



The

Parish Visitor

A Publication of Bethlehem Lutheran Church • Askov, Minnesota

December 2020						
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Hello, Church!

First, I pray all of you are staying safe, sheltering at home as much as possible, and avoiding crowds. We are living in a dangerous time and as much as it pains all of us, gatherings, celebrations, and crowds are among the times when this virus easily spreads. By the time you get this, we will have spent our Thanksgiving holiday away from the physical presence of our families and friends. By now, most of us probably know people who have contracted COVID-19. We need to keep all of the victims in our prayers, especially since we still don't know what the long-term effects may be. Please do not stop praying.

This separation we are experiencing is also hard on our mental and spiritual health. We need human contact in whatever way it can safely be accomplished. After meeting with our SMART Team and the Worship Committee, and in view of the recommendations of the experts, all indoor worship, meetings, and gatherings at Bethlehem are on hold for at least the month of December. We will continue to provide weekly online services and this newsletter once again includes weekly meditations and adult activities for each week. Those pages also include suggested readings for each day. Please make use of them.

We are now in the season of Advent and I would like to invite you all to Sunday afternoon Advent meditations. We will do them via Zoom and they will be short, about twenty minutes or so. The services will include lighting an Advent wreath with a prayer, a scripture reading and a very brief meditation. We will also use the time to pray together. You will have access either by computer or tablet, or by phone either with or without video. As we get that working, I will also invite you to join in a weekly "coffee and chat" time.

For those things to work, I need **all** of you to help. Please, if you haven't received an email invitation from me, send me your email contact information. I will keep all contacts private, but that is the easiest means to include you all in Zoom meetings. So, send me your name(s), email address(es), and phone numbers. My email address: larryanders29@gmail.com (please put "Zoom contact" in the memo). You can also text or call me at 218-206-5933.

I would also like to invite all of you to give me a call. I long to get to know those I haven't met, long to hear the voices of those I have met, long to be present for you, and pray with you. You don't need to be in a crisis or a need to call. I love to chat!

I pray we can all stay safe, stay connected, and make the most of this bizarre holiday season. May the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, be with you each and every day.

Yours in Christ,

-Larry



All in person worship services have been suspended through the month of December 2020
Please check the website for information and updates:
www.blcaskov.com

IN OUR
Thoughts and Prayers

Please include the following people in your daily prayers:

Millie Sorensen, Leroy Larsen, Jan Ecklund, Lois Sahlen, Ann Olson, Jo Jessen, Tony Ecklund, Shirley Lund, Joyce Schaumburg, Chase & Elizabeth Moon (in the Philippines) and their families.

If you would like to add someone to this weekly list, please email the church office at blcaskov@gmail.com

2020 Church Council Members



Bill Jansen



Marilyn Krogh



Cheryl Kohner



Chuck Moon



JoEllyn Foss



Andy May



Heidi Moon



**November 11, 2020
Unapproved Minutes**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Bill Jansen, Larry Anderson, Marilyn Krogh, Chuck Moon, Heidi Moon, Jo Foss, Andy May, and Cheryl Kohner.

Check-ins; devotion and opening prayer by Larry.

ACCEPT MINUTES FROM COUNCIL MEETINGS: Motion by Bill to accept the minutes from the October 20th meeting and also the November 2nd meeting, 2nd by Marilyn, motion carried. Chuck made a motion to accept the October 7th minutes with the following revision: *During discussion on fundraising one council member left the meeting. Heidi made a motion to adjourn the meeting but was not recognized; after further discussion another council member left the meeting.,* 2nd by Bill, motion carried.

TREASURER’S REPORT: October 2020 report was reviewed.

PASTOR’S REPORT: Reviewed.

MINISTRY TEAMS:

- Property—Chuck informed us the parsonage inspection was today.
- Family Ministry—Jo reported they are contin-

uing with the multigenerational bible study.

- Music and Worship—Bill reported they have picked out music through the end of the year.
- Circle of Faith—Jo reported there will not be a Christmas bazaar this year due to Covid-19. They have appointed members to look into how COF can assist with Thanksgiving meals (gift cards, certificates), this has not been decided for sure. Their next meeting is November 21st. They will discuss what to do for December meals at that time.

