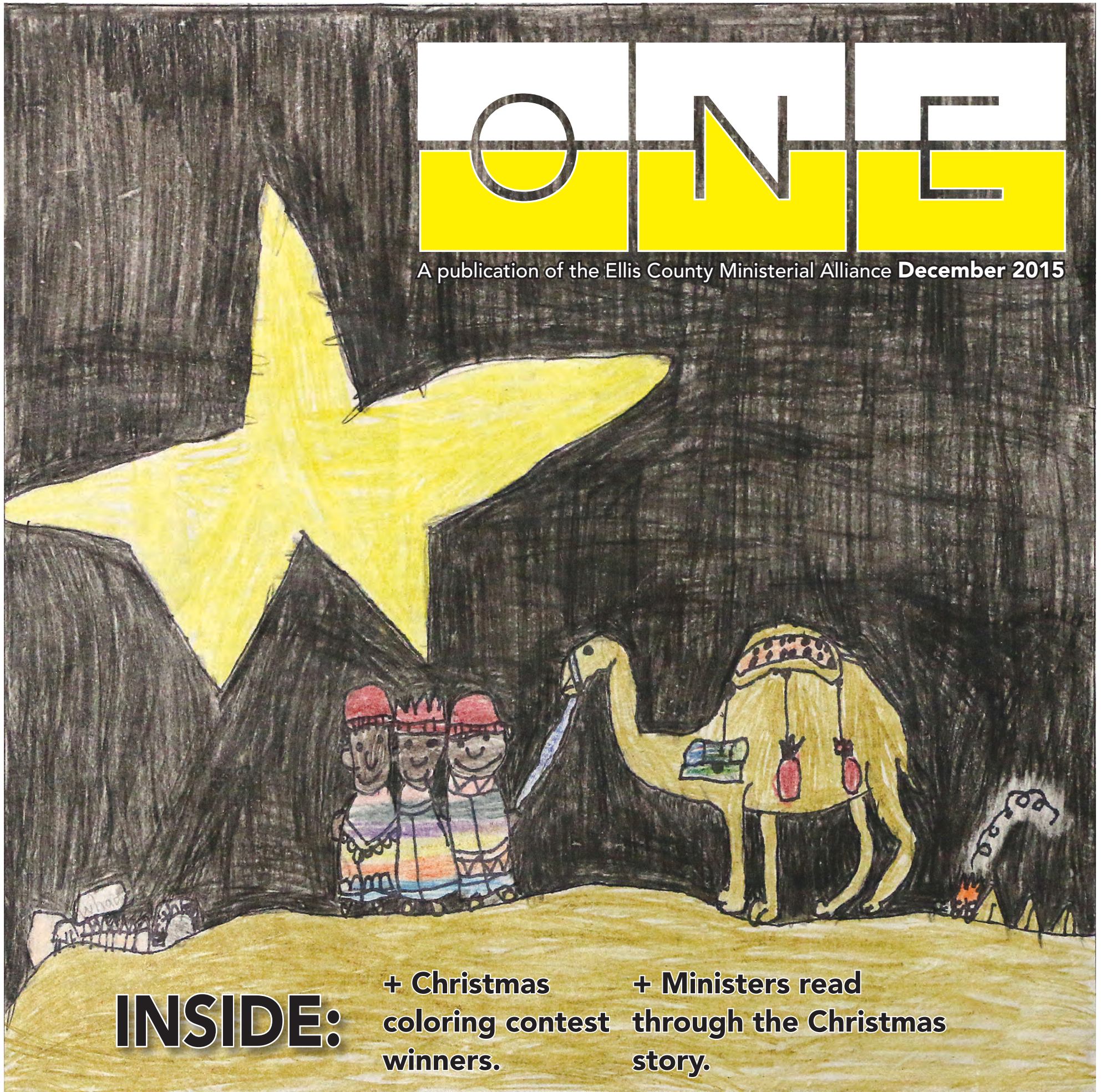


ONE

A publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance December 2015



INSIDE:

+ Christmas coloring contest winners.

+ Ministers read through the Christmas story.

THE CHRISTMAS STORY: BRINGING BACK A TRADITION

Dear ONE Reader,

This month we return to one of our most popular traditions: reading through the Christmas story — the narrative of Jesus' birth — together. This time around we will focus on the story as told through the Gospel of Luke. Each writer will share a devotion about their portion of the story. Our hope is these articles will help each of us reflect more fully on the true meaning of Christmas.

As we begin, I want you to consider the following passage:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign;

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,

And shall call his name Immanuel. — Isaiah 7:14 (KJV)

The coming of Jesus was not unplanned. It was not a mere afterthought. Instead, it was part of God's salvation plan set in mo-

tion in the pages of the Old Testament. The entire Old Testament looks forward to the coming of the Messiah — the one who would save God's people from their sins.

This passage from Isaiah speaks to the promise of the coming Immanuel. Immanuel means "God with us." To say that Jesus is literally the Immanuel, means to say that Jesus is God in the flesh, God with us. That was the promise made centuries before — God

is coming to save his people! That salvation came through the Messiah, who is identified in the Gospels as Jesus of Nazareth.

