

Encourager

Mid-South District LCMS | December 2021



The Busy-ness of Christmas

Imagine going to the kiosk at a shopping mall, standing in line to get your child or grandchild's picture taken with Santa Claus. But, instead of seeing that jolly old man, dressed in red, with a big white beard, you see a gaunt, weather-beaten man. His face is leathery and worn. Instead of a red Santa Claus jacket, he has a camel hair tunic and a wide leather belt around his waist. He has a scraggly beard and unkempt hair. Several of the children ahead of you in line hesitate to get on his lap and tell of their wishes for Christmas. Some children leave in fear of this man. The line of children

with fear and misunderstanding racing through their minds watch the man take out a jar of honey, dip a locust into the jar and belch while waiting for the next child to come to his chair.

Then, as you're waiting in line somewhat hesitant to go through with the picture taking ritual, you hear the man speak to the child ahead of yours. "I don't want to hear what you want for Christmas! I want to tell you to get ready! Repent for the Day of the Lord is at hand." Another child jumps from his lap, crying to his mother because he's scared to death.

It's not likely to happen in this age of instant gratification, but the message of John the Baptizer is for us to not miss the importance of what Advent and Christmas are all about. When we look at the time around the birth of Christ, we realize there were people who could look at the face of God, but didn't recognize Him for who He is. Think about all those who heard about Him or saw Him and just didn't get it!

Why didn't the whole citizenry recognize who Jesus was? Think about the Innkeeper and all the people of Bethlehem.

Most of the inns at the time of Jesus weren't 5-Star hotels. They were more like camp sites – a place where crude shelters offered a place of protection against the extreme temperatures of Judean nights. There was no running water for a hot shower in the morning. Bathrooms weren't rooms, but a ditch dug several yards away from the buildings.

When we read Luke's account of the night of the birth of Christ, we can attach the account to history and discover that the census of Caesar Augustus likely took place in the year of 4 BC. Because so many Israelites claimed ancestry with King David, his hometown, Bethlehem, was full of visitors to accommodate the census of the Roman government. The census was a taxation scheme. The people had to register in the census and pay their taxes to the Roman government. This, of course, meant Mary and Joseph had to get to Bethlehem and register their citizenship in Bethlehem because they were David's descendants.

Mary and Joseph walked more slowly than the rest of the crowds because Mary was in the last trimester of her pregnancy. When they got to Bethlehem, there were no more rooms available. But, the innkeeper didn't want to seem cruel, so he made accommodations for Mary and Joseph in his stable among his animals. If he had known who was going to be born that night, I'm convinced he would have made room. But, he was too busy and, as a result, missed the most significant

event that has ever happened in the history of mankind. He was too busy with the business to recognize that this was Jesus Christ who was to come to take away the sins of all the world.

The folks in Bethlehem weren't any better. The crowds of people who flocked to Bethlehem must have put a strain on the businesses of that little 300 population town. It was such an insignificant town most of the time that its main purpose was a storage place for the grain collected in the harvest season. That's how it got its name – Bethlehem – which means "House of Bread" in Hebrew. Could that possibly mean anything important?

Way to the north of Bethlehem was a palace of King Herod – one in the long line of those Herodians who bought themselves political and religious power. They were ruthless murderers of anyone who opposed them, including their own family members. In Matthew's Gospel we read about Magi who went to King Herod to find out where the Christ Child might have been born – the King of the Jews. Their inquiry shocked



Herod. Of course, if he had read Scripture, he'd have known there was such a promise from God. His shallow understanding of Scripture was exposed, as was his paranoia. This is the same Herod who killed one of his wives and son because he thought they were plotting to overthrow his governance.

Herod wasn't very excited about hearing there was such a thing as a King of the Jews. He ordered the slaughter of all baby boys under the age of 2 years old in the region of Bethlehem. He wanted to preserve his house of cards, but missed the opportunity to meet the Baby who personified love, forgiveness, grace and eternal power.

But before we get too hard on Herod and the unnamed Innkeeper, we must not forget the people of the church – the priests, the scribes, and elders. If anyone should have known who Jesus was, it's these men. They heard and read all that God had given them about the coming of the Messiah. They knew He would be born in Bethlehem. They knew He was to be born of a virgin mother who was from the lineage of King David. But, when they heard the report of the birth of Jesus, did they go check out this thing that had happened in the town of David?


