



December 2016

The Word of God NEWSLETTER

an
ecumenical
charismatic
missionary
Christian
Community

What is a lot more fun than a Christmas party?

Hark the Herald Carolers Sing

Christmas is a great time of year—but not so much for everyone. For a lot of folks living in nursing homes and health centers the season is especially lonely as they experience their isolation. The message of Christmas is that God has broken into our isolation due to sin to save us through Jesus, our Savior. What better time is there to bring that message to those who at least feel like ‘people who sit in darkness’. So this year we again sent teams to Brookdale, Whitehall and Superior Woods to sing the ‘glad tidings’ and visit with folks. Below you can join us through words and pictures.

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Brookdale by Joan O'Connell

Bob Magill arrived early for caroling, to set up and check over the beautiful piano in the foyer. As residents began rolling in for our event, he noted that on the piano, "A" above middle "C" wasn't working consistently: just like last year. Good to know.

When I walked in, a few minutes after the start time, everybody was engaged: jingling bells and singing. Wheelchairs and walkers. Smiles and unguarded, dreamy looks. Carolers assisting residents with song sheets as requests were called out.

Familiar faces from previous years. Significant participation from residents and intermingled caroling guests, with standing room only for some of the carolers. Who came? Some of the people you know: Hillakers; Galdieux's; O'Connell's, including Maria and her husband Daniel, Joe and Carrie and their two boys; Elizabeth Mimms and her granddaughter; Rosaleen Kirk; Bill Johnson.

The home manager gave us permission to send a few younger carolers down the hall to knock on doors and deliver the greeting cards Pat had people sign as they arrived. Gabriella, Sean and Declan accepted the charge, accompanied by their adults. Cards were well-received, with sufficient to pass out to the residents who joined us for songs in the snack nook.

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Not quite angel choirs, but the same glad tidings! Pat O'Connell & Bob Magill led a team of folks to bring the joy of Christmas to folks at the Brookdale Health Center. Bob reported a small miracle—the 'A' key was unresponsive all night except for one carol for which it was critical when it worked! God-empowered caroling!

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Seems to me ...

The gift of Yes

By Phil Tiews

At our recent Christmas prayer meeting, Jack Flanagan shared some thoughts about Jesus' 'Yes' in the Incarnation. This has stuck with me and I have been reminded of the passage from Philippians 2:6-8:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

At Christmas we remember and celebrate the unimaginable love, humility, and obedience of Jesus that enabled him to say 'yes' to the Father's plan to rescue us from just judgement through the sacrifice of a perfect Lamb. That 'yes' emptied Jesus of his glory and led him to become one with us in flesh as a vulnerable baby, to live as a servant, and to die shamefully on a cross. It was a 'yes' that cancelled out the 'no' that you and I and all men have shouted from Adam down through the years.

The Bible makes it clear that ... *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. (Col 1:21)* As hostile rebels, we were incapable of saying 'yes' to God. Jesus' 'yes' embraced the penalty due for all the 'no's' — and was greater yet!

Jesus' gift to us is even more than the paying of our penalty. He has shared his identity with us and given us his own Holy Spirit. In him now we are empowered to say his 'yes' to the Father. Every 'yes' of ours is now connected to him and expresses his life. What a gift— given 2000 years ago, and given today and given for all eternity!

As we progress through this Discernment Year and seek the Lord's direction for us as a community, it is critical that we remember we can only say 'yes' to the Father's plan for us in Christ. Let's look to him and deepen our surrender to him so that the 'yes' comes readily and joyfully to our hearts and lips!

May you all have a wonderful Christmas and a blessed New Year

Yes!

■ 

Maybe we don't know as much about Christmas as we *Five Things You Don't Know*

I thought I would share a few lesser known facts about Christmas that I think can make a big difference in how we experience the season today.

1. Advent is an older Christian practice than Christmas

As many are certainly aware, we are now deep into Advent. Advent is a time of year when the Church prepares itself for the coming of Christ both in the Christmas celebration of the Nativity and in the hope of the Christ's return. What you may not know is that the Church was doing Advent before the development of a Christmas feast. Although there is no consensus among scholars to exactly how Advent came about, one thing is sure; expectation of the Parousia (coming of Christ) in Early Christianity was palpable. A kind of proto-Advent seems to have emerged in the early years of the faith, where Christians would fast and pray that their hope of restoration would come to completion in Christ's reappearance. This period was eventually attached to Christmas.