To recognize that Jesus is the Messiah is to recognize that God has truly become like one of us, his creation, in order to save us from our sins. Humankind has fallen away from God. We chose, beginning with Adam and Eve, to follow our own path and reject God's. By doing so, we have separated ourselves from God with a barrier

Pastor
Kevin Daniels



RECIPE

With the weather starting to turn cool and things starting to happen fast this is one of our family's favorite to sit down to and enjoy!

Chicken and Dumplings

Ingredients

- 1 (3 3/4-lb.) whole chicken
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 1/2 teaspoons salt, divided
- 3/4 teaspoon pepper, divided
- 1 teaspoon chicken bouillon granules
- 3 cups self-rising flour
- 1/2 teaspoon poultry seasoning
- 1/3 cup shortening
- 2 teaspoons bacon drippings*
- 1 cup milk
- Garnish: chopped fresh parsley

Preparation

1. Bring chicken, water to cover, garlic powder,

thyme, 1 1/2 tsp. salt, and 1/2 tsp. pepper to a boil in a Dutch oven over medium heat. Cover, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer 1 hour. Remove chicken; reserve broth.

2. Cool chicken 30 minutes; skin, bone, and shred chicken. Skim fat from broth. Add chicken, bouillon, and remaining 1 tsp. salt and 1/4 tsp. pepper to broth. Return to a simmer.

3. Combine flour and poultry seasoning in a bowl. Cut in shortening and bacon drippings with a pastry blender until crumbly. Stir in milk. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Roll to 1/8-inch thickness; cut into 1-inch pieces.

4. Drop dumplings, a few at a time, into simmering broth, stirring gently. Cover and simmer, stirring often, 25 minutes. Garnish, if desired.

*2 tsp. butter plus 1/4 tsp. salt may be substituted.

Submitted by Ashley Allen, Ellis County Coordinator of the Salvation Army.

HOLY HUMOR

There was a barber that thought that he should share his faith with his customers more than he had been doing lately. So the next morning when the sun came up and the barber got up out of bed he said, "Today I am going to witness to the first man that walks through my door."

Soon after he opened his shop the first man came in and said, "I want a shave!" The barber said, "Sure, just sit in the seat and I'll be with you in a moment." The barber went in the back and prayed a quick

desperate prayer saying, "God, the first customer came in and I'm going to witness to him. So give me the wisdom to know just the right thing to say to him. Amen."

Quickly the barber came out with his razor knife in one hand and a Bible in the other saying, "Good morning sir. I have a question for you... Are you ready to die?"

Submitted by Lory Herrick, pastor of First Baptist Church Hispanic Ministries.

called sin. The only way to bridge that gap is by living a life of perfection; a life free from sin. No one can do that.

Except Jesus.

Jesus was born of a virgin, born to live a perfect life, born to give us eternal life. When we acknowledge his sacrifice and his gift, and accept his offer of salvation, he gives us life everlasting with God.

That gift was made known to us over 2,000 years ago when Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem. This is the miracle; the miracle of Immanuel. That is what we celebrate in this month's issue of ONE.

Blessings & Merry Christmas.

Kevin

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SUBMISSIONS

ONE and the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to one@dailynews.net.

The ECMA advisory board will choose appropriate and timely submissions for publication.

The columns in ONE represent the views of the author.

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On the cover:
The winner of this year's coloring contest with the theme "Follow the Star" was submitted by Dominic Hernandez, 7, a second-grader from Celebration Community Church.



The end of the reading plan is here — for 2015

The end of 2015 is in sight, and so is this year's ONE Bible reading plan. I sincerely hope that you've enjoyed it, but even more that you've grown from what you have read. This has been an amazing year in many ways. I've never enjoyed reading the Old Testament as much as I have these past three years. A special "thank you" to the International Bible Society (Biblica) for developing and publishing this "Books of the Bible" reading strategy.

As we finish reading the Old Testament we will conclude with two books that are difficult to place within the standard categories of the Old Testament works; Esther and Daniel. Both of these books have engaging

and life-changing narratives within their pages. The book of Esther reminds us God has a purpose for every person. And we discover the entrapments of pride, and the futility of fighting God along the way. Daniel is a most interesting book,

because it contains both prophetic and historic literature. It communicates the life of a truly amazing man. Daniel became an indispensable advisor to those who enslaved him. Daniel

demonstrated how to remain faithful to God despite persecution; a lesson that many experience in our lifetime.

It will be interesting to read the book of Daniel along side our New Testament readings this month: the book of Revelation.

