



/ DECEMBER 2021

MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN



Of all the holidays we celebrate, Christmas is the highest energy of them all. We “do” Labor Day, Independence Day and Memorial Day, but they don’t require much more than going to a picnic or watching fireworks. Thanksgiving is more of a medium-energy day like Easter, but for us all, Christmas is completely the high-energy celebration.

Several years ago, I stood in line at a store to pay for some unremarkable things. A woman stood there with arms overflowing with bulky packages. She complained to anyone within ear shot, “I tell you, I can’t stand all this frantic mess. There are angry people everywhere! Whoever came up with this holiday should be tarred and feathered.” The man in front of me in line turned to me and whispered, “They’ve already taken care of that when they hung Him on a cross.”



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

Christmas is more than gifts, parties and decorations or plastic Christmas trees. We will hear commercials saying Christmas is about family and loving friends, kindness, peace and charity. They’ll say Christmas is about loving and giving to others, being kind or charitable to one another. But isn’t that what we’re supposed to do all the time?

Maybe Christmas is that one time of the year when we really *try* to find life’s real meaning or search for real joy. Christmas is supposed to be when we make an effort to look into the heart of God. “Maybe *this* is the year,” people say, “I will finally see God, finally understand Him and find real joy and meaning in life. I may be able to get a glimpse of who God is and how He affects my life.”

But is that Christmas? At the time of Jesus’ birth, imagine what Mary saw. Look at the dusty roads between

Nazareth and Bethlehem filled with grumpy travelers. The people were forced to travel on dusty roads, going to their hometowns to be taxed by the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus. They weren’t any happier than the woman in the line with me.

Mary and Joseph were two of those travelers, on their way to Bethlehem. They didn’t find a place to sleep. So like most men, Joseph hadn’t asked for directions or made reservations at the nearest motel. He and Mary were forced to make a room in an inn’s stable. At least they’d be warm and could lay down.

But that’s where Mary gave birth to her firstborn Son. No one really noticed. The innkeeper nor anybody else cared, but not because they weren’t interested in God. It’s just that a couple of poor travelers having a baby in a stable didn’t seem to have much to do with God. In fact, the world really hasn’t changed much since then. It’s still busy.

Would most of us want to tar and feather the Guy who came up with this? Does that mean we’re not interested in God? No, not really. Deep down, most people want to look into the Baby’s eyes and see the heart of God.

I believe that’s why there’s so many religious holidays. People speculate and try to figure out and wrap up the mysteries of God. Interest in spirituality is growing and has never been higher. Go to Books-A-Million. There are rows of books on spirituality. This year we’d likely find another Hollywood diva’s attempt to discover their inner

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CHRISTMAS

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

self. Christmas shows on TV are nice and heartwarming (with the possible exception of “The Grinch Who Stole Christmas”).

These “enlightened” books don’t really give a good look at the heart of God. That’s why so many books on spirituality are sold for under the Christmas tree. No matter how busy we are, we’d love to be touched by an angel and have a face-to-face visit with God. Is that why Christmas leaves so many people depressed, disappointed or looking for God? Our soul isn’t at rest until we find our peace with God. But books on spirituality and TV shows don’t do it. As a society, we’re looking for God, but we won’t ever find Him looking in the places where we’ve tried to stuff Him.

This Christmas, stand together inside an ancient stable. Stand next to a young woman named Mary. Look at what she sees. Is it straw? A contented cow chewing its cud, a donkey or maybe a few sheep? No, those things are there, but more importantly, Mary sees a Baby. She remembers the promise of God, given to her by an angel. She recalls the promises given by God to His people. She remembers what she and Joseph talked about, how His name would be Jesus because He would save His people from their sins.

Mary ponders the face of Jesus. She realizes she’s staring into the heart of God. But listen, the creaking of the stable door interrupts her myriad thoughts. Total strangers cautiously peer from behind the door. It’s some men. Were they coming to clean the stable? No, they’re shepherds. They enter quietly through the door. They tell Mary and Joseph in excited whispers about what the angels said. They hurry their story because they want to see the Child laying in the manger.

It’s a Baby — the promised Savior! But why’s He lying in straw? Why’s He in a stinking barn instead of a king’s castle? Because of the message that woke the shepherds from their dreamy night’s work, they stare at the face of Jesus and

realize that they are gazing in the heart of God.

