

Advent Devotional Booklet 2018



"You are the light of the world." Matthew 5:14

Dear Friends,

As we journey together through this wonderful season, it is important to remember its true meaning – the celebration of God’s love through his son Jesus. The time leading up to Christmas, Advent, is often the busiest on many of our calendars. We hope that this Devotional serves a resource for calm reflection and inspiration during what can be a hectic time.

Every day, Liberty Lutheran faithfully accompanies individuals and families through service. Our mission to provide vital resources for people facing life-changing situations is rooted in a faith based tradition that stretches back more than 100 years.

The relationships we hold with congregations, communities, and volunteers across Eastern Pennsylvania lies at the heart of our ability to live out this mission. We are blessed to work with so many individuals who demonstrate God’s grace by lifting up more than 10,000 older adults, their families, and vulnerable populations that face challenging situations.

Within these pages, you will find the reflections, prayers, ponderings, and insights of some of the people whose commitment and dedication makes what we do possible.

It is our sincere hope that this Devotional brings you joy and peace as we approach Christmas Day.

Advent Blessings,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Luanne B. Fisher". The script is cursive and elegant.

Luanne B. Fisher

CEO, Liberty Lutheran

**Each day’s Devotional will be available online at
<http://lutherancongregationalservices.blogspot.com>**

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Thursday, November 29, 2018

Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

Psalms 25:5

We rest in God's promises. Throughout the Liberty family of services God is at work in compassionate ways.

A note from a family member of a recent resident in Paul's Run rehabilitation services:

"...Straight from my heart..."

We appreciate all that you did for our loved one during her stay at Paul's Run. She loved being there, and all of you.

Please pass our words of thanks to your entire staff. Everyone was just so wonderful and eased our minds totally. We will always be in your debt. You made everything easier to deal with.

God Bless You All!"

Powerful Healer, Thank you for your promises of love and salvation. Amen.

This thank you letter was recently received at Paul's Run.



Friday, November 30, 2018

**Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Once a week, on Monday afternoon, a group of residents gather. It is our worship time. As we sing hymns and pray, naming those whose concerns are known to us, we give thanks. For most of us, this gathering is a pattern deeply engrained in our lives. Worship is something we've always done. It is an anchor for our week and indeed for our lives.

In a way, we are like the early churches to whom Paul writes in the Epistles. We come from different places and experiences of Church and faith and worship. But on those Monday afternoons, we are together-rejoicing, praying, giving thanks!

When we gather, the door is open. Outside the room people come and go. Some peek in. All of them hear our voices! This, we think, is indeed the will of God in Christ for us.

As we begin Advent, we begin to retell the familiar stories of the season. But what seems most amazing is that like our Monday afternoon worship, this coming of Jesus, our Savior, into the world happens with folks doing what they've always done. Shepherds are tending their flocks, a young couple are traveling because they need to be counted, stars shining in the night sky and wise astronomers are watching them, animals are feeding in the stable, an innkeeper is rejoicing because all the rooms are full. And as life goes on its way: God births God's-self into the world!

And we who gather once a week, we are reminded to take heed of what God has done and therefor to rejoice and pray and give thanks.... and we do!

Amazing God, stir up your presence in us! Teach us, in the midst of daily life, to be mindful of the wonder of your coming to us to be our redeemer, savior and friend. Amen.

This reflection comes out of conversations between The Rev. Ghislaine Cotnoir and residents at The Hearth.



Saturday and Sunday, December 1 and 2, 2018

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

Luke 21:29-33

In our passage, we read about the changing seasons, in this case winter to spring as the leaves begin to sprout. During this season of Advent, the season is changing from fall to winter. In the fall, we prepared our AHUB (Advocates for the Homeless of Upper Bucks) shelter for the coming season which will enable us to welcome guests in from the darkness and cold of winter, to provide a warm meal, a warm bed, and fellowship with one another. Whether it is during the evening chatter over dinner or the sleepy breakfast conversations, or even during the night when all are asleep, we are assured that the kingdom of God has drawn near to us in this community as we care deeply for each one of God's children and attend to their needs.