No! They missed the Son of God's birth because of their indifference – too busy with their religiousity to let faith get in the way. They knew all the facts about the Baby. They knew He would be the Messiah sent from God. They knew He came to reconcile mankind to God. They knew He was the One promised from God for thousands of years, the last and final fulfillment of God's promise. They had waited for over 400 years without a word from God to His chosen prophets, but when the Word became flesh, they simply ignored His coming because the festive traditions of waiting became more important than the actual event.

That old scraggly character at the shopping mall has a purpose. He's there to tell us to not miss the meaning of the coming of the Christ Child. He's there to tell us to prepare a room in our hearts to receive the blessed Child of God. He's there to tell us to not think so much of ourselves that we can't bow down and worship the Lord

of life who comes to take away the sins of all the world. He's there in his booth to remind us that the business of getting ready for the Christmas season and the business of the Church cannot overlook the fulfillment and promise of God we can only find in Christ Jesus. The character of John the Baptizer in his booth at the mall is here to remind us that we shouldn't allow the tradition of the festival of celebrating the coming of the Christ Child. It should not distract our attention away from the Gift God sent us when Christ – the Word – became flesh and dwelt among us.

His name is Jesus Christ – the One sent from God to be our Savior and Lord. We cannot disconnect the reality of Christmas without understanding its secondary importance to the other high festivals of the Christian Church – Good Friday and Easter. Jesus was born to fulfill the will of God. He was crucified on a Roman cross to suffer and die for our sins and the sins of all people. But, God, satisfied with His atoning sacrifice raised Jesus from the dead – true human flesh vivified above the chains of sin, death, the grave and Satan's power. Jesus is alive today, preparing an eternal place for all those who are joined together with Him in faith. Don't let the bright lights and colorful packaging let you become blinded to the message of Advent and Christmas. *"Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You shall find the Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And all of a sudden, there were with the angel a company of the Heavenly Host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to all men on whom His favor rests."*

Have a blessed and joyous Advent and Christmas; and come see the Lord Jesus Christ. Come Lord Jesus!





Treasurers' Workshops

Mid-South District

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD

[Register Online Now](#)

Join us for one of the upcoming workshops. The Presenter for the Treasurer's manual (Volume 1) session will be Mr. Charlie Rhodes, Executive Director of Synod Accounting (Retired). The afternoon session will be presented by Angela Fowler with a focus on Best Practices/Roundtable discussion as well as Q&A. It would be helpful for you to have a copy of the manual with you, either the CD, hard copy or online version. The Treasurer's Manual is available on the LCMS website.

**Please respond by
December 31, 2021**

Additional information contact Angela
Fowler by e-mail

afowler@mid-southlcms.com

or telephone (866-373-1343)

[Register Online Now](#)

Dates and Locations

January 8, 2022

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1

11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Best Practices/Roundtable

Grace Lutheran Church

9076 Middlebrook Pike, Knoxville, TN

January 15, 2022

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1

11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Best Practices/Roundtable

Christ Lutheran Church

315 S. Hughes St., Little Rock, AR

January 22, 2022

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1

11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Best Practices/Roundtable

Our Savior Lutheran Church

5110 Franklin Road, Nashville, TN

January 29, 2022

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1

11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Best Practices/Roundtable

Mid-South District Office

1675 Wynne Road, Cordova, TN

February 5, 2022

9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. Treasurer's Manual – Volume 1

11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Lunch (provided)

11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Best Practices/Roundtable

St. John Lutheran Church

500 N. Cumberland Avenue, Russellville, AR

MINISTRY FAIR 2021 AT CTK

On a recent weekend in October, the congregation of Christ the King, Memphis, was invited to the Fellowship Hall before and after services to CTK's Ministry Fair 2021. Over thirty active ministries within the congregation were represented, with creative displays and enthusiastic participants eager to share their goals and accomplishments – as well as the many avenues to volunteer -- with all those who passed through. Hosted by the CTK's Office of Community Outreach, the Fair promoted fellowship and service both within the church and out in the community.

Among those ministries represented were Faith in Action, Room in the Inn, Tanzania Mission, the Comfort Dog ministry, Children and Family ministry and LWML. There were also many ways to serve in the areas of outreach and worship, including the varied facets of communication, such as live-streaming, sound, website, and CTK's App.

Many of the booths had giveaways – candy, pencils, magnets, homemade goodies – and breakfast was served to those attending between services. Christ the King's new Fellowship Hall provided a beautiful space for the visitors and exhibitors, with plenty of room for browsing and chatting. An updated Ministry Handbook was available to all visitors with a handy explanation of each ministry and organization.