Watch as they leave quietly, but with excited steps. Mary ponders all these things in her heart. Everything her world needs is right there, lying in the straw. Everything that the hustling and bustling world will ever ask for is lying in the manger, the place where the animals eat. The key to understanding God — the key to understanding the meaning of life or, in fact, the key to understanding everything — is right here, a tiny newborn Baby, lying in a manger, who comes to serve and save us by His grace.

Picture Mary going to the manger to lift the Baby. She gives Him to you. Stand there, your arms locked in terror over holding a fragile, precious new life. God is in your arms!

Look down at His face. You’re looking into the heart of God. In your arms you’d be holding what everyone in the world really needs. While the rest of the world hustles and bustles, snarls at the tangled confusion, runs after spiritual gurus or channel surfs to the next Christmas special, reads books on spirituality and sings about chestnuts, snowflakes and reindeer, they’re all really looking for God. But you’re holding Him.

Why would almighty God do this? Why would God — who created the heavens and the earth, who keeps the stars and planets in balance — stuff Himself into a tiny 7-pound, 6-ounce Baby? Why? Look outside the stable. See a faint light coming through the crack in the stable door. It’s a bright night with a full moon and a bright star. See a shadow cast across the bluish darkness of a moonlit night? Now you understand why God humbled Himself to become a fragile Baby. The shadows let you see the shadow of a cross.

You understand that one day God will even stoop lower than just being in a stinky barn. That night He humbled Himself to take on human flesh. But one day He stooped low enough to

cover Himself with all our sins and the sins of all the world. Looking into the face of the tiny Baby, do we feel a little sad because we know the whole reason He came was to save us? But even in that, we can’t help but feel joy because we know that after this Christ Child died on the cross, He rose from the dead to free the whole world from its sin. We know it’s because of this Baby that all our mistakes — every rotten thing that’s happened to us or rotten thing we’ve done — has been taken away by Him. It’s because of this Baby that God loves us and gives us eternal life.

We can’t touch the Baby in that stable. But before we walk away from the stable, take one last look.

See God’s love for us. At Christmas God touches us with something better. Rejoice because we know God isn’t a God who is far off, but One who is with us. We don’t have to drift and wander through strange spirituality, looking for some God. God came looking for us. He has found us in a stinking barn.

Ponder this Christmas joy. Enjoy its time. We can enjoy this because we know that we don’t have to rely on gifts, gatherings and parties to find true blessings. God has given us things to enjoy, but we can also rejoice because God found us and came to us to give our life pure joy, in which we find our meaning and purpose.

We hold the Baby of Bethlehem. We looked into the face of God. And each time in worship or in His Word, we continue to receive life from the heart of God, which gives a blessed Christmas to us all. Merry Christmas.

“
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FOCUS on EVANGELISM

Giving something that lasts

Shared by the Board of Evangelism of First, Little Rock



If you were meeting a person for the very last time in your life, what would you say to them? Is there something you could leave with them that could change their life forever? Into eternity?

We meet people every day — the checkout person at Kroger, the guy at the dry cleaners or the woman who delivers your mail. Many of these people we encounter for only a brief time and may never see again. They change jobs, you shop elsewhere or one of you leaves town forever.

I have discovered (thank you, Lord) that there is something we can share with

people who we may see for just a few moments, and it just might have a real impact on their lives eternally.

Every one of us has our own way to interact with people, but this works for me. I have interaction with someone, such as a cashier at Kroger. Just as I am ready to leave, I ask them their name. They usually brighten up and tell me their name.

Then I introduce myself, and tell them “This is my most favorite quote in all the world; you can read this later,” and hand them a small piece of paper with a quote or Bible verse on it. I then leave,

knowing that this person will read it later, with no pressure from me or anyone else. It will just be between that person and the Lord.

Asking someone for their name honors that person as an image-bearer of God and opens a window into their soul. Their demeanor usually changes, the conversation becomes more personal and we can leave something eternal with that person, a seed that might grow and bear spiritual fruit.

So what would you share with that person? It might be your favorite Bible verse, or perhaps a compelling quote from our pastor or a Christian author. It might even be a pocket-size New Testament (available at Dollar Tree for \$1.)

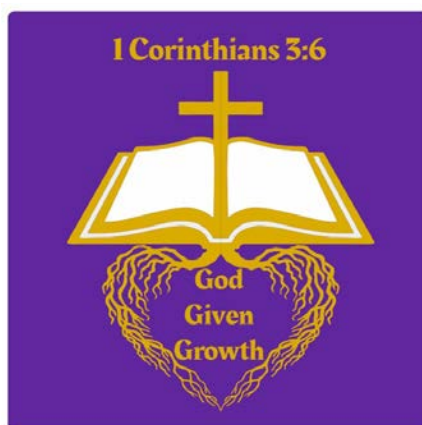
Now go out and plant seeds. To God be the glory!

