlue | 19 | 20 | 21Pr. Tom in LindyWomen’s meeting, 10:00 AMNo Confirmation class | 22 | 23 | 24Christmas Eve worship, 5:00 PM |
| 25No Sunday SchoolWorship, 10:30White (Christmas Day) | 26 | 27 | 28 29 30 31Pr. Tom awayNo Confirmation class |
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Good Shepherd Evangelical

Lutheran Church of Lindy

89039 539 Ave.

Bloomfield, Nebraska 68718



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