The Ministry Fair wrapped up a month that saw an emphasis on inreach and outreach, and included an after-church catered lunch combined with an intergenerational service project. Also there was an congregation-wide invitation to submit updated Time and Talent Surveys, a two-session Connect Class which provided new members with information on finding their niche, the observance of Pastor Appreciation Sunday, and the celebration of Job Comfort Dog's fifth anniversary at CTK. So much to celebrate! Soli Deo Gloria!



DISASTER RELIEF PARTNERSHIP



Since 1999, Trinity HOPE has been feeding children in Christian schools in Haiti. The infrastructure used by our organization not only helps to fill tummies but supports the Haitian economy as well. In Haiti, we source all of the food from local vendors and our 30 Haitian feeding program directors (FPDs) work with school administrators to get food to children.

Never has this infrastructure been more needed than it is today. At a time when missionaries cannot travel to Haiti, our children are still being fed because our Haitian FPDs are still able to do their work.

When the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) Disaster Response Team was looking for a way to provide meals to the communities impacted by the August earthquake, they were

intrigued by Trinity HOPE's infrastructure and accountability. Through a \$100,000 grant from the LCMS Disaster Response Team, and the Feeding Program infrastructure provided by Trinity HOPE, 180,000 meals were provided to families in the areas of Les Cayes and Jeremie in October. Another 180,000 will be provided in November.

Ever our desire to be the hands and feet of God, nothing is more rewarding than working alongside other ministries to share God's love and mercy when and where it is needed most. Because of this partnership, doors are being opened in this community for the Lutheran Pastors to share the Gospel. What a mighty God we serve! Watching Him work is always pure joy.

Romans 10:14-15

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"



SHINYANGA ALBINO MINISTRY -UPDATE



Tanzania, ELCT-SELVD (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania – Southeast of Lake Victoria Diocese)

Great news from Shaun Trump. Teams from the Mid-South District have been supporting ministry to the Albinos in the Shinyanga Region. This year during our visit to the Mwadui Lutheran Secondary School, the Head Master/Assistant Bishop Yohana Nzelu showed us 2 new buildings that had been built at the back of the school property (above photo). These buildings had been built with support

from Pastor Peter Brocks congregation located in Decatur, IN (St. John, Bingen). A group of 23 are going to Mwadui in July 2022 to work on 2 more homes for Albino students.

From Shaun Trumps email—

“What great news. Much of this work is being done by others, but I must credit the Mid-South District support of the Pastor Training

program at Negezi and on-going mission teams to the SELVD to be a catalyst for this good work. Pastor Brock has gone to Negezi for a number of years teaching in the Pastor training program and his congregation has provided great hospitality on Sundays to the SELVD students studying at CTSFW. God has really blessed this ministry.”

For more information, contact Bob Allen at 270-535-7370.



St. John, Bingen in Decatur, IN has provided humanitarian aid to the albino children since 2014.

2022 TANZANIA MISSION TRIP

We are making plans for a team from the Mid-South District to return to Tanzania, Africa in May of 2022. We pray we will be able to communicate to the people of Tanzania the life-changing power of Jesus Christ in a practical and understanding way; to develop them into responsible, productive, successful Christians, and equip them for their ministry in the church and like mission in the world.

We plan to visit the city of Shinyanga, home of the Southeast Lake Victoria Lutheran District. The main emphasis of the trip will be to share the Good News of Jesus with the Sukuma people, located in Northwest Tanzania. We will also visit other areas of past ministry; such as food ministry to albino children, Mwadui Lutheran secondary school, widows ministry. Team members will go door-to-door in villages to spread the Word of God and the wonderful news of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. The team will be accompanied by local ministers and lay persons who will act as translators. We will be using simple techniques such as: an



Evangelcube or Bible story telling. So, if you can share a 4th-grade level Sunday school lesson in your own words, you are qualified!

Please contact, Bob Allen for more information about the trip. 270-535-7370 || rjallen@prodigy.net

now may the
God of hope
fill you with all
Joy & Peace

Romans 15:13



PRAYER SUMMARY, NOVEMBER 2021

Following is a list of all the people that have appeared on the Mid-South District website prayer list www.mid-southlcms.com during the month of November 2021.