LWML to gather in Clarksville

Have you saved June 10-12, 2022, for the LWML Mid-South District's 27th Biennial Convention in Clarksville, Tenn.? Registration information will be available in January at midsouthlwml.org/district-convention. Check back early and often for more details.

Get excited about:

- ▶ Rev. Dr. Gregory Seltz, executive director of the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty and Lutheran Hour Speaker emeritus, being the keynote speaker.
- ▶ Wendysue Fluegge being the song leader and banquet entertainer.
- ▶ Towneplace Suites in Clarksville being chosen as the convention location. It's conveniently located near Beachaven Winery, Old Glory Distilling Co., the Riverwalk, Miss Lucille's marketplace, Fort Defiance Civil War Park and many more attractions.
- ▶ Ingathering recipients Hope Pregnancy Center in Clarksville and Hope Unlimited Crisis Pregnancy Center in Paducah, Ky.



Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of Sept. 30, 2021 (9 months)

Anticipated amount (75% of budget)	\$1,105,211
Actual receipts	\$1,104,324
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$887)

Use of mission commitment receipts

Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$312,547
Allocated to Tanzania	\$18,750
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)	\$773,027
Total receipts	\$1,104,324

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of Sept. 30, 2021	\$1,104,324
Actual receipts as of Sept. 30, 2020	\$1,134,291
Over (under) prior year receipts	(\$29,967)

UPDATES FROM CAMP TRINITY



Paul Morphis performs with Mark and Katherine Tooley during Music on the Mountain, held on Sept. 25 at Camp Trinity. The fourth annual event drew about 135 people for a day of live music, barbecue dinners, games, silent auction and fellowship. The event raised more than \$5,000 for the camp.

Retreat Lodge

After several delays, work began this fall on the retreat lodge with completion now projected for summer 2022. Gifts and pledges from camp friends have pushed funding to more than two-thirds of the projected cost. Congregations or individuals who want to be part of the camp's mission are invited to consider a gift or pledge. Gifts can be made at

lutherancamp.org/retreat-lodge.

Cabin Reservations

Congregations are already contacting the camp about reserving the lodge for retreats, but no reservations are being taken yet. However, the bunkhouse cabins and family cabin are still available and congregations are invited to consider booking a retreat for families, confir-

mands, church leadership teams, women, men and youth. For information about availability, send an email to director@lutherancamp.org.

Linkt Youth Retreat

The registration deadline for the Linkt senior high youth retreat is Jan. 23 (the retreat will be held Feb. 18-20). Registration is primarily by congregation, but individual high school students (grades 9-12) from Mid-South District congregations may contact the camp to register and be assigned to a youth group from another church. Learn more by visiting the lutherancamp.org/linkt-youth-retreats.

Summer Staff

Applications are now being accepted for summer staff at Camp Trinity and other LCMS camps. College-age students who want to serve God by serving His children can fill out a candidate profile at the website of the National Lutheran Outdoors Ministry Association, nloma.org. Online registration for summer camp sessions begins Jan. 1.

Outdoor Classroom

This fall marked the third semester of the Outdoor Classroom, which is designed to assist homeschooling families with subjects outside the core of reading, math and language arts. During the fall semester, students heard from a cattle rancher, shepherd, state park interpreter, wildlife officer and others. Although designed for homeschoolers, the Outdoor Classroom was also joined this semester by school classrooms. Families can register for the spring 2022 semester at lutherancamp.org/for-home-schoolers. Class sessions are on Thursdays.



Volunteers needed in Alaska

Alaska Mission for Christ needs you!

The ministry is looking for volunteers with a servant heart to work at a 74-year-old log cabin Christian camp outside of Fairbanks.

Skilled and non-skilled laborers are welcome.

Volunteers are welcome any time between May 15 and June 12, 2022.

COVID vaccinations will be required on this particular team.

To learn more, contact Jan Bruick, servant event coordinator at 402-641-9691 or janbruick@alaskamissionforchrist.org.

Alaska Mission for Christ is an LCMS ministry established to proclaim and practice the love of Jesus in Alaska.