OLD BUSINESS:

- Decorum at council meetings—Bill discussed information he received from Bishop Amy Odgren regarding being peacemakers. Marilyn read the information to the council.
- Parsonage Sale—Paperwork has been signed and now we wait. Power of attorney was discussed for the closing of the parsonage.
- 2019 Audit—Bill delivered the files to Pine Tax in Hinckley. No word from them at this time.
- CARES Act grants and request for donations—We were awarded two grants from Partridge township. A check for \$4,500 and a check for \$2,000. The check for \$4,500 will go toward the air exchanger for the basement. Motion by Bill to reimburse year-to-date Covid-19

expenses of \$1,801 from the \$2,000 check, and the remaining \$199 to the Community Outreach fund, 2nd by Chuck, motion carried. Marilyn made a motion to approve the donation request letter to the Askov American Legion, 2nd by Andy, motion carried.

- Offering envelopes—discussed options for less expensive envelopes.
- SMART Plan contingency (pending Governor’s orders)—Larry reported on Governor Walz’s Covid-19 restrictions as of yesterday. Bill stated there will be a SMART Team/Worship Team meeting next week to discuss what we need to do going forward. Motion by Heidi to approve \$500 being spent on additional equipment needed for online worship services, 2nd by Cheryl, motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS:

- Quarterly meeting agenda was reviewed.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Heidi will put announcement in the newsletter regarding offering envelopes

Motion to adjourn by Heidi, 2nd by Andy. Meeting adjourned with The Lord’s Prayer.

Next meeting will be on Wednesday, December 9, 2020 at 6:00 pm.

*Respectfully submitted,
-Cheryl Kohner*



COUNCIL MEETING

**November 2, 2020
Special Called Meeting
Approved Minutes**

MEMBERS PRESENT:
Bill Jansen, Larry Anderson, Marilyn Krogh, Jo Foss, Cheryl Kohner, Andy May, Chuck Moon, and Heidi Moon.

Opening prayer led by Larry.

BUSINESS:
Parsonage sale—

Discussion was led by Bill. We were informed that a party is interested in purchasing the parsonage for the price of \$165,000. They want to put \$2,000 down and will pay for an inspection. Denny will be meeting with potential buyers and Tom Jensen on Tuesday, November 3, 2020 at 9 am to go over the contract. (There has also been interest by another party). Our non-profit status was listed as inactive. Heidi has already gone on-line and changed our status to active. Bill contacted the Synod office regarding legalities of the sale. Do we need to give someone Power of Attor-

ney should the sale go through? This is something that Tom Jensen can answer. Bill asked Marilyn to attend the meeting with Tom and Denny. She will take notes. It was also brought up we need to check for the deed for the parsonage. Motion by Bill to authorize Denny Birkholm to sign paperwork on behalf of the congregation for the sale of the parsonage, and explore power of attorney at the meeting on November 3, 2020, 2nd by Jo, motion carried.

*Respectfully submitted,
-Cheryl Kohner
Council Secretary*



- Ron Foss—2nd
- Bill Jansen—3rd
- Brenda Lunde—3rd
- John Zinter—10th
- Brent Jensen—12th
- Barrett Peterson—14th
- Lorraine Peterson—15th
- Hannah Jensen—18th
- Lori Willie—18th
- John Ecklund—19th
- Ella Champagne—20th
- Marilyn Krogh—21st

Happy Anniversary!
DJ & Brenda Zinter—31st

Card of Thanks

To the lovely folks at Bethlehem Lutheran, Askov:

Thank you all for your thoughts and prayers for my recovery from recent medical issues, and for cards and food, and quilt and meaningful online worship and music.