Sovereign Creator, give us strength and conviction to always be steadfast in caring for one another, while always remembering that you are God. Amen.

Kathie Afflerbach is Director Donor Services, and Theological Education Coordinator at Lutheran Theological Seminary. She also serves on the LCS Advisory Committee.



Monday, December 3, 2018

**Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.**

**Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.**

Psalms 90: 1-2

Home. Everyone has an image of what home is to them. The definition of home is: one's own abode (residence/habitation). For the most part, we find our homes to be a place of rest, comfort, peace, and love. When the outside world is not what we'd like it to be, we long for the safety and comfort of home. For those who trust in God, we look to God to be what we desire in our homes: comfort, provision, and protection. The Israelites wandered in the desert many years—so long in fact that they thought they were going to die in the desert. But, God had a different plan. He brought them into a land so wonderful they could never have imagined being so blessed.

Sometimes in life, we find ourselves wandering from God when we feel our needs are not met. But, God is everlasting and in control of all things at all times. As His people, we are permanently united to Him no matter how far we might wander. He is our help in times of trouble, and we can live wholly assured of His eternal presence in every aspect of our lives. We are assured repeatedly in the Bible of God's favor and protection. And, from "everlasting to everlasting", He will be the eternal God.

Eternal God, help us to make you our heart's desire. Help us to remember during this holy season that you are in control of all things and help us to dwell in your presence. Grant us the peace of allowing you to reign in our lives and in our homes. Please be our provision and refuge always, and as always, we will praise you and thank you. Amen.

Christine Naessens is Administrative Assistant to Human Resources at Liberty Lutheran.



Tuesday, December 4, 2018

And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant; now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you; for you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever.

2 Samuel 7: 28-29

Anytime I have experienced moments of serene peace, selfless love, inexpressible joy, or life giving hope, there's always a moment where I think to myself, "I wish this could go on forever." Unfortunately, those moments become new ones, and the blessings that had once been so clear and tangible become memories that we cling to in times of struggle, grief, or hopelessness.

In these verses, God has promised King David that God will raise up one who would not only continue David's royal line, but would be a King of kings, with a kingdom that lasts for eternity (7:12-13). David's words are in thanksgiving to God, as well as a plea for God's promised blessing to never end.

David is giving thanks for a yet-to-be-born Jesus, who fulfills God's promises to David, Israel, and creation itself. In Jesus, we trust that God's promised blessings of peace, love, joy, and hope are indeed true and good for us. In Jesus, we see God reaching out through us to provide shelter for the weathered, food for the hungry, comfort for those who grieve and mourn, and hope that tomorrow will be better than today. God blesses the church and its ministries to remind us that God's blessings never leave us, and uses us to share Christ's coming throughout the world. Peace, love, joy, and hope persist with us in times of struggle, grief, and hopelessness, because God abides with us in Christ. May our hearts, which long for God's continued blessing in our lives, always cry out with hopeful expectation and an assurance that God's blessings are true: Come, Lord Jesus.

Bless us by your Advent, Lord Jesus, and strengthen us by your blessings forever. Amen.

The Rev. Brandon Heavner is the pastor at St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bethlehem, and member of the Lutheran Congregational Services Advisory Team.



Wednesday, December 5, 2018

For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation.

Luke 11:30

It is the beginning of Advent, a time of watching and waiting, and a time of change and transformation. As we sit on this cusp of new hope and new life of peace and promise, may we also reflect on our own lives. As we look to the future, let us examine the past. Author Richard Bach once wrote:

A cloud does not know why it moves in just such a direction and at such a speed. It feels an impulsion...this is the place to go now. But the sky knows the reasons and the patterns behind all clouds, and you will know, too, when you lift yourself high enough to see beyond horizons.