What this means for us: It is easy just to think of Advent as a time to prepare for Christmas. That, however, is not the point. The reason we look to Christmas during Advent is because it reminds us to be alert. God is at work in the world, Christ shows us that; and Advent is an affirmation that that work is not yet complete. As Jesus states in Revelation 21:5, "behold I am making all things new." Are we open to the renewal of God in our own lives? Have we set our eyes on becoming holy? In my life the answer to that question is often, "no." Thankfully we have Advent, which refocuses our lives on the great hope we have, and the call to love that beckons us each day.

2. The Christmas story tells the life story of Jesus, in miniature

Both Matthew and Luke mirror the life of Jesus in their birth accounts. Luke uses his birth account to reflect themes that are included throughout the rest of the Gospel, for example Luke offers three travel narratives toward Bethlehem/Jerusalem in chapter 2. These accounts mirror the travel narrative that guides the central part of Luke's Gospel, from Luke 9:51 up into his entry into the city at Holy Week. Similarly Matthew offers his own gospel-in-miniature. In his infancy narrative, the leaders in Jerusalem hear the word and reject it (Matt 2:1-7) mirroring (Matthew 26:1-5). Matthew then includes a proto-passion (2:16-18), and even a resurrection account (2:20a) which ends with Jesus in Galilee (2:22-23).

What this means for us: This theme of seeing the whole of the Pascal mystery in the birth narrative is powerful. These stories were told to help the Church better understand the work of God, manifested in Christ. The Christmas stories open our hearts to live out God's love in the kingdom of God. We are now in a time of year where images of Christ's birth surround us. Look beyond the diaphanous soft-

think!

About Christmas (and probably should)

By Billy Kangas

focus cast upon the synthetic holiday paraphernalia, these over-played motifs have a deeper well. In each Christmas image the melody of salvation is softly being hummed.

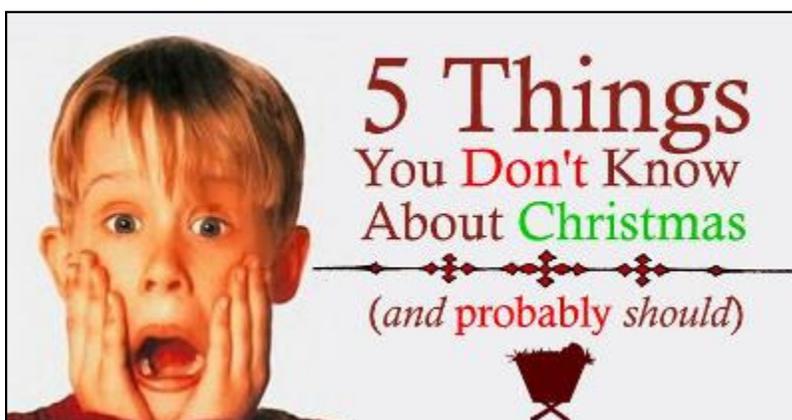
3. The Story of Jesus Birth was Propaganda (and that's awesome)

Luke opens his formal birth narrative by giving an explanation of how it came to be that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He situates the impetus for travel within a census which is said to have been conducted throughout the whole world, or at least that portion which was under control of the Romans. The use of the "whole world" image employed by Augustus creates a subtle parallel. This Caesar, by making this demand, has made a claim at being the lord of the whole world. This is contrasted with all the royal language which had just been attributed to Christ in the Magnificat and Canticle of Zechariah. Caesar is the lord of the world through temporal subjugation. Christ, on the other hand, is positioned to be the lord of the world through heavenly mercy (1:54).

When Mary and Joseph finally arrive in "the city of David", the birth narrative is centered around a manger. This detail seems to be very important, since Luke mentions it three times (2:7, 12, 16). This image is probably rooted in Isa 1:3 which states, "The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand" (NRSV). Luke is challenging his hearers to recognize their master's crib, and the master contained within. It's not Caesar, but the Christ child.