Pastor Steve Dinkel



Bible Reading Plan

DECEMBER

| | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--------|
| 1..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nemehiah 12..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 1 |
| 2..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nemehiah 13..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 2 |
| 3..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Esther 1..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 3 |
| 4..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Esther 2..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 4 |
| 5 & 6..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Weekend Review | | |
| 7..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Esther 3..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 5 |
| 8..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Esther 4..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 6 |
| 9..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Esther 5..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 7 |
| 10..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Esther 6..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 8 |
| 11..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Esther 7..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 9 |
| 12 & 13..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Weekend Review | | |
| 14..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Esther 8..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 10 |
| 15..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Esther 9-10..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 11 |
| 16..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 1..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 12 |

| | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|--------|
| 17..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 2..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 13 |
| 18..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 3..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 14 |
| 19 & 20..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Weekend Review | | |
| 21..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 4..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 15 |
| 22..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 5..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 16 |
| 23..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 6..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 17 |
| 24..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 7..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 18 |
| 25..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 8..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 19 |
| 26 & 27..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Weekend Review | | |
| 28..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 9..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 20 |
| 29..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 10..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 21 |
| 30..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 11..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rev 22 |
| 31..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Daniel 12..... | | |

Both books contain very visual language. I would encourage you to use a study Bible as you read through these books. Theologians and commentators can help you understand the very different language in these books. It might take a bit more time to navigate this month's readings, but I encourage you to take the extra time; you will be glad you did.

As we finish this year I want to take these last few sentences to say "thank you" for reading along with me this year. It is an absolute honor to share thoughts and ideas with you each month. I will look forward to reading through the Bible with you again in 2016. Until then, Merry Christmas! May the light of Christ brighten your hearts as you continue to study God's Word.



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THE ANGEL VISITS MARY — LUKE 1:26-38

The Annual Christmas Wars began early this year, weeks before Thanksgiving, with of all things, a red cup. Each year there is a new focus of Christian outrage. The battle cry “Merry Christmas” is declared the only greeting which may be heard from October to January. Honestly it makes me exhausted.

I cherish the season of Thanksgiving and the hushed expectant hope of the four-week season of Advent. I celebrate Christmas-tide and Epiphany, the revelation of God’s

Incarnation in Jesus, the Christ Child. I often offer the greeting of “Blessed Holidays” or “Happy Holidays” from November through Epiphany. After all, Christians observe more than Dec 25th as deeply holy days of gratitude to God and longing preparation for the coming of Jesus, the incarnation of God’s unfailing love for the world. These are holy times of hopeful preparation and waiting with trust for what God is doing in our lives and our world, not just in our gift buying, merry-making and feasts.



The Rev. Celeste Lasich

First Presbyterian

Perhaps rather than Christmas consumerism and Christmas outrage, throughout this season Mary might be our guide and sister, one who models for us a pattern of life long Christmas expectancy and Christmas response.

Paying attention to Mary as she responds to the angel’s declaration might offer a way to experience this season of holy days as a way of life, rather than the relentless countdown of “shopping days until Christmas.”

Luke’s account of the announcement by the angel Gabriel of the coming of the Son of God — also known as the annunciation of Mary — points to the message of Christmas much deeper than being “merry.” Do not fear. Nothing is impossible with God. I know I need to hear those gospel truths every day, not just once a year.

Confused and disturbed by the angel’s shocking announcement, Mary reasonably questions “How can this happen?” I suspect many of us ask that question often, as we consider how our culture is so far

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!” Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.” The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.” Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her. (New Living Translation)

from God’s vision of peace and good will. Even so, Mary is still open to God working in and through her, even when the ways may be bewildering. Mary is able to wait,

to be present to the events unfolding. She doesn’t have to control or force God’s hand.

Rather than react with outrage at this proclamation of God’s intention, Mary is willing to accept and face the unexpected. Mary has the courage to ask questions without having to receive immediate answers. She is able to respond with trust because she already knows God’s regard and care. Mary knows she is part of something greater than her own immediate wants or desires. Most importantly, she knows she is not alone.

Mary dares to fully commit to align her will with God: “I am the Lord’s servant. Here am I.” Like the prophets of old, she commits herself to the God who is always making things new in unexpected ways. At the same time, she gives herself over to a new way of being, willing to imagine a future beyond her present, to embrace an identity of which she has little knowledge or understanding but to which she is willing to commit fully and faithfully.

This season perhaps we might take our Christmas cues from Mary, rather than the manufactures of outrage. Happy and Blessed Holidays!

Mary Visits Elizabeth — Luke 1:39-45

When I was given my assignment for the December issue, I began to read more about Mary and Elizabeth. I found references about them in books I have in my Collection: “Women of the Bible” (American Bible Society), “Women of the Bible — Devotional” by Ann Spangler and Jean E. Syswerda, and Stonecroft Bible Study “Following Jesus with Luke”.

The angel had whispered in Mary’s ear the secret that her older cousin was also with child. Almost immediately, she left to visit Elizabeth.

Mary was from a poor family in an obscure village in Galilee, and she traveled 60 miles to where Elizabeth lived. I wonder just how Mary made the trip. There was no mention of who went with her or how they traveled.

When Mary reached Elizabeth’s home, she was welcomed by the older woman. When Mary spoke, Elizabeth felt her unborn baby leap inside her and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. She said, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear. I am so favored the

mother of our Lord’s Son has come to visit me.”

Both women experienced a divine happening- they were witness to the fact “nothing is impossible with God.” God is all powerful, His word will come true whether it seems possible or not. Mary believed it would be as the angel said. God was pleased.

Opal Flinn



St. John Lutheran, Ellis

Mary and Elizabeth were relatives. They had always known each other, but they were from different generations. Suddenly, they were sharing a similar unique event.

No other women alive could possibly understand the turn their lives had taken. They must have drawn tremendous comfort and encouragement from each

other.