Making Christ known in White House

"Discover White House" is held in White House, Tenn., every year and showcases community organizations and businesses. Prince of Peace Lutheran Church has participated for the last decade, not only supporting the regional event, but introducing the congregation to newcomers, visitors and community members alike.

The event attracts many from surrounding communities, who come to visit the booths, hear the various country bands perform and perhaps discover new friends and a church home at Prince of Peace.

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church Outreach Committee members, from left, Kay Reynolds, Ken DeCoursey and Rev. Randy Sakach greeted visitors at the "Discover White House" event in October.



Going (back) to church

By Rev. Ron Bacic
Pastor, First, Little Rock

In this second chapter in the series, I share more of the 10 reasons for going to church (or going back to church if you have been away for a while).

04 To grow in the knowledge of the Bible — God's Word.

Private study of God's Word is wonderful, but it must not be a substitute for hearing the preached Word. The pastor, who holds the divinely appointed preaching office, is by God's will the chief teacher of God's Word, the one through whom Christ Himself speaks (see Luke 10:16; Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 4:13-16; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Heb. 13:17).

Furthermore, he has gone through extensive study to become a "specialist" in God's Word (though he, too, is always growing and learning). He has learned biblical Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek and spent many years in prayer and study.

05 To feed your soul.

According to Scripture, we are reminded that "man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3). There we are encouraged, "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). God's Word is food for the soul.

Public worship is the best place to give your soul the Word-of-God-nourishment it needs. In another place Jesus says, "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you" (John 6:27). How tragic to see people zealously provide for their bodies but not their souls.

06 To be loved and encouraged.

We all have troubles. Life can be cruel in a fallen world. What God said of Adam applies to us all: "It is not good



for man to be alone." Why bear your burdens alone? Coming to church means interacting with your fellow Christians, the body of Christ. It means receiving an encouraging word, a hug and a smile. It means having someone listen. More profoundly, it is often through His body that Christ speaks the comfort and crucial direction that we need. How often a timely word of Gospel by one Christian to another dispels the gloom and gives a spiritual insight that benefits another — be loved and encouraged.

May these words encourage you to come to church and if you have been away for a while, come back! There is always a place for you in the Lord's house.

This article is adapted from a devotional by Rev. Michael Mueller, pastor emeritus.



CHRIST CLIMBED DOWN

Our cover message reminds us to re-insert the Christ Child into a Christmas too often devoted to synthetic holiday decorations and behaviors. In conjunction with that reminder, we're including this poem to serve as an Advent meditation.

Christ climbed down from His bare Tree this year
and ran away to where
there were no rootless Christmas trees
hung with candycanes and breakable stars

Christ climbed down from His bare Tree
this year
and ran away to where there were no gilded
Christmas trees
and no tinsel Christmas trees
and no tinfoil Christmas trees
and no pink plastic Christmas trees
and no gold Christmas trees
and no black Christmas trees
and no powderblue Christmas trees
hung with electric candles
and encircled by tin electric trains
and clever cornball relatives

Christ climbed down from His bare Tree this year
and ran away to where no intrepid Bible salesmen
covered the territory in two-tone cadillacs
and where no Sears Roebuck creches
complete with plastic babe in manger
arrived by parcel post
the babe by special delivery
and where no televised Wise Men
praised the Lord Calvert Whiskey

"Christ Climbed Down"
By Lawrence Ferlinghetti, ©1958

Christ climbed down from His bare Tree this year
and ran away to where no fat handshaking
stranger in a red flannel suit
and a fake white beard
went around passing himself off
as some sort of North Pole saint
crossing the desert to Bethlehem
Pennsylvania in a Volkswagen sled
drawn by rollicking Adirondack reindeer
and German names
and bearing sacks of Humble Gifts
from Saks Fifth Avenue
for everybody's imagined Christ child

Christ climbed down from His bare Tree this year
and ran away to where no Bing Crosby carollers
groaned of a tight Christmas
and where no Radio City angels
iceskated wingless thru a winter wonderland into a
jinglebell heaven
daily at 8:30 with Midnight Mass matinees

Christ climbed down from His bare Tree this year
and softly stole away into
some anonymous Mary's womb again
where in the darkest night
of everybody's anonymous soul
He awaits again an unimaginable
and impossibly Immaculate Reconception
the very craziest of Second Comings.