It's part of being human, to look ahead and reach out for the unknown. As people of faith, we see beyond the horizon when we lift ourselves in prayer, in meditation, and in reflecting on God's word. We have already been given all the signs we need.

May the Son of Man transform us, and through us, transform the world. Amen.

Karyn Jean Dickhoff is Chaplain, Liberty Hospice.

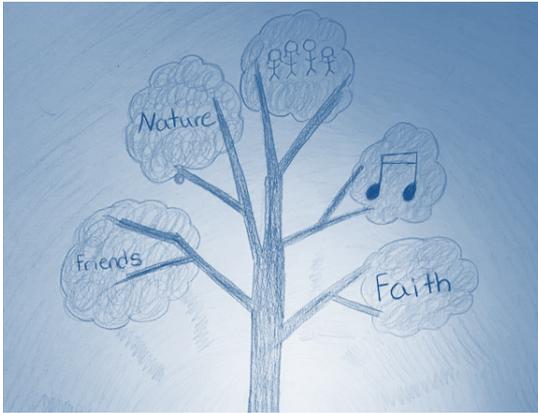


Thursday, December 6, 2018

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1: 78-79

Faith and reflection can be expressed in so many ways! "The dawn from on high will break upon us."



Holy Spirit, move us to see your tender mercy in the dawning of each new day and guide us to ways that are peaceful. Amen.

Hannah Gerhart, Confirmation Class, Trinity Lutheran Lansdale.



Friday, December 7, 2018

It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 1:20

What does that even mean? This is just another way of stating the goal of a Christian life is to glorify God in everything we do. How do we glorify God? ...We make God look Good (although he clearly needs no help with this).

Think of God as a distant star, much more brilliant than our own sun, but to the human eye, he is just a dim speck in the night sky. We as believers are called to be a telescope to bring the truth about God into view for the unbeliever. Through us, and especially through how we handle trials, and he promises us trials, Christ may be magnified to a skeptical, unbelieving world.

It doesn't matter what you do for a living- a construction worker, a stay at home parent, a lawyer or a business person...What matters is how we can answer the question 'What are you living for?' Your answer to that question will determine the direction of your life. If your purpose is vague or fuzzy, your direction will be fuzzy. If you don't know your purpose you will be swept along by the current of our world, doing what seems to bring happiness.

In Philippians in view of Paul's circumstances, it is remarkable that his main focus was not on getting released from prison, but rather on exalting Christ. Whether he lived or died wasn't the issue; all that mattered to Paul was that he exalted his Lord and Savior.

Dear Heavenly Father,

May I always exalt Christ through my actions, thoughts, and feelings; I pray that by exalting you every day that the world might see your brilliance. Amen.

Luke Rodgers is Deputy Director of Planning and Projects at The Salvation Army in Philadelphia. He is a long time partner of Lutheran Congregational Services.



Saturday and Sunday, December 8 and 9, 2018

He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’

Luke 3:3-6

Preparation is an important part of our Advent journey. We prepare our hearts for Christ coming into our lives anew. We prepare our homes for meals and gatherings with friends and families. Many of us also prepare, brace ourselves even, to endure a season which proclaims the coming of joy, peace, hope and love of Jesus when our lives are filled with grief, loss and disappointment. The brokenness of human life and the world do not stop when December begins. What’s more, the hardships of life can feel intensified when life falls short of the joy we long for.

I’ve experienced times when life seemed to press in so hard that the days when “every hill will be made low and the rough ways will be made smooth” seemed a far off dream. For those who’ve experienced a significant loss—of a loved one, a marriage, a job, “getting through the holidays” can seem an insurmountable task. The world might tell us joy comes from the twinkle of Christmas lights and wrapped presents under a tree. Luke’s message invites us to turn our attention and lives over to God’s ever-emerging story of relentless and immeasurable love and hope made visible in the coming of Jesus.