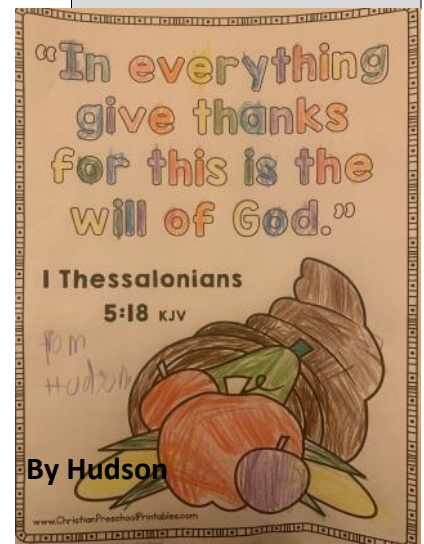
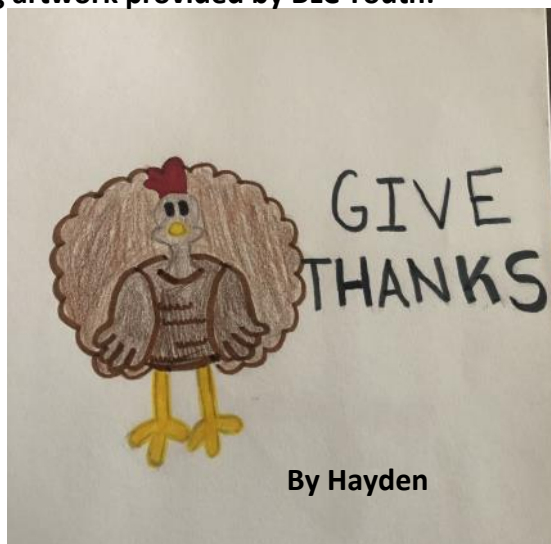
Despite my need to be homebound, I feel as though I have met you in person, and will hold you all in my heart.

- Mona Anderson



During this time of COVID-19, we still need your help to make certain we continue to fulfill our mission and meet our budgetary needs!
Thank you for your continued support!

Thanksgiving artwork provided by BLC Youth:





Community Meal

Thank you so much to the many volunteers and donors for the Askov Community Meal. It has been a tough year, and the need has grown in the community, and thanks to so many, we have been able to grow along, too, to help meet it. August through October we distributed meals and groceries, approximately 200 meals and 100 bags of groceries worth between \$12 and \$15 each month. In November and December we are distributing 200 \$20 Chris' gift certificates in lieu of the meals and groceries.

In addition to BLC's community fund and Chris' food stand fundraiser this summer, we have been able to do so much due to amazing community partners and their donations this fall: Askov American Legion Post 243--\$2,000, Northern Pine Riders Snowmobile Club--\$1,500, the City of Askov's Cares Act funds--\$3,297.15, and donations from individuals. These funds were stretched by generous in-kind donations of food and discounts by Kettle River Pizza, Maple Run Orchard, Main Street Grocery, Chris' Food Center, as well as individuals, along with surplus from their gardens and apple trees.

It is good work but it is hard work preparing takeout food for 200 and bagging groceries for 100 households each month, and it has only been accomplished through the dedication of an army of more than 30 volunteers, some who have helped once and many repeatedly. We had 25 people work the food stand or bake for it this summer. Plus nine members of the Askov Fire Department helped distribute and deliver meals in October. This work started with Circle of Faith, who is still at it, but volunteers are men and women from throughout the community, which is how it should be. Please do join us and invite others from the community to join us in this work as well. It is work that has led us to meet our neighbors, and it is satisfying to hear their thanks.

Our congregation was eligible, applied for, and received some Cares Act money (for Covid-19 expenses) from Partridge Township and Pine County to reimburse the congregation for some of its expenses related to the virus and to purchase and install an air exchange system in the basement of the church. Thank you to Denny Birkholm, Bill Jansen, and Ovid Jensen, for their contributions to make the project possible. It is great news, and we hope to be able to use our basement safely, with Covid-19 precautions, in the new year for continuing the community meal and other ministries as well as potlucks, funeral lunches, etc.

So, thank you again for the support of our congregation, this ministry, and your gifts of time and money. We have indeed been blessed to be a blessing. Thanks be to God!

-Shawn Jansen

BLC lost three of our treasured members in the past month, in loving memory...



Ardis Jensen

September 30, 1936—October 21, 2020

No services were held at this time, there will be a memorial gathering at a later date



Dorla Clark

August 9, 1931—October 23, 2020

A memorial service was held for Dorla at BLC on November 7, 2020



Donna Norgaard

August 5, 1932—November 1, 2020

A visitation was held at Methven Funeral Home on November 10, 2020

Offering Envelopes



A decision was made not to order/print individual offering envelopes for the coming year.