PRAYER CONCERNS

MRS. SUSANNE ELSEROAD (wife of Rev. Richard Elseroad, Grace Lutheran Church, Knoxville, TN)

REV. RONALD HALAMKA (Waxahachie, TX)

MRS. ALISON HAWKINS (Mid-South District Office)

REV. DONLEY HESSE (Emeritus, Mena, AR)

REV. CHAD PHILIPP (Pastor, St. Luke Lutheran & St. Paul Lutheran, DeWitt/Gillett, AR)

REV. GIL PINGEL (Emeritus, Chattanooga, TN)

MS. CHERYL TYLER (Mother-In-Law to Renae McElwain, Mid-South District Office)

Our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Mark Piepenbrink (brother of Allen Piepenbrink, Mid-South District Office) who recently passed away.

CALL UPDATE

ORDAINED MINISTERS:

ACCEPTED: Rev. Willie Grills, Pastor, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Mattoon, IL accepted the Call to serve as Pastor to Zion Lutheran Church of Avilla, Alexander, AR. Installation was November 20, 2021.

Rev. Neil Vanderbush, Chaplain, U.S. Military-LCMS Ministry, accepted the Call to serve as Pastor to Immanuel Lutheran Church & School, Memphis, TN. Installation planned for December 5, 2021 at 4:00PM.

Pastor-Elect Trae Fistler, Candidate, has accepted the Call to serve as Pastor-Elect to Faith Lutheran Church, Hopkinsville, KY. Ordination planned for December 4, 2021 at 10:30AM, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Rockwell City, IA. Installation planned for December 12, 2021 at 3:30PM, Faith Lutheran Church, Hopkinsville, KY.

Rev. Michael Edwards, Pastor to Faith Lutheran Church, Springfield, MO, has accepted the Call to serve as Pastor to Our Savior Lutheran Church, Cabot, AR. Installation is planned for January 30, 2022.

Rev. Kirk Abatelli, Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Oakridge, TN has accepted the Call to serve as Pastor to St. Mark Lutheran Church, Saginaw, MI.

PENDING: Rev. Dr. Jayson Galler, Pastor to Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Kilgore, TX has been issued a Call to serve as Pastor to St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Conway, AR.

VACANT CONGREGATIONS & MINISTERIES

Mid-South District – Executive Director for Mission and Ministry

Hope Lutheran Church, Batesville, AR – Pastor

First Lutheran Church, Blytheville, AR – Pastor

St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Conway, AR –

Pastor *A Call has been issued

Trinity Lutheran Church, Columbia, TN – Pastor

COMMISSIONED MINISTERS:

IN THE CALLING PROCESS - COMMISSIONED MINISTERS

Avilla Christian Academy, Alexander, AR – Teachers (Middle School Grades 5th&6th; Part-Time High School)

First Lutheran School, Knoxville, TN – Part-Time Teacher (Early Childhood)

Holy Trinity Lutheran School, Bowling Green, KY – Teachers (Preschool) and Classroom Aids

St. John's Lutheran School, Stuttgart, AR – Teachers (Early Childhood and Extended Care)

Zion Lutheran Church of Avilla, Alexander, AR – Director of Parish Music

Congregational Mission Commitments

Mission Commitment Receipts as of 10/31/2021 (10 Months)

Anticipated Amount (75% of
budget).....\$1,228,013
Actual Receipts1,275,480
Over (under)
anticipated amount\$47,467

Use of Mission Commitment Receipts (10 Months)

Allocated to Synod for World
Missions\$361,811
Allocated to Tanzania 20,833
Retained for District Mission/
Ministry Support
(70% of receipts).....892,836
Total Receipts\$1,275,480

Mission Commitment Receipts Prior Year Comparison (9 Months)

Actual Receipts as
of 10/31/2021\$1,275,480
Actual Receipts as
of 10/31/2020.....\$1,267,384
Over (under) prior
year receipts \$8,096

Encourager Topics in 2022

We invite you to share your
stories with us please email
it by **December 16, 2021** to
Rhonda, webmaster@mid-southlcms.com

- January - School Week
- February - Outreach
- March - Youth

Lutheran Witness supplement

The monthly deadline is
the 15th. Please email your
original high resolution
digital photo (.pdf or .jpg files
only) and a short paragraph,
to The Lutheran Witness
Supplement editor, Judy Otto.
Email: LW@mid-southlcms.com
phone: 662-252-1004. Judy will
always acknowledge receipt
of your submission if it is sent
directly to her.

Mid-South District, Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod

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