The angel had appeared only to Mary (not her parents or Joseph), so as far as anyone knew, Mary was pregnant and unmarried, an offense worthy of death in her culture. Not just her reputation was at stake, but also her life. Can you imagine the relief Mary experienced when Elizabeth

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” (Revised Standard Version)

acknowledged her divine pregnancy? How good of God to lead her to visit the only woman in the entire world who could know what had happened to her!

What a joyful time these two women must have had together! They had been singled out by God in such a miraculous way.

I enjoyed reading again about Mary and Elizabeth and I will remember nothing is impossible for God. We must believe and worship the One for whom nothing is impossible.

MARY'S SONG — LUKE 1:46-56

In the gospel of Luke, right before Mary utters these beautiful words of praise to God, Elizabeth blesses Mary and the baby in her womb. Now Mary, who has shown great faithfulness to God and has made room for him in her heart and in her body as a faithful Jew, cannot help but glorify God to the depths of her soul.

The Magnificat, also known as the Song of Mary, holds a special place in my heart. In my Anglican/Episcopal tradition, the Magnificat

is spoken or chanted during the daily office of Evening Prayer, found in the Book of Common Prayer. The Song of Mary is believed to be one of the oldest hymns of the Christian Church. Whenever I read or sing this song of praise, it connects me to Mary, to the earliest church, to Christians around the world today, and ultimately to God.

This passage reminds me of God's faithfulness to us, his people. As Mary declares, what God has fulfilled – God's redeeming work in the world - is not something of the future, but something that has been

done already. These are words of ultimate faith. She reminds us that God keeps His promises, like those he promised to her ancestor, Abraham, when God established his covenant with Israel.

Mary's words proclaim for herself – and for us - God's goodness and mercy. She



Casey
Rohleder

St. Michael's
Episcopal

says, "the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name." Her words remind me that the Mighty One has done great things for me, too. In the gift of God's son born into the world, in the gift

of God's church, in the gifts of family and friends. In the gift of a calling to ordained life. In the gift of God's loving presence even in the midst of the most painful times of my life.

In this season of gift-giving and gift-getting, which reminds us of God's love present in the love we share with people in our lives, it is worthwhile to spend some time considering where we have experienced God's faithfulness in the last year and then give God thanks for faithfulness. As I buy and wrap gifts and put them under the tree,

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

(New Revised Standard Version)

world would suggest. While the world might esteem the rich and powerful, God exults the lowly and feeds the hungry. That God would ask a woman – considered among the "least of these" in first-century Palestine – to be the vessel of God's redeeming love.

Love begets love.

In this liturgical season of Advent, and in the seasons of Christmas and Epiphany that follow, it is a good time to reflect upon how well we truly love who and what God loves. How are our hearts and actions aligned with the heart of God? Believe me, sometimes it is easier to disregard or pay lip service to "the least of these", particularly in these worrisome and polarized times. I feel helpless, stretched too thin, distracted. Is that how God calls his children to be? No way. Like God, we are called to lift up the lowly, feed the hungry, heal the sick, clothe the naked, protect the widow and orphan. To seek justice and love mercy. That is how we participate in God's ongoing faithfulness to the world. To be more like Mary, who in the end lost her son, Jesus, so that all might live.

Great is Thy Faithfulness, Lord Unto Me.

The Birth of Jesus — Luke 2:1-7

Christmas seems to come in waves each year. Beginning with the day after the Thanksgiving holiday known as 'Black Friday' (a dubious term that probably describes the event better than it should) a frenetic pace of overspending and stress is too often accompanied by a feeling of being overwhelmed by unrealistic expectations. Elaborate family gatherings, seasonal parties (that all too often don't reflect the true "reason-for-the-season") coupled with the cultural traditions that run deep and wide, we too often find that Christmas is simply a superficial blur. It's easy for me to become cynical and well... for lack of a more descriptive term.... a Grinch.

But then something remarkable happens, and I must admit, over the years, it's hap-

pened from a number of sources, through a number of people, in a number of ways. The first time I recall it happening, I was about 5 years old. I was mostly concerned about what Santa was bringing me for Christmas, and that it was at least equal-to or greater-than what my older brother was getting.



The Rev.
Mike Rose

First United
Methodist

My Mom had forced me into the Children's Christmas pageant at the small Methodist church we attended in Tucumcari, New Mexico. The sheer embarrassment of it all was that I was to play Joseph, the earthly father

of the baby Jesus. Not only would I appear on stage in a bathrobe with a towel wrapped around my head, but I'd also have to hold and rock a "baby doll"- baby Jesus, something no self-respecting 5 year old cowboy could ever quite live down. (The saving grace

was that a very cute 5 year old Palley Jester played Mary....) But that night, when the curtain came up for the final scene with me in my bathrobe and towel headdress, holding the doll, I heard the words from Luke 2:1-7 being read, and my shame turned to something different.

Looking down at the doll, it happened.... and almost 55 years later, I still remember it vividly. For the first time, I got it. It wasn't about Santa or how much loot I was going to get. It wasn't about a 5-year old cowboy dressed in a bathrobe with a towel wrapped around his head holding a doll or even playing opposite a cute 5 year old Mary.