If you would like to receive a few blank offering envelopes, please email the church office at blcaskov@gmail.com and a handful of envelopes will be mailed to you. Once we're able to resume in-person worship services, these envelopes will also be located in the pews of the sanctuary. We also encourage you to consider giving on-line through our website: <http://www.blcaskov.com/online-giving>



Joel: God's
Promised Spirit

Sunday, December 6, 2020

Read: Joel 2:12-13, 28-29

Main Idea: As Advent is underway, we can be tempted with visions of consumerism. But God's Holy Spirit offers visions far more satisfying and lasting.

Although there is debate over the exact era of Joel, some believe he may have prophesied during the period of exile, and after the building of the second temple of Solomon. Many of the post-exilic prophets proclaimed destruction upon Israel, and many also proclaimed the promise of restoration.

In today's verses, God encouraged Israel to mourn and repent, not only in their outward appearance but in their hearts. God reminded Israel that God is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing (2:13b)."

God also promised that God would imbue them with God's Holy Spirit. The Spirit would enable God's people to dream dreams and see visions. They would have hope for a better future.

In this season of Advent, we might long for evidence of God's Holy Spirit in the midst of shopping malls and online advertising. We are bombarded with visions of consuming (goods and food), of an elusive, perfect holiday experience, and even the illusion of conflict-free family gatherings. The Holy Spirit doesn't thrive in these visions, which are temporary at best, and fraudulent at worst. In these thrive the spirit of make-believe and a promise that stuff can make you happy.

But God's Holy Spirit still does thrive even amid the dreams and visions of a consumerist secular holiday. It can take faith and a willingness to see visions from God—generosity over selfishness, joy over pleasure, relationships over stuff. God's Holy Spirit is powerful and present, and sometimes all she needs is for us to allow the visions she offers to dance brilliantly before our eyes.

December 6, 2020

Joel 2:12-13, 28-29

Pray: Light a candle. Open your devotion with prayer.

Steadfast God, you never abandoned your people when they were at their lowest. Hold your promises before our eyes that they might shine brighter than any darkness which threatens to overcome us, for the sake of your son Jesus. Amen.

Read: Read the key verse from Sunday's reading.

Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. (Joel 2:28)

Reflect: Reflect on the scripture summary.

Israel had strayed and was exiled. But God was not done with her yet. God promised the Holy Spirit, which would bring dreams and visions of a life far better than this.

Connect: Connect in conversation with others in your household.

What was a high point of your day? What was a low point?

What is the most tempting Christmas present you desire to buy for someone? What would happen if you spent that money on someone in need instead?

Do you think people have visions as in Joel's day? What might those visions look like today? What might they be trying to say?

For the littles: What is the wisest thing an older person has said to you?

Bless: Close your devotion with a blessing.

May God grant you visions of God's kingdom on earth. Amen.

Do: By acting on what we learn, we make God's word come alive. Do the following activity this week.

Make a list of all the things you think you need to do to prepare for Christmas. Add to your list activities or events that give you the opportunity to love God, your neighbor, or yourself. For every love activity you add, remove something less important from your list. See how your holidays are transformed as love activities dominate your season.

Go Deeper: Visit clergystuff.com/daily-devotions.

Monday: *End of Babylonian Captivity*, Ezra 1:1-11

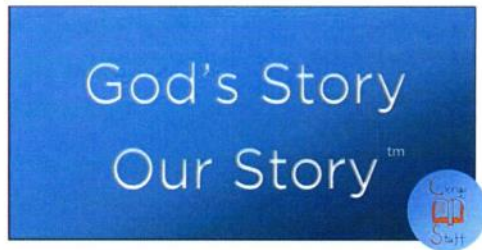
Tuesday: *Lament over the Ruined Country*, Joel 1:1-12

Wednesday: *Call to Repentance and God's Response*, Joel 1:13-20

Thursday: *Dedication of the Temple*, Ezra 6:13-22

Friday: *Ezra Restores Torah as Law*, Nehemiah 8:1-12

Saturday: *Dedication of Jerusalem's Wall*, Nehemiah 12:27-47



Sunday, December 13, 2020

Read: Isaiah 61:1-11

Main Idea: God's Holy Spirit brings with it the gifts of salvation and righteousness—far greater gifts than sparkly things and new stuff.