It's also interesting that Luke brings shepherds instead of Magi to honor Jesus. Luke focuses again and again on David, a former shepherd. This makes the focus on shepherds of messianic significance. If this was Luke's intended connection, however, it didn't last long. Commentators soon came to see them as representative of God's grace to the lowly rather than to the religious elite. Although this is a beautiful notion, the messianic connotations make more sense with the rest of the symbols used by Luke in this pericope. They remind us of the shepherd King, who established a new dynasty in Israel.

Another element that is often forgotten is the military and imperial connotations of the description of the angels and the angels' message. They are essentially God's army, which is promoting a form of counterpropaganda. They are stating that "this day" marks a new eschatological shift. They tell the shepherds that there is a new imperial birth. The Messianic Lord is here, and he is born in the city of David. For a Jewish audience this announcement would be a validation of the beliefs of many that Roman power was illegitimate. For an imperial audience this would be nothing short of high treason.



What this means for us: The Christmas story was a reminder to the Early Christians of where their true allegiance lay. They were citizens of a kingdom without borders, and were under a ruler without lands. Their banner was love, their mission was sacrifice, their constitution was proclamation. Let

Christmas remind you to build the kingdom of God, and let it free you from our contemporary monarchies of xenophobia, materialism, covetousness, and waste.

4. Christmas isn't about celebrating the Birth of Jesus

Don't get me wrong, Jesus' birth is a significant part of Christmas, but it's not the primary point! This can be seen in the Gospel reading for Christmas day in many churches, which is John 1:1–18. This passage nowhere mentions Jesus' birth account but instead is an account of the eternal generation of Christ and the Advent of his light in the world. Christmas is not simply Jesus' birthday, but a feast of the Incarnation. Christmas is a sacrament; it is a time in which we remember the highest outward sign of the inward grace God offers to the world. God gives expression of his love in the universal language of flesh and blood, and offers the world a grace that communicates the totality of human existence – humanity itself.

What this means for us: As we are often overwhelmed with the waves of humanity running frantically to prepare for the holiday, it is easy to forget that each person we encounter – from the rude cashier, to the exasperating relative – is a reminder of God's preferred philological form. God didn't abandon humanity for their deficiencies instead God entered into the tumult with us.

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Hark the Herald Carolers Sing [continued]

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Brookdale

I suppose for many people, caroling is a significant memory springboard. One resident told me that she hadn't sung since an operation many years ago impacted her formerly soprano voice. "Christmas carols were always very solemn," she said, noting that she'd never imagined Christmas songs sung in ragtime or upbeat with rhythm instruments. Another gal, between songs, regaled Mike Gladieux with stories of her youth.

Our time at Brookdale was friendly, relaxed, familiar, and peaceful. We made a joyful noise together. People were blessed. Thanks be to God.



■ *When our spiritual family goes out on mission, it is a great opportunity to bring along extended family and friends and include them in Jesus' mission. Several members of the O'Connell clan and Elizabeth Mimms granddaughter came to carol at Brookdale.*



Superior Woods

by Steve Lucchetti

Advent is a great time to share a bit of the Lord's love with those less fortunate. Sunday, December 4th, some of us had the great opportunity to share joy and love with patients at Superior Woods in Ypsilanti Township.

When we got there, Tony had the fantastic idea to lead all of us in a very lively re-telling/remembering of the



Lord's birth. Sprinkled through the story, appropriate carols were sung with patients joining us to sing many of the old Christmas favorites. During the singing, I found myself in the back of the room with several elderly men. It was easy to see by the energy they were putting in their singing that they were having a great time! Two of the men were looking

forward to making it home for Christmas. One of them was alone, with no local family, serious health issues and was expecting to die in the near future. I've been praying for each of them since then.

The most touching thing I saw was Jim sitting next to a woman, holding her hand. Every time I looked, she didn't appear to say or sing anything but was just sitting there staring out the window. She was physically there but it was hard to determine what she was thinking. I found myself praying for the Lord to bless her and touch her mind and life and what ever was going on in her life.



It was definitely an extremely blessed and rewarding afternoon -- I can't wait until next year's caroling!!!

What is better than taking the joyous news of the Incarnation out to other this time of year?

'It was a very good day.'