Christmas was about the Savior of the World, born in a humble stable, and the world would never be the same. Nor would I. Something happened inside me that I can't quite describe.

Over the years, I've had many other remarkable Christmas experiences, but that

Now it came to pass in those days, there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to enrol themselves, every one to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David; to enrol himself with Mary, who was betrothed to him, being great with child. And it came to pass, while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

(American Standard Version)

one when I was 5 years old left an indelible impression on me that altered my life. May you have a remarkable Christmas experience as you read the true story of Christmas this year.

THE ANGELS APPEAR TO THE SHEPHERDS — LUKE 2:8-14

Think back to the last time you were outdoors, far from town, at night, with no artificial light, just you and the stars and moon. You are not alone. You have perhaps a few family or friends, or in this case “co-workers” who are shepherds. The main job of shepherds is to protect the sheep. The second main job is to herd the sheep to the pasture where they can graze, and to the water they can drink.

Imagine suddenly, bright light creatures that look like humans with wings appear. And those creatures say “fear not!” The angel mentioned is actually very perceptive in understanding how you and I “would” be “startled!” The “startle”

response is one of fear. What is going on?

This is a life-changing event, not just for those shepherds, but for all of humanity, past, present, and those who will come for generations after us, when we are remembered no more.

This passage mirrors other times in the Bible when angels appear to humans. “Fear not” is usually the first thing they say, and that is for good reasons. In that “startle mode” you and I would be thinking about fleeing or defending ourselves and our flock from harm. We don’t like to be startled.

The angel makes an announcement of great joy, and tells the shepherds what “signs” to look for when they find the

baby. The huge advantage those shepherds had over us today is that life was *not* full of bombardments from “announcements.” Today we cannot escape all of the “announcements.” Announcements appeal for our vote, appeal to our greed, appeal to our wallet to purchase “stuff,” appeal for gullibility to ploys (by promising things that can’t be delivered, by pretending to know things that cannot be known because they are genuine mysteries). We are hammered with announcements every day, but it was not always so. At the time of this great happening, there was no announcement overload.

Perhaps this story can remind us in the Advent Season to be silent, to be still, to rest, and to say “enough” to announcements that do not matter, to make room

That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and they became very frightened. The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I am bringing you good news that will be a great joy to all the people. Today your Savior was born in the town of David. He is Christ, the Lord. This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in pieces of cloth and lying in a feeding box.”

Then a very large group of angels from heaven joined the first angel, praising God and saying:

“Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace among the people who please God.”

(New Century Version)

in our hearts for the one announcement that really does matter.



Father
Harvey Hillin

St. Michaels
Episcopal

The Shepherds Respond – Luke 2:15-20

In this time of hustle and bustle, I encourage you to take a moment to sit in silence and reflect on the story of Jesus’ birth. So I am glad you are taking the time to read this article. This scene, with the shepherds, is the scene that many Christmas crèches and nativity scenes are made of. What would you do, if you were at work, and angels appeared to you telling you that you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger? Would you respond quickly like the shepherds did, hurrying to find their way to Mary and Joseph? Would you take your time, or would you even believe that you had seen angels?

In our world, there are many things that make us wonder. We wonder how will survive the “pre-Christmas” chaos. We wonder how we will afford gifts to those we want to share with. And we wonder how we will fit in seeing all our loved ones during the holiday season. But I wonder, if this year we can take a step back and wonder at the glory of God. The birth of Jesus is a magnificent story filled with love. It reminds one

When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.”

So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.

And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

(New American Standard Bible)

of God’s love for the world. Jesus was born to be the Savior of the world (Luke 2:11). And in being the Savior, he shares God’s love with all he met.

So as you put out your Christmas crèches and nativity scenes this year, I encourage you to stop and reflect on all the joys God has given you this Advent season. And as I walk by my cabinet of crèches and nativity scenes, I will stop and say a prayer



Pastor
Marie Sager

Trinity
Lutheran



for you all here in Hays, who have welcomed me as a new pastor in town.

Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus Christ, your Son into this world. In this Advent season may we be like Mary

and treasure all that we have, knowing that your love surrounds us. We glorify and praise your holy name. We pray all this in the name of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.

Jesus Presented in the Temple — Luke 2:21-24

For having only a few short lines, this reading contains several important lessons. It takes place about 40 days after Jesus' birth, and the family is able to go to the temple for this special ceremony. This was the amount of time, determined by the Jewish leaders, that it took for a woman to be clean again after childbirth. It would have been a much anticipated day, when Jesus is circumcised, named, and dedicated to God—and offerings were made to God.

Mary and Joseph listened to what the angel said and glorified God by calling their son Jesus, as instructed, thus showing their willingness to follow where God leads them. They dedicated Jesus to the Lord because it was customary for the firstborn, but also because he already was the Lord's. Mary had carried the child and she and Joseph would raise him, but they knew who his true father was and to whom he belonged.