Israel had strayed from God and were exiled. But Isaiah had words of hope and comfort for those long banished from their homes. They owned next to nothing and were not in the position to command any honor or respect from their captors.

But God continued to be faithful to Israel, despite her unfaithfulness. God promised God's Holy Spirit would come upon them. Isaiah described what such a gift might look like. "For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (61:10)."

There were few grander sights than a fully garlanded bridegroom or bejeweled bride. But Isaiah's declaration made the wearing of God's Holy Spirit glow even more brightly. Instead of garlands and jewels, God's favored would be clothed with salvation and righteousness. To a weary people, these were far greater gifts than jewels. Salvation and righteousness could be worn on a person's spirit.

As we wait for the Christ child, we can imagine Israel holding her breath in anticipation of the promised Spirit. We know how this promise is fulfilled for Israel. And yet, we wonder if that promise is still offered to us today. We have been led to believe that garlands and jewels will fill the emptiness inside us. But garments will fade. Even today, the promises of salvation and righteousness are far more glorious. These gifts are deep and eternal.

December 13, 2020

Isaiah 61:1-11

Pray: Light a candle. Open your devotion with prayer.
Faithful God, you restore to your people all that has been lost. Renew our hopes for the future and our zeal for serving you as chosen and beloved children, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Read: Read the key verse from Sunday's reading.
I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)

Reflect: Reflect on the scripture summary.
Although Israel had sinned and was exiled, God still promised a better future. One day God would adorn the people with salvation and righteousness.

Connect: Connect in conversation with others in your household.
What was a high point of your day? What was a low point?
What do you wear? What does your attire say about you? What do you want the world to know about you?
What binds you? What prevents you from being all that God has created you to be?
What can you do this week to accept God's freedom from the burden of your bondage?
For the littles: Have you ever been to a wedding? What was your favorite part?

Bless: Close your devotion with a blessing.
May God free you to be who you were created to be. Amen.

Do: By acting on what we learn, we make God's word come alive. Do the following activity this week.
Stick a bunch of dollar bills (you decide how many) in your wallet, pocket, or purse. Every time you pass a Salvation Army kettle, put in a dollar. If you shop online, donate a dollar to your favorite charity for every gift you purchase. As you do, remember every positive act you do for the world helps make it the new creation God desires.

Go Deeper: Visit clergystuff.com/daily-devotions.
Monday: *God Is Gracious*, Isaiah 63:7-14
Tuesday: *Prayer of Repentance*, Isaiah 63:15-64:12
Wednesday: *New Creation*, Isaiah 65:17-25
Thursday: *Edom's Betrayal and Israel's Restoration*, Obadiah 1:1-21
Friday: *Jerusalem's Victory*, Zechariah 12:1-13:1
Saturday: *The Coming Messenger*, Malachi 3:1-7



Jesus' Birth
Announced

December 20, 2020

Read: Luke 1:26-45 [46-56]

Main Idea: Waiting can be a hard, but necessary element in the arrival of something important.

Gender reveal parties have become quite popular events these days. From balloons to colored cakes to crop-dusting color bombs, these announcement-based parties have become all the rage. But even the best of these cannot compare to the announcement made to Mary by an angel of the Lord!

With no fanfare, no trumpets or brilliant lights, a quiet, gentle angel appeared before Mary to announce that she would give birth to God's child. Not to be shaken, Mary quickly agreed and prepared to visit her relative, Elizabeth, who was also expecting a child (who would become John the Baptist—Jesus' cousin). Although they may have skipped the announcement party, Mary knew she needed some companionship from another who knew more about these things than she did. She sought her community of support.

Elizabeth's reaction was priceless. She could have condemned her relative for infidelity, but in a strange twist, her own baby leapt for joy at the sound of Mary's voice. It was another sign among many that this child was special. This child would need no parties nor celebrations. He would be born simply and humbly in an animal's den.