Advent is a time to recall that God’s story and our own lives collide and are inseparable in the coming of a Savior named Jesus. May we find hope in knowing that, no matter where we are in life, every valley will be filled, what is crooked will be straightened and what is rough will be smoothed and soothed. Advent reminds us afresh that God’s powerful story of love is our story too. May we find freedom in knowing God’s love unveiled in the coming of Jesus is making all things new.

Gracious God, fill our hearts with your peace this Advent season. May we linger in the hope you give and be empowered by your unimaginable love for us. Amen.

The Rev. Jennifer Heavner is pastor of Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, PA and serves on the Lutheran Congregational Services Advisory Team.



Monday, December 10, 2018

Comfort, O comfort my people,

says your God.

Isaiah 40:1

At a time when everything was falling apart in Judah, God's message was "comfort my people." Each and every one of us has moments in our lives when we need someone to help us hold it altogether. During those times, comfort comes in all shapes and sizes.

When I was 16, my father was diagnosed with lung cancer. You could definitely describe my family's world as falling apart, especially with five children between the ages of 7 and 18.

My parents struggled to make sense of it all while also trying to prepare for the inevitable. The pain from the cancer was not nearly as agonizing as the question that kept my dad awake every night. Who would take care of his family when he was gone?

The answer to his question was revealed in many ways over the next year: a shoulder to cry on, helping hands when a storm damaged our roof, numerous hot meals, rides to events and activities, an ear to listen, and a prayer when nothing else would do.

In my role with Liberty Lutheran, I witness the many ways that donors, residents, members, volunteers and staff comfort God's people.

Lord, open my eyes and heart to those whose world is falling apart. Give me the courage, strength and wisdom to comfort them. Amen.

As Director of Advancement, Patty Cline raises funds to support capital projects, programs and services. She also leads a team of experts responsible for community outreach, fundraising and communications.



Tuesday, December 11, 2018

**When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion
we were like those who dream
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with shouts of joy.**

Psalms 126: 1-2a

This passage was probably sung after Israel's return from exile in a time of unimaginable rejoicing. Modern-day exiles come in many forms – the flight of refugees from unsafe homeland perils, evacuees fleeing catastrophic storms.

As a Lutheran Disaster Response volunteer, I was once part of an initiative that repaired people's ruined residences along the Delaware River and in Mississippi so that "exiles" could be restored to their cherished homes as part of a "new normal." Volunteers worked across ecumenical and interfaith "divides" in ways that continue to inspire me in our chaotic time.

In the aftermath of Maria in 2017, Liberty Lutheran Services played a pivotal role in resettling Puerto Rico evacuees who can't go home again because of massive destruction to their homes and schools. Hopefully they are rejoicing in their new-found homes!

In Wilmington, NC, where my daughter lived until recently, many hurricane exiles remain tragically uprooted as they contemplate long-term recovery. Hopefully, with God's help and the aid of volunteers, someday they will rejoice!

In my prayers I try to remember with compassion exiles of our day and give thanks that I and my family members have never been forced to flee dire circumstances. Have you ever been an exile? What exiles have you known or thought about? What actions might you take to support them?

Gracious God, help us find a way to walk with exiles. Guide our steps, giving us wisdom and compassion. Amen.

Mark A. Staples is a member of Trinity Lutheran, Lansdale, PA and a loyal partner to Lutheran Disaster Response. Mark is a lifelong writer on religious subjects.



Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
“Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you.

Isaiah 35:3-4

Everyone, I think, knows the old Sunday School stand-by, “Jesus Loves Me”, but I wonder how many have come across the wonderful lyrics written for Seniors? Among the verses of this version are these:

Jesus loves me, this I know, Though my hair is white as snow.
Though my sight is growing dim, Still He bids me trust in Him...
Though my steps are oh, so slow, With my hand in his I'll go...

This text from Isaiah, like the revised version of Jesus Loves Me, begins with an acknowledgement of things that are part of life as we age, hands and knees get weaker and our steps slow. Sight grows dim, hair loses color and our hearts become fearful. But Advent reminds us of the promise that Isaiah spoke and that God enacted being born to us.