Lastly, they make a sacrificial offering of two doves or pigeons. All families made sacrifices when they came to the temple for this

special day, but what they sacrificed tells us something about this family. The two doves or pigeons were the typical sacrifice for poor families. Even during this time, when Jesus is being lifted to God, and named according to what the angel proclaimed, we are reminded that this holy child was born in a stable to poor parents. Yes, we will know him as the "King of Kings," but here we are reminded of his lowly stature in this world.

In the Lutheran tradition, we do not have a naming ceremony, a special ceremony or rite for circumcision, and we do not make animal sacrifices, but we do have a way to dedicate our children to the Lord, through baptism. When children are baptized, their parents, sponsors, and congregation members all make promises to raise them up in the church, bring them to worship, and guide them through the scriptures. This is our way of ensuring that these children are dedicated to God. During the holiday season, when we celebrate the birth and dedication of a child named Jesus, take time

to remember your own baptism, or that of someone you love. Remember ways in which others helped you to grow into your faith, remember ways in which you help to guide the children in your life, and remember that you belong to the Lord.

Many of us have traditions that include helping the poor during the holidays. Do you pick an angel off the Angel Trees and buy a present for a child in need? Do you buy extra groceries for a friend in need, or to donate to the area food pantries? Do you give money to the Salvation Army bell-ringers? Whenever you can help those less fortunate, remember, you are helping Christ. I know it can be hard, but this is a tradition we should continue throughout the year. We talk about "keeping Christ in Christmas," but why not keep Christmas all year long?

I am reminded of Matthew 25:40, where Jesus is speaking about "the least of these." Whether we like to admit it or not, there are homeless people in Hays. There are families and children suffering every day from lack of food, proper clothing, appropriate shelter, etc. Instead of turning a blind eye, thinking "just, get a job," try to picture that person as

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

(New International Version)

what they are, a child of God, a reflection of Jesus. Even if you can't give much, even acknowledging them as a person, someone of worth, goes a long way. Even if you cannot invite them to stay with your family, or buy them a Greyhound ticket to their next stop, maybe you can invite them to share a meal at Wendy's, or take them into Wal-Mart to pick out a few items they need most. When we see those less fortunate as children of God, someone named and claimed by God, we remember to treat them with respect, and sometimes, that is a rare moment for "the least of these."

SIMEON SEES JESUS — LUKE 2:25-32

In Jerusalem lived a man named Simeon who was a good man and godly. He was waiting for the time when God would take away Israel's sorrow, and the Holy Spirit was in him. Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he saw the Christ promised by the Lord. The Spirit led Simeon to the Temple. When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the Temple to do what the law said they must do, Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God: "Now, Lord, you can let me, your servant, die in peace as you said. With my own eyes I have seen your salvation, which you prepared before all people. It is a light for the non-Jewish people to see and an honor for your people, the Israelites." (New Century Version)

Good things come to those who wait. That is true of Simeon, who finally sees the baby Jesus after waiting in the temple for many years for the Messiah to appear. That is true of us as we look toward the celebration of Christmas. It is true; not simply in a secular sense, but especially in a spiritual sense. We Christians are getting ready for the great yearly celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. That is the good thing for which we wait. There is thus a sense of eager expectation this time of year. Simeon is a good role model for Christians living in this season filled with expectation. We notice that Simeon waits in three ways: in worship, in the Spirit, and in the promise. We take this as an example for ourselves.

First of all, Simeon is devout, attending to the things of God in the House of God. Thus he waits in worship. We too attend worship with fellow

Christians as we move toward Christmas. Some people say they do not need to attend worship to be a Christian. An old analogy puts this attitude in perspective. According to the analogy, this is like saying a coal can burn all by itself. The coal receives its fire from outside itself. The coal, once lit, may smolder awhile on the hearth, but without any connection with the heat source and the other coals in the fire, whatever is burning in it will soon grow cold and the flame in it will die. To keep the flame of faith alive in us, we will want to wait for the Lord in the Lord's House in worship, like Simeon.

Secondly, Simeon listens to the Spirit that teaches him of the Messiah and creates in his heart a longing to see his appearance. He receives this teaching, and the Spirit that accompanies it, in the House of God as he hears the Word of God there. This Word is not mere language but is

Anna Towns

Trinity Lutheran



Deacon Scott Watford

St. Nicholas of Myra



SIMEON'S BLESSING — LUKE 2:33-35

The message of Christmas is not all about peace and joy. Indeed, the boy, Jesus, was destined to be God's salvation for the whole world, a wondrous, marvelous, even mysterious reality. Yet he would also bring division and pain. He would be the dividing line of history. We like to dance around this issue because the trend in our society is to be inclusive, tolerant, open-minded. Whether a person agrees or not, likes it or not, finds it fair or not — is not the point of Simeon's prophetic blessing. The point is, Jesus is a dividing line that requires people line up on one side or the other. In Jesus, God draws a dividing line for each and every person and asks them to stand with Him or reject His offer of by their choice.

Luke tells us that Jesus' parents wondered at the things spoken concerning him, this six-week old baby in whom Simeon sees the light of God's salvation now

present for all nations. But Simeon was not done. His additional words provide a sobering counterpoint. This one is set for the falling and rising again of many in Israel.

Jesus' ministry will be uncomfortable and divisive. As he provokes opposition people will be obliged to take sides (that the reasonings of many hearts may be revealed), and there will be those who fall as well as those who rise.