Still, the announcement was a critical event in the life of this little one. It gave Mary time to prepare. It gave Joseph time to recognize his role in the birth. It gave Elizabeth the opportunity to rejoice. Sometimes the time of waiting is a crucial element leading up to an important event. It gives us the time we need to wrap our brains around it all. Even though the waiting can be hard, it is necessary and important. While we wait for the event of Christ's birth (just days away now!), we sit comfortably simply with the announcement. He will come.

December 20, 2020

Luke 1:36-45 [46-56]

Pray: Light a candle. Open your devotion with prayer.

God of surprises, you blessed Mary and Elizabeth with the gift of holy children, and they faithfully embraced your calling. Give us peace and joy as we await your coming among us, in the form of a humble baby—our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Read: Read the key verse from Sunday's reading.

And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." (Luke 1:28)

Reflect: Reflect on the scripture summary.

Without fanfare, an angel announced the coming of a baby to Mary. While she waited, she took the opportunity to seek out her support community and prepare for the child's arrival.

Connect: Connect in conversation with others in your household.

What was a high point of your day? What was a low point?

What has been the hardest thing you've ever had to wait for? Was it worth the wait?

Does the anticipation of the celebration of Christ's birth shape how to move through the Advent season? Why or why not?

For the littles: What's the hardest thing to wait for? Why?

Bless: Close your devotion with a blessing.

May God grant patience as you wait. Amen.

Do: By acting on what we learn, we make God's word come alive. Do the following activity this week.

Put together a new baby care kit for expectant parents, those waiting on adoption, or those fostering children in your community. Be creative about what you include in the kit. How will your kit support the new parents? How will it support the kid? How will it lift up God's love for the family?

Go Deeper: Visit clergystuff.com/daily-devotions.

Monday: *Introduction to Luke*, Luke 1:1-4

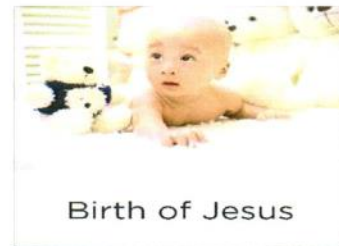
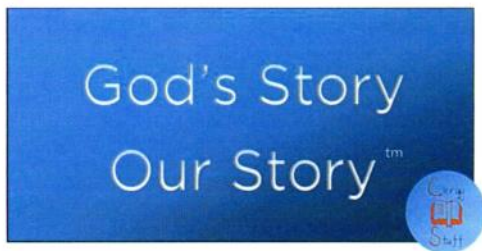
Tuesday: *An Angel Tells Zechariah of John's Birth*, Luke 1:5-25

Wednesday: *Mary's Song*, Luke 1:46-56

Thursday: *Birth of Jesus (Christmas Eve)*, Luke 2:1-14, [15-20]

Friday: *Shepherds Visit (Christmas Day)*, Luke 2:8-20

Saturday: *Birth of John the Baptist*, Luke 1:57-66



December 24, 2020

Read: Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

Main Idea: Although familiar, this timeless story has the capacity to capture our imaginations every time we hear it.

Jesus' birth story is one of the most familiar stories in Christian history. And yet, every time we read it we may see something in the story we had not seen before. Every event and stage of our lives shifts our perspective, and we see things differently than the last time. Here are some observations you may or may not have noticed before.

The emperor called "that all the world should be registered (2:1b)." There's a familiar arrogance in the emperor's claim on the entire world. It's as if nothing outside the emperor's reach existed, or at least if it did exist, he could claim it, too.

Scripture prophecies claimed the savior would come from several different places—one claimed Nazareth, one Bethlehem, one Egypt. Jesus' birth story takes him to all these places. His origin story fulfills all the competing prophecies.

It's likely Bethlehem was filled with relatives of Joseph, all arriving simultaneously for the decreed census. The lack of room was not inhospitality, but a logistics problem. David's descendants had become too numerous for the small town to hold them all. One wonders if there might have been family to help Mary deliver after all.

Mary delivered in the middle of the night (as many babies seem to want to do!) Who better to announce his arrival to than the ones working the night shift? The shepherds were hard-working folk, likely in as much need of economic and political salvation (which is what they were expecting) than anyone. They would have been eager for such news to arrive—a savior, a king to rescue them from poverty and oppression!

The angels praised God who lived in the highest heaven. This would put all the other gods in lower heavens, wouldn't it?