Whitehall

by Marilyn Geyer

For the Nursing Home Outreach, Dec 4, our group went to Whitehall Healthcare Center of Ann Arbor. We had a great turnout, both from The Word of God and friends and the Whitehall residents. We started out with our annual Nativity skit put on by Lennon, Reimer, Varblow kids (Geyer Grandkids). We had some pretty amazing outfits, thanks to the generosity of Cross & Resurrection Lutheran Church. We briefly covered God's plan for His creation, man's fall, and the Lord's promise to send the Messiah to restore our relationship with God. The kids did a great job portraying the Christmas story. Barb Tiews beautifully sang part of "His Name Will Be Called". This added some class and depth to an otherwise somewhat chaotic rendition of the Christmas Story!



What is a Christmas celebration without a pageant? Under the enthusiastic direction of Grandma Marilyn the Geyer/Varblow clan did a quick review of the Nativity story which delighted the residents at Whitehall Healthcare Center before they joined the team in singing Christmas Carols and songs of the season.



One of the highlights was the large number of very young children dressed as sheep and angels wandering around the stage during the play. We also distributed a little craft project and some cookies. Most of the time was spent singing Christmas carols, enthusiastically led by Phil Tiews with some great accompaniment on the piano by Martha Balmer. We all had a great time.

The most touching part of the day was the mingling of The Word of God people with the nursing home residents. It's kind of an awkward situation. I was very moved by the efforts of our people to get to know the residents and make them feel valued. As you looked around the room you saw little gatherings of the 2 groups talking and laughing together. I felt honored to be part of the way God allowed us to join Him in showing His love to these people. It was a very good day.



And, of Course—Dinner Afterward!

If you were not able to join us this year, we hope you will next. In the meantime, may all experience the joy of the good news that the Word has come in the flesh for our salvation!



Majesty

We are the same size, the Child and I.
At least it seems that way, as he nestles in the hay.

The Unreachable Light shines through the dark night.
No longer a far sight, in my heart now alights.

The Father strums finely, 'til the Son picks divinely.
The Father cuts tighter, but the Son cuts without mitre.

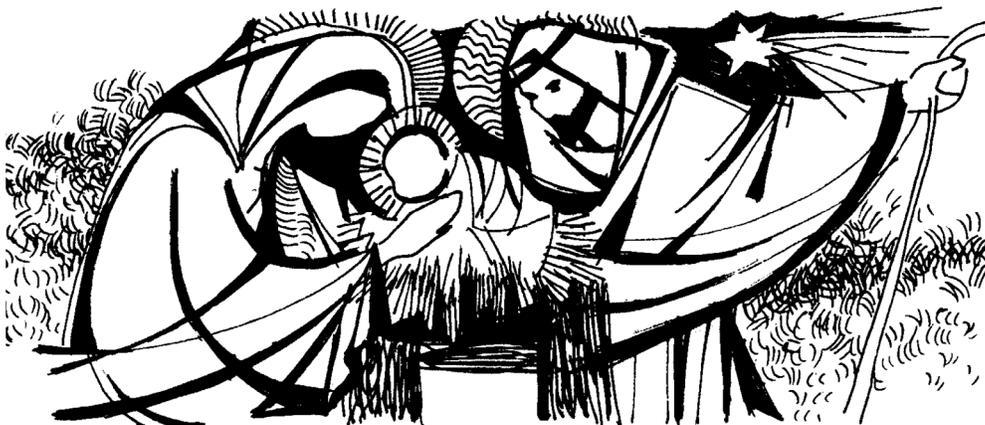
The Unreachable Light, now mystery in flight.
A Son first given, that all may be risen.

God with Us, One like us,
Totally touchable, auras now weldable

Venite adoremus pray, *venite ut ludamus* say.
Come let us pray, come let us play.

Might conquers Night
In the Spring of all things.

Vincent dePaul Curran
Christmas, 2016



January Discernment Retreat January 7, 1-8 pm

Save Saturday afternoon and evening, January 7, 2017 on your calendar! The Discernment Team is planning a day-long retreat then to help us take another step along the discernment path.