Some will respond and others will oppose. That means that he will be a sign that will be spoken against. People will contend against and about Jesus.

The road to God's salvation promise-fulfillment through Jesus is not smooth. To identify with Jesus will bring pain, because many will reject him. This rejection explains Simeon's reference to a sword piercing through Mary's soul. She will feel a mother's pain as she watches her son go his own way and suffer rejection, but the sword also reflects the pain anyone

who identifies with Jesus feels as the world rejects what Jesus has to offer. Simeon's remark to Mary is an aside, but an important one, since it shows that identifying with Jesus has painful personal consequences.

Simeon's words, with their strikingly contrasted themes of joy (2:29—32) and foreboding (2:34—35), offer a micro-cosm of the paradox of the gospel, which brings both joy and pain, and in which the triumphant fulfillment of God's loving purpose is achieved through the rejection and death of his Son.

Simeon's words also present Jesus as God's dividing line of a person's destiny. Jesus is the dividing line of humanity. The continental divide is a drainage divide on one side of the divide feeds into one ocean and the basin on the other side feeds into a different ocean. It is a "line" where a few feet separate the destiny of raindrops falling on one side or the other. It is one divide but it determines fate either way. Jesus is like that dividing line. Accepting him or rejecting him deter-

And Joseph and his mother were wondering at the things spoken concerning him, and Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, 'Lo, this one is set for the falling and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign spoken against— (and also thine own soul shall a sword pass through)—that the reasonings of many hearts may be revealed.'

(Young's Literal Translation)

mines one's destiny, toward God or away from God.

Jesus is the dividing line. The debate continues. As C. S. Lewis reasoned, a person who made the claims that Jesus made was either a liar, claiming to be God but knowing he wasn't; a lunatic, actually thinking that he was God; or the one and only God in the flesh, just as he claimed to be.

Jesus is the dividing line. Is he your God? Your Lord? Your Savior? Or just an interesting figure in history who provided some great stories, much like Aesop's fables? You have to choose.



The Rev.
Ken Ediger

North Oak
Community
Church

SIMEON, from 7

It involves an ever deepening personal relationship with Jesus. Our expectation about the Christmas celebration is framed by a life of action inspired by our knowledge of, acceptance of, and trust in, the Christ, whose coming we celebrate. In this, we are

like Simeon.

In conclusion, good things come to those who wait. Every child knows that this time of year. Christmas is anticipated eagerly and is filled with the promise of joy. So it is for Christians who await yet

another celebration of the birth of Jesus. This waiting is filled with increasing joy and deepening hope and assurance in Jesus Christ that comes to us in worship. It is full of the promise contained in the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit that

accompanies the Word. Our hope is not disappointed. The long expected Messiah has appeared in the baby Jesus. Simeon is a good example of what it means to live in the expectation of the fulfillment of this truth celebrated at Christmas.

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Imagine if Jesus had been born in "A galaxy far, far away..." That's what you'll experience when the youth of Hays Christian Church put on the play *Galaxy Wars*. Children and teens put on familiar costumes and transport us to the time of the birth of the Child of Promise. The Child of Promise is the one promised by the Prophecy long ago, which states that a child will be born who will defeat the dark side once and for all. Many have studied the Prophecy along the way; some want to worship the child, others want to destroy him. See what happens in this

action-packed adventure for all ages!

Galaxy Wars will be performed at 7 p.m. Dec. 4, and as part of the worship service at 10:45 a.m. Dec. 6.

The church is located at 22nd and Marshall in Hays. Admission is free and all are welcome.

♦ ♦ ♦

First Presbyterian

Church Christmas schedule

Dec. 6 — Children's Christmas Program, "A Christmas to Believe In" at Trinity Lutheran Church at 10:15 a.m.

Dec. 12 — Luth-terian Youth Group Presents The Living Nativity, a walk-

through or drive-through event. 6:00-7:30 p.m. at Trinity Lutheran Church

Dec. 13th — Luth-terian Youth Group Presents The Living Nativity, a walk-through or drive-through event 6 to 7:30 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church

Dec. 20 — Christmas Cantata, during worship at 10 a.m.

Dec. 20 — Service of the Longest Night at 7 p.m.

Dec. 24 — Christmas Eve Communion Service at 7 p.m.

Regular Worship is Sunday at 10 a.m.

Anna Sees Jesus – Luke 2:36-38

Although Anna is part of the Christmas story, the truths she lived out are an inspiration and model for us to follow as we consider the upcoming New Year and all the opportunities it holds. Why did Anna succeed under adverse circumstances when so many others did not? How did she become a prominent figure in the Christmas story?

Anna Learned To Seek God Daily. Verse 37 says, “She never left the temple.” She never fell away or became faithless. She kept trusting and obeying.

Anna who had been widowed for a long time believed and depended upon God not only to supply her every need but also to use her life for his glory. She dwelt with Christ and talked to him each day as she would her own husband if he were still living. Jesus Christ would later tell us in John 15:4 the secret Anna discovered: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you

abide in Me.” Let me ask you, “Are you abiding in him? It really is no secret what God can do. What he has done for Anna, he will do for you.