Here is your God!
Strength in times of weakness.
Calm to fearful hearts.
Light in times of darkness.
Hope when all seems lost.

Just like the simple song declares, “Yes, Jesus Loves me”, the season of Advent declares that God’s promise to come is realized in a manger, as angels sing, and shepherds quake, and Mary ponders.

Do not fear- Unto us will be born a Savior, who is Christ our Lord. How different to face all of the changes and chances of aging are when faced with that blessed assurance!

Stir up your power, O God of all ages, come to us when we are weak, feeble and afraid. Be our strength and peace. Every day fill us with your light. Come, Jesus, Word made flesh- save us. Amen.

The Rev. Ghislaine Cotnoir is Director of Pastoral Care at The Artman Home & The Hearth at Drexel



Thursday December 13, 2018

**He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.**

Isaiah 40:11

Today is the Artman Home Annual Christmas Pageant! Like in any Christmas Pageant there will be sheep and shepherds! We can't imagine a pageant without them!

Yet, the reality is, a lot of us have never seen a real shepherd. Many of us have never held a real sheep. None the less, Isaiah's image of a shepherd whose entire life is given to caring for the flock is familiar to us. It is comforting. It reminds us what kind of a Savior God chooses to be. Humble, caring, gentle, and attentive.

When we see those shepherds and sheep in the pageant, we know that these characters who see the wonder of Jesus birth unfold are, in fact, the very face of the Savior.

We know that this Christmas babe, Jesus, will grow up and we will come to know him as our Lord ...our shepherd... the one who feeds, and gathers and carries and leads us. And knowing this, we will all enter the pageant. Having been cared for by the Shepherd, we become the shepherds. We become the body of the Shepherd Christ. We feed and gather and carry and lead one another to show the face of Jesus.

Last year, as costumes were donned, one pageant participant said, "I waited 90 years to be a shepherd." But, in fact, as a man of faith, he had been a shepherd all along. And we are too!

So, once again we will have our pageant. And there will be shepherds and sheep! They are all of us who follow Jesus and who show Jesus to others!

O Lord, our shepherd, teach us to follow you, becoming shepherds to one another. Amen

This reflection comes out of conversations between The Rev. Ghislaine Cotnoir and residents at Artman.



Friday, December 14, 2018

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

2 Corinthians 9:11-12

“It is better to give than to receive.”

Good luck sharing that biblical saying with a youngster who didn't get that particular gift from his or her Christmas wish list! While it may be difficult for a child to fully appreciate the profundity of this statement, as adults we often find ourselves more enthusiastic about the gifts we give – and the anticipated excitement of their recipients – than those we are given (although, will opening gifts of Super Bowl Champion merchandise ever really get old?).

Are we inclined to feel the same way when giving to God? Just as we receive satisfaction and joy from giving gifts to others, today's Scripture reminds us of the rich blessings we receive when we are generous to God and the furtherance of his Kingdom. Whether it is through financial contributions, or selflessly giving of our time through volunteer roles and opportunities, our churches and faith-based organizations like Liberty Lutheran's family of services rely on the generosity of many. But when we give to God, do we do so with the perspective we are encouraged to have in 2 Corinthians 9?

This advent season is the perfect time to reflect on how you can be cheerfully generous to the Lord – and to experience the enriching blessings God promises in your life!

Lord, show me new ways in which I can be generous this Advent season and into the New Year. Allow me to cheerfully use the blessings you have provided me to in turn bless others and spread your love. Amen.

Brandon Frank is the Manager of Financial Reporting for Liberty Lutheran.



Saturday and Sunday, December 15 and 16, 2018

**I will plant them upon their land,
and they shall never again be plucked up
out of the land that I have given them,
says the Lord your God.**

Amos 9:15

Immigrants know the powerlessness that comes with being uprooted. The critically ill, uprooted from tranquility know of powerlessness too. Likewise: the child abused by a trusted adult; the worker who learns of the plant closing; the adolescent hooked by opioid abuse. Life can be uprooted by devastating circumstances. It is easy to give up in disgust.