A little over a year ago Sam Williamson led our retreat on Hearing God. How timely that is proving as we are now in our year of discernment! We will be putting those lessons to good use at our Retreat Day, January 7, 1-8pm, @ Covenant Community Church as take extended time to worship, seek the Lord and dialog about what we are hearing from the Lord.

The plan is to meet at Covenant Community Church, 5171 Jackson Road from 1 pm through dinner, ending no later than 8 pm. We won't have a prayer meeting, then, on Sunday the 8th. This extended time will give us a great opportunity to worship, seek the Lord in prayer

and dialog. The Discernment Team is preparing some exercises to help us to clarify together our sense of the Lord's call and mission for us as a community today. We will share a catered meal and then close with a time of evening prayer.

We are encouraging all community members to attend, and we welcome interested guests, as well. We are sure this will be a significant, as well as refreshing time together and a great way to start off the calendar year!

In order to plan, we will need an accurate count for the dinner meal, so pay attention to your email. Very soon we will be sending out a link where you can register for the retreat and indicate whether you will be able to be at the meal. We will also be getting out information about how you can prepare in prayer.

2017 Community Calendar Preview

Here is a calendar of community events and holidays for 2017 so you can save the dates. A few of the events are tentatively planned and are indicated with question marks. As always, all the dates are subject to change, but we will give you as much notice as possible.

- 7-Jan Retreat Day 1-8 pm
- 22-Jan Prayer Meeting
- 5-Feb Prayer Meeting
- 19-Feb Prayer Meeting
- 5-Mar Prayer Meeting
- 19-Mar Prayer Meeting
- 2-Apr Prayer Meeting
- 16-Apr EASTER
- 23-Apr Prayer Meeting
- 7-May Prayer Meeting
- 14-May MOTHER'S DAY
- 21-May Prayer Meeting
- 28-May MEMORIAL DAY
- 4-Jun Prayer Meeting - Pentecost
- 11-17 Jun Pine Hills Boys Camp
- 18-Jun FATHERS DAY
- 25-Jun Prayer Meeting
- 2-Jul 4TH OF JULY WEEKEND
- 15-Jul Saturday Service Night??
- 30-Jul Prayer Meeting
- 13-Aug Community Picnic
- 13-19 Aug Pine Hills Girls Camp
- 27-Aug Prayer Meeting
- 3-Sep LABOR DAY WEEKEND
- 10-Sep Prayer Meeting
- 24-Sep Retreat??
- 8-Oct Prayer Meeting
- 22-Oct Prayer Meeting
- 5-Nov Prayer Meeting
- 19-Nov Prayer Meeting
- 26-Nov THANKSGIVING WEEKEND
- 3-Dec Christmas Caroling Outreach
- 17-Dec Prayer Meeting



5 Things you didn't know about Christmas

[Continued from page 3]

5. The Magi offer us a Star to Follow

Matthew 2:1-12 focuses on how the gentile's come to Christ. They first are observant to the natural world, which tells them of a royal birth through a star (2:2). Next they turn to the Hebrew Scriptures for clarification on what God is doing (2:5-6). Finally they encounter Christ and respond with worship and gifts (2:11). This trajectory offers a foreshadowing of the great commission – the "world" hears the message of natural revelation given by the star, then is taught by the Old Testament, and finally accepts a kind of proto-gospel by indicating that they accept Christ as their kingly lord.

What this means for us: The Magi remind us of the universal mission of the Gospel. As Psalm 19 reminds us, even the sky proclaims the glory of God. The Magi discovered that. Keep your eyes open for God's life at work all around you and follow it. Open the scriptures and see what new life emerges. Above all seek Jesus as your king. Grace and Peace!

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Women's Breakfast

January 14th

9:30-11:00 am

@ The Word of God Office

3820 Packard, Suite 200

All are welcome, bring a friend!

Join us!

- 1/7** **Retreat Day, 1-8 pm**
See page 7 for details of time and location
- 1/14** **Women's Breakfast**
The Word of God Meeting Room
3800 Packard, Ste. 260
- 1/22** **Prayer Meeting, 4:30-6 pm**
Covenant Community Church
5171 Jackson Road
- 2/5** **Prayer Meeting, 4:30-6 pm**
Covenant Community Church
5171 Jackson Road

See full calendar at our website
www.thewordofGodcommunity.org