December 24, 2020
Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

Pray: Light a candle. Open your devotion with prayer.

God incarnate, you come again to us on this blessed night, to take our form and living among us. Bring us with awe and wonder before your holy nativity and be born anew in our hearts. Amen.

Read: Read the key verse from Sunday's reading.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7)

Pray: Light a candle. Open your devotion with prayer.

God incarnate, you come again to us on this blessed night, to take our form and living among us. Bring us with awe and wonder before your holy nativity and be born anew in our hearts. Amen.

Read: Read the key verse from Sunday's reading.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7)

Reflect: Reflect on the scripture summary.

This Christmas story is likely the most familiar story in the Bible (thank you, Linus!). And yet, this story of Jesus' birth—the census, the inn, the angels, and the shepherds—has the capacity to capture our imaginations every time we hear it.

Connect: Connect in conversation with others in your household.

What was a high point of your day? What was a low point?

What is your favorite part of the Christmas story? What does it mean to your life? Why?

Why do you think God came as a baby instead of a fully grown adult?

For the littles: What's your favorite Christmas carol? Why?

Bless: Close your devotion with a blessing.

May God bless your Christmas with love. Amen.

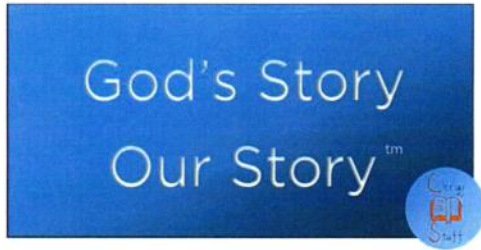
Do: By acting on what we learn, we make God's word come alive. Do the following activity this week.

Consider donating one of your Christmas gifts to someone in need. Or return it and donate the refund. How does giving to someone you don't know shape you?

Go Deeper: Visit clergystuff.com/daily-devotions.

Friday: *Shepherds Visit (Christmas Day)*, Luke 2:8-20

Saturday: *Birth of John the Baptist*, Luke 1:57-66



December 25, 2020

Read: Luke 2:8-20

Main Idea: Mary treasured the words of the angels more than anything else. We can consider what words we will use in the coming year, and how and who they will affect.

The event of Jesus' birth is magnificent and vivid! There was an angel announcing the arrival of the baby to Mary months before she delivered. There was an emperor eager to make more money on taxes through a census. There was a husband courageous enough to remain by Mary's side when he could have left her. There were animals playing host to the newborn. There were angels announcing, "Glory to God!" to a field of nightshift shepherds. So many grand things happened in relation to this fantastic event!

Yet, the thing Mary treasured the most were the words. "But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart (2:19)."

Remember the mantra of earlier generations, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me!" Turns out, that's not true. Words have the incredible power to hurt. Today, we use words frivolously and without regard to their effect. Especially on (but not limited to) social media, we feel free to throw our words around without considering who or how they might hurt. But we can do better.

Words also have the incredible power to heal, both body and spirit. "It's in remission." "It's a girl." "I'm coming home." Simple words, but powerful meanings. On this meaningful day, we might consider the words we want to use in the coming year. Who will we speak to? What will we say? How will our words be received? What words of forgiveness and reconciliation might I speak? And what words will I listen to?

December 25, 2020

Luke 2:8-20

Pray: Light a candle. Open your devotion with prayer.

Merciful God, we treasure the news of your arrival among us, as Mary treasured the wondrous things spoken about her son. Fill us with joy at our savior's birth as we proclaim your love made real on earth, in the person of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Read: Read the key verses from Sunday's reading.

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. (Luke 2:16-18)

Reflect: Reflect on the scripture summary.

Amid the company of animals, the fanfare of angels, and the visit of shepherds, Mary treasured most the words that were spoken about her child.

Connect: Connect in conversation with others in your household.

What was a high point of your day? What was a low point?

What words hold the most power for you? What words hold the least? What influences how those words are perceived?

Shepherds were the first to hear of the birth of the king. They were working-class folk. Who are the working-class folk in your community? What messages do they receive?

For the littles: What would you say to the baby Jesus if you had visited with the shepherds?

Bless: Close your devotion with a blessing.