Our strength wears down in the face circumstances that take away peace, joy, justice, and hope. Our relationships suffer, our sense of purpose fades, and our will to live is damaged. Compassionate words from those we love cannot always overcome the pain that strikes so deeply.

More than simply a period of time meant for quietly awaiting the festival of the Nativity, Advent offers the disquieted a disciplined reminder that God keeps God's promise to enter into the lives of the uprooted for the sake of the healing of the world.

The Advent word of God expressed by the prophet Amos is especially directed at the uprooted. The prophet proclaims God's promise to securely plant those who have been uprooted. Trees, or flowers, or shrubs once planted are given place, given nourishment, given future.

The dawning of the one who brings God's place, nourishment, and future to all is near. Amos proclaims that this one offers as well God's peace, joy, justice, and hope to the uprooted. Come, Lord Jesus.

Steadfast Lord, in times of turmoil in our lives, let us never forget your promises. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Samuel R. Zeiser is Bishop, Northeastern PA Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



Monday, December 17, 2018

For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood.

Hebrews 13: 11-12

The Dr. Seuss book “Oh, the Places You’ll Go” makes a popular gift at graduation from nursery school, high school, or college. I think it makes a wonderful gift for baptism or confirmation, too, because when a person becomes part of Christ’s body, one never knows “the places you’ll go” with Jesus.

In today’s passage from Hebrews, I am reminded that God sends his followers into all sorts of places, even “the prickly places.” Jesus “suffered outside the (holy) city gate” of Jerusalem, which tells me he ventured often into the most unholy places, where he hung out with outcasts, sinners, and those “left in a lurch” by poverty, hunger, homelessness, sickness, addiction, natural disaster, racial profile, violence and abuse, family separation, or unjust government policy.

A take away lesson is to step outside the protective gates, walls, and doors of our churches and homes, to join with Jesus and the most vulnerable ones around us, serving with the love and gentleness of the Savior. When we do, it brings much needed hope to the despairing, and a renewed sense they are not alone... that God is with us.

“Oh, the places you’ll go” with Jesus.

Dear Jesus, lead me and guide me outside my zones of my comfort, my ranks of my privilege, and my walls of isolation, that I may join with you today to bring good news to those caught in prickly places or left in a lurch. Amen.

The Rev. Julie Bergdahl serves as Pastor of St. Michael’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sellersville, PA, and recently organized a summer project with 18 congregations in Upper Bucks county and Lutheran Disaster Response-Eastern PA to supply household items to families relocated to PA after Hurricane Maria destroyed their homes and communities in Puerto Rico.



Tuesday, December 18, 2018

**A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.**

Isaiah 11:1-3

A wide-swath of people watched homes and livelihoods stripped away as the beautiful island of Puerto Rico was among those transformed with haunting death and devastation. With horrifying images etched in hearts and minds, and without water, electricity or a livelihood, some families made the painful decision to leave their island home. Approximately 400 of these families came to Eastern Pennsylvania. Living with relatives and friends, or in transitional housing identified by LDR and their partners, the winds carried change including school in a different language, stresses of finding work and friends, and trying to rebuild hundreds of miles away.

I'm stumped! How do I get volunteers to run a dynamic day camp called Camp Noah to help these families? A home town pastor remembers a promise from a 2017 Camp Noah volunteer... and a tiny shoot begins to grow from my stump.

With the talented Liberty Lutheran staff helping with networking, funding, and publicity, the shoot grew into a strong branch! The Spirit rested on all who heard the call for help to provide the first bilingual Camp Noah to children displaced from Hurricane Maria. In all, 108 different individuals, organizations and ministries donated time, food, money, and talent for 40 children so that they could build resiliency and restore hope! Hospitality came from retirement communities like Paul's Run and Artman, from UCC and ELCA congregations in Dallas, PA and Orwigsburg, Fleetwood and our host Reading Lutheran Parishes in Reading, PA, a total area slightly bigger than the entire island of Puerto Rico!