KNOW YOUR BIBLE

The first Christmas

1. The genealogical descent of Joseph, the husband of Mary, was from Jacob through
 - a. Reuben
 - b. Absalom
 - c. Judah
 - d. Daniel
2. In the Gospel according to Matthew, the number of generations between Abraham (the father of Isaac) and Jesus, was
 - a. 17
 - b. 28
 - c. 39
 - d. 42
3. Because they saw his star in the east, the wise men came to
 - a. Jerusalem
 - b. Bethlehem
 - c. Nazareth
 - d. Capernaum
4. According to Matthew, how many wise men were there?
 - a. two
 - b. three
 - c. four
 - d. unspecified
5. The source of Herod's information regarding the town where Jesus was to be born was
 - a. the Wise Men
 - b. his security police
 - c. Micah
 - d. Joseph
6. Herod's reaction to the wise men's visit was to kill
 - a. all new parents named Mary or Joseph
 - b. certain Jews in the vicinity
 - c. certain children
 - d. the Wise Men
7. When Joseph learned that Mary was with child, his first inclination was to
 - a. act as if he were the father
 - b. put her away without public exposure
 - c. denounce her to the priests
 - d. send her abroad
8. Because Zacharias did not believe the angel Gabriel's announcement that Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, would also bear a son, he was
 - a. struck deaf
 - b. made dumb
 - c. blinded
 - d. killed
9. Which angel appeared to Mary and told her she was to give birth to Jesus?
 - a. Michael
 - b. Apollyan
 - c. Gabriel
 - d. Israel
10. Why did Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem to be taxed?
 - a. It had been the city of David
 - b. Bethlehem was prophesied to be the birthplace of Israel's ruler
 - c. The Wise Men had come there
 - d. Everyone had to go to his own birthplace
11. Mary wrapped the baby Jesus in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because
 - a. It had been so prophesied
 - b. There was no room in the inn
 - c. They were too poor to stay in the inn
 - d. The Wise Men were coming to the manger
12. The shepherds in the field at night were directed to the baby Jesus' side by
 - a. a star
 - b. the wise men
 - c. an angel
 - d. a guiding light

ANSWERS:

- 1) c (Matt. 1:1-3)
- 2) c (Matt. 1:2-16)
- 3) a (Matt 2:1-2);
- 4) d (Matt. 2: 1-12)
- 5) c (Matt 2:1-8;
- 6) c (Matt. 2:16)
- 7) b (Matt.1:18-20)
- 8) b (Luke 1:19-23)
- 9) c (Luke 1:26-33)
- 10) a (Luke 2: 4-6)
- 11) b (Luke 2:7)
- 12) c (Luke 2: 8-12)

Volunteers wanted in Pasadena



Pictured is the LHM float during a test drive in August.

It's not too late to volunteer with Petal Pushers to help decorate the Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) float in the Tournament of Roses parade, to be held Jan. 1 in Pasadena, Calif.

Featured on the float, titled "Jesus Teaches," with Jesus will be 12 modern day disciples.

When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. **Matt. 11:1**

A cross is firmly fixed to a solid rock from which flows a stream of living water.

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

John 4:10

The LHM float is the self-funded project of the LHM Float Committee (LHMFC) and Southern California District of the International Lutheran Laymen's League (Int'l LLL). The Int'l LLL is an auxiliary of the LCMS and Lutheran Church Canada.

The float committee's ongoing work is funded primarily by generous donations from Christian friends and multiple fundraising activities and is not included in the operating budget of LHM or the LCMS.

The Lutheran Hour Ministries float will participate in the Rose Parade for the 71st year.

Join the Petal Pushers and help support and make possible the only Christian float in the parade. Register to decorate floats for Jan. 1, 2022 at petalpushers.org/reg.

Share your news with us!

We are always in need of more submissions for *Mid-South Lutheran*. They help remind us of what God is doing around the Mid-South District. It is also a way to share ideas for nurturing those God has already gathered into His church and for reaching those still outside of the flock with the Good News about Jesus. It finally reminds each of us that Christ's church is much larger than just our particular congregation.

We welcome pictures and stories of congregational events, youth events, outreach events, installations, events from your men's or women's group, servant events, conferences, anniversaries, church renovations or additions, and much more. If you would like an upcoming event publicized, please make sure we have the information at least two months in advance.

Submissions for the February 2022 issue are needed by Dec. 15.

Send email submissions to LW@mid-southlcms.com or send by postal mail to: **Judy Otto; 150 N. Maury St.; Holly Springs, MS 38635**. Please ensure photos sent electronically are high resolution.