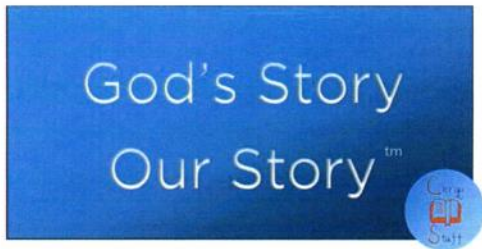
May God bless you with words of wisdom and kindness, and hope. Amen.

Do: By acting on what we learn, we make God's word come alive. Do the following activity this week.

Research the foster care system in your community. Donate time or money to help kids who are in need.

Go Deeper: Visit clergystuff.com/daily-devotions.

Saturday: *Birth of John the Baptist*, Luke 1:57-66



Simeon and Anna

December 27, 2020

Read: Luke 2:21-38

Main Idea: Luke's gospel reminds us that Jesus was first a Jew and also the fulfillment of God's promises.

It can be easy to forget that before Jesus was the Christ of Christianity, Jesus was Jewish. His parents followed the rites and rituals of Judaism, bringing him to the temple to be circumcised on his eighth day after birth, and offering sacrifices in the temple on his behalf.

The primary way God spoke to God's people was through visions, dreams, and the guiding of the Spirit. Anna and Simeon were both righteous and devout Jews who were watching for the signs that God's promises were to be fulfilled. Both were given signs, and both recognized Jesus as the one God promised to send—the one who would redeem Israel. Of course, neither had any idea just how grand God's redemption through Jesus would be. They believed Jesus could save them from oppression by Roman rule. They could not have even imagined Jesus would save them from sin and death!

Consider the characteristics of Luke's gospel as you interpret the stories through Luke's lens. Luke was likely a well-educated author writing for a multi-cultural and inclusive audience. He regularly paired stories of men with stories of women (as here with Simeon and Anna). He often pointed readers back to the Jewish scriptures to make the point that Jesus was sent to fulfill the promises of the scriptures. He also refused to let people off the hook when it came to matters of justice and peace. (For a good, quick read on Luke's gospel, check out Matthew Skinner's [Preaching Luke in 2019](#).)

Luke's story of Anna and Simeon checks all the boxes, introducing us to the Jewish life of Jesus and his wide appeal to both genders and multiple cultures (2:32). This might be a great opportunity to introduce your congregation (perhaps again) to Luke's gospel and the challenge of working toward justice and waiting patiently as the fulfillment of God's promises happen "now and not yet."

December 27, 2020

Luke 2:21-38

Pray: Light a candle. Open your devotion with prayer.

God of all ages, your servants Anna and Simeon recognized your salvation in the face of the infant Jesus. May we also see in him the pathway to forgiveness and the fulfillment of all your promises. Amen.

Read: Read the key verse from Sunday's reading.

At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:38)

Reflect: Reflect on the scripture summary.

The righteous man, Simeon, and the prophet, Anna, both recognized the fulfillment of God's promises in the baby, Jesus, when he was presented before the temple for circumcision on his eighth day after birth.

Connect: Connect in conversation with others in your household.

What was a high point of your day? What was a low point?

What do you think Anna and Simeon saw in Jesus that led them to believe he was the promised savior? What do you see in Jesus that leads you to believe the same?

Who are the elders in your community? How are they regarded?

For the littles: Do you have any babies in your life? (A sibling, maybe?) What do you like most about babies?

Bless: Close your devotion with a blessing.

May God bless the babies and the elders among you. Amen.

Do: By acting on what we learn, we make God's word come alive. Do the following activity this week.

Invite to coffee someone much older than you, or much younger. Learn something about them and share something about yourself.

Go Deeper: Visit clergystuff.com/daily-devotions.

Monday: *Prophecy of Zechariah*, Luke 1:67-80

Tuesday: *Jesus Grew in Wisdom*, Luke 2:39-40

Wednesday: *Isaiah Brings an Answer to Hezekiah's Prayer*, 2 Kings 19:20-34

Thursday: *Purification of a Woman after Childbirth*, Leviticus 12:1-8

Friday: *The Law Concerning Dedication of Firstborns*, Exodus 13:1-16

Saturday: *Levites Become Substitutes for Firstborns*, Numbers 3:40-51