Awesome God help us prepare to be stumped; bring a strong branch of lively delight from the twisted stump of devastation this Advent.

The Rev. Rebecca Knox is Chaplain, Tower Health in Reading, PA. She served on the leadership team for Camp Noah held in Reading this past summer. Camp Noah is a day camp for children who have experienced disaster or trauma.

Wednesday, December 19, 2018



**They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.**

Isaiah 11:9

The waters more than covered the sea during Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. Children and youth that had lived through the Hurricane came to Camp Noah held at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Reading, PA for a week this August.

At first they didn't want to open up about all the pain and suffering they endured. They felt the hurt and destruction on the holy mountain. Yet throughout the week, thanks to a great curriculum, caring and understanding staff and volunteers and the work of the Holy Spirit, the children and youth began to let their guard down and open up about their experiences.

The story of Noah and his family escaping the flood was woven throughout the week of camp showing them that God had not abandoned Noah just as God had not abandoned them. They saw that God was with them and that they could move forward. Death and destruction was a part of their life but it didn't have to end there.

Janmary, one youth who attended Camp Noah, talked about how her new life was beginning in Reading, PA. She was ready to face whatever came her way. Camp Noah helped her with that.

In this season of waiting may we be full of the knowledge of the Lord as he prepares to come to us through the Christ child. May we know that God does not abandon us and beckons us to share his message of healing and hope with the world.

Holy One, thank you for showing us that death and destruction are not the final answer. Help us to see you in everyone and remind them that you are with them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The Rev. Katie Lyon is Pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Reading, PA. She worked with Liberty Lutheran to help make Camp Noah become a reality in Reading this summer for those who came from Puerto Rico as a result of Hurricane Maria.



Thursday, December 20, 2018

**And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying,
“This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds,”
he also adds,
“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”**

Luke 13:35

Sitting with a group of 10th graders preparing to affirm their baptisms at Confirmation, we read this passage out loud and talked about it.

The first thing that stood out to Evan Kolecki was ‘I will not remember their sins and evil deeds any longer.’ He said, “it was reassuring, like God won’t forever hold things against us. God doesn’t hold grudges.”

Then we started talking about, what might it mean to have God’s law in our hearts and written on our minds? I asked Evan if this meant anything to him. He explained that to him, having laws written on our hearts and minds means that he knows deep down how God wants us to treat one another.

Evan talked about a couple of times when he was ready to walk out of practice or quit a sport mid-season, but he knew that was not the right thing to do. He talked about ‘knowing’ that commitment was important, that ‘knowing’ is what it means to have something written on your heart.

Today’s passage calls to mind the baptismal promise to proclaim the good news of Christ through word and deed.

Loving God, be with Evan and all people affirming their baptisms in the coming year, and grant them the blessings of a God who does not hold grudges.

Conversation with Evan Kolecki, Confirmation student at Trinity Lutheran, Lansdale

Julia Menzo is Director of Community Outreach for Liberty Lutheran / Lutheran Congregational Services.

Friday, December 21, 2018

Restore us, O God of hosts;

let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Psalms 80: 7

I have read this verse many times and always wondered why our world is so violent and in such turmoil, and I think of man's inhumanity against man; I have heard that talked about many times.

My doorbell rings and a friend is there. We sit outside and then four little guys come running up. They portray Spider-Man, Captain America and two other super heroes, smiling , laughing, and I see hope, God 's face shining and smiling through children. Later I have a visit from a family from Nepal who had been resettled by LCFS. I volunteered and became friends with the family: once again smiles and laughter, God smiling and I see more hope.

The church I attend is Prince Of Peace in Lawncrest, Philadelphia . Prince of Peace is very welcoming and as a congregation, we are friends with quite a few Muslim organizations. We have made new friends. We smile some more and yes God 's face is smiling and hasn't turned from us . We pray for all children and remember we are all children of God no matter the age, shape of our eyes , skin color or language spoken. We pray "Hear us o God " Your mercy is great.

Like the sun, thank you Lord God for shining on the whole world. Amen.

Helen Tobin has been active for many years at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in the Lawncrest neighborhood of Philadelphia. She and her team welcome newcomers fleeing hardships of many kinds from around the world.





Saturday and Sunday, December 22 and 23, 2018

See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Luke 13:35

This passage is set among a series of parables in Luke. The parable is titled, “The Lament over Jerusalem.” In the beginning of the story Jesus dismisses the Pharisees warnings to Jesus, ‘get out of here! Herod wants to kill you!’ Jesus fires back that he has better things to do than worry about Herod; Jesus sends the message that for now he has demons to cast out and healing to administer; running from Herod will have to wait.

Continuing, Jesus notes his desire to care for the people of Jerusalem, but that he must be on his way soon as Jerusalem is not very hospitable. He will return only when the people are ready to say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Sometimes in desire to respond to very difficult situations, and in our compulsion to be of service, we get lost in the fervor of organizing, coordinating, ordering food for lunch, getting speakers arranged, putting a curriculum or agenda together, and making sure all supplies are ordered. Service can be very busy.

Sometimes when I am frazzled and too busy, it is helpful to remember, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” Jesus calls us to serve in response to the love God has shown us. Coming in the name of the Lord is indeed a blessing. It is what gives us the freedom to give as we can, with loving, generous, and faithful hearts. Coming in the name of the Lord gives us permission to give what we can in service, and to leave what’s still left to do to the hands of others who will come following us a God provides.

In our service, let us come without worry about not being the right person for the job, but with hearts open to the caring work that God puts before us each day. Amen.

**Julia Menzo is Director of Community Outreach for Liberty Lutheran/
Lutheran Congregational Services.**

Monday, December 24, 2018



Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord

Luke 2: 9-11

The shepherds heard and followed. They took the steps necessary to find the Savior, Christ the Lord. How ready am I to seek and believe?

Why has God come to the earth? It is already his by right of creation, presence, and power. So why has he come? Why did he take on a human nature? According to Genesis 1:27, God created man in the image of himself. “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

So why did God come? Why take on a human nature? God came to restore the lost image. He came to reclaim, redeem, and restore us to our intended place, as his children.

Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation! What will it take to get our attention? Holy Spirit, guide our contemplations. Amen.

Mary is a resident of Paul’s Run; a member of the Liberty Lutheran family of services.



Christmas Day, December 25, 2018

So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2: 16-19

“Joy to the World!” 400 years, the Israelites prayed and waited for a promised Messiah to come and deliver the nation from Roman oppression as the heavens remained silent. But finally, in the fullness of time, the divine hope was sent from heaven, piercing through the centuries of human disappointment and national despair.

Luke records that a young virgin did conceive, and gave birth to the only begotten Son of God. Angels appeared to shepherds in the field and announced that the Lord had indeed sent the promised deliverer to save his people. Shepherds were filled with unspeakable joy as they travelled to Bethlehem and gazed upon the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

In their excitement, the shepherds shared what they had been told about the child. All who heard them speak were amazed, as Mary treasured their words and pondered them in her heart. What a testimony!

When I consider the unbridled hope that is expressed in this gospel story juxtaposed against the divisive rhetoric that permeates our public discourse, I remain convinced that the world needs to hear our testimony. Truly, we have “tidings of great joy” to share with all people, everywhere! “for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Therefore, let us add our voices to those of the shepherds and the angelic hosts in singing the advent hymn of celebration; “Joy to The world! The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King.”

Merciful God, with joy we give thanks for your gift of freedom through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Carlton Rodgers is Pastor of the Tabernacle Lutheran Church, Philadelphia Pa



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