Anna Was A Servant. What an aspiration for us to achieve. The Scripture says Anna was “serving night and day”.

She served God and others and remained in a state of readiness for opportunities the Lord would bring her way.

Like Jesus, she saw her purpose to serve not to be served. Verse 37 says

Anna served night and day “with fastings and prayers.” Notice the emphasis placed on “fastings and prayers” as a significant type of service in the eyes of God. Our enemy, the devil would have us think it is the least form of service when the battle is actually won on our knees. Anna’s life serves well as an example because she was continuously seeking and asking, the Lord on behalf of others. She truly valued others more highly than herself.

There was also a prophet named Anna. She was the daughter of Penuel from the tribe of Asher. Anna was very old. After getting married, she lived with her husband seven years. Then she was a widow until she was. She never left the temple. She worshiped night and day, praying and going without eating.

Anna came up to Jesus’ family at that very moment. She gave thanks to God. And she spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the time when Jerusalem would be set free.

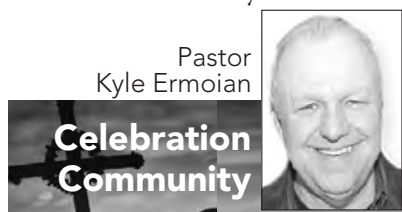
(New International Reader’s Version)

Anna Had A Thankful Heart. She learned to see people and circumstances through the eyes of a merciful and gracious God. God granted her eyes to see and ears to hear. Luke says, “At that very moment she (Anna) came up and began giving thanks to God.” Because Anna readily represented to others the truth and grace found in Christ; because she abided daily in Christ, she saw what only the prophet Simeon had the joy of touching that day. Amongst all the religious leaders in the Temple; amongst all the scribes and

Pharisees, only Anna and Simeon were able to see and touch the Messiah. Anna knew this Christ child was her source of joy and happiness.

Therefore, she could in everything give thanks. Like the writer of Hebrews, Anna would have said to us, “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” Hebrews 13:15-16

Finally, Anna Was A Witness For Jesus Christ. Anna sought the Lord for witnessing and teaching opportunities each day with those looking for the light of the world. Her daily prayer was for the Lord to bring across her path someone who needed a healing touch from the Lord – someone looking for deliverance from the penalty of sin and willing to accept the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Anna’s example of faithfulness is a wonderful model for how we should live.



Pastor
Kyle Ermoian

Jesus Grows in the Grace of the Lord – Luke 2:39-40

This passage in Luke summarizes nearly the next 30 years of Jesus’ life. The only account of his childhood or teen years comes later in the chapter, when his parents lose him because he stayed behind in the temple “sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions.” (2:46). The chapter finishes with verse 52: “Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.”

There is much speculation about what Jesus did or did not do during this time. I’m not going to join in the debate, other than to say that this was probably an ordinary time in Jesus’ life. He learned

alongside the other boys of his village. He played with his brothers and sisters. He studied the trade of his father, Joseph, and learned how to be a carpenter. It was rather,

well, ordinary.

Jesus’ extraordinary time was certainly the 3 years of his public

ministry. But that was only 10% of his life! Before that time, Jesus spent time as a human being living a human life. Certainly he was still divine and still God incarnate, but he was simply living and preparing for his future.

Sometimes I think that we focus so much on the extraordinary times in life (10%), that

we forget that the ordinary times (90%) are just as, if not more, important. If we treat the ordinary times as unimportant, or as just times to “get through,” we miss what God has for us; we miss the joys of normalness. If we are too focused on getting to our next extraordinary, we miss the spectacularly ordinary that is right before us.

Imagine if you only got to see a child on the special days of his or her life. Of course you would be there for the birth, and then you’d be there for birthdays, maybe first steps or first lost tooth, graduation, marriage, and the birth of a first child. Certainly there are more extraordinary times, but you get the picture.

How fulfilling and meaningful would your relationship with that child actually be?

When Joseph and Mary had finished doing all that was required by the law of the Lord, they returned to their home town of Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom, and God’s blessings were upon him. (Good News Translation)

You would miss out on the days leading up to the birthday, when the planning and anticipation set in. You’d miss the days of wiggling that tooth and her trying to eat hard foods to pop that thing loose. You’d miss the courtship and relationship building that takes place before marriage. You’d also miss some things that you might be OK to miss — sleepless nights, dirty diapers, bad grades, a car accident — but really, would you trade those moments either?

The point is that life is

more than just the highs and lows. It is most of the time lived in-between, in ordinary time. What we do in that ordinary time sets up how we will react and respond in those highs and lows, and without that middle ground, we’re not in a place where we can appreciate the others.

I would encourage you this Christmas season to definitely celebrate the extraordinary times of the season — maybe it’s a first Christmas for someone or with someone you love — but don’t neglect the ordinary times.

Don’t be discouraged if you haven’t felt like your life is spectacular or outstanding lately — ordinary time is equally as important. That’s when we are truly molded into the men and women we will be during the other times.



Pastor
Kevin Daniels

Message at the Top: Say you'll remember me

A thought that is important to dwell on for people involved in serious thinking about life is the rather deep consideration of how we want to be remembered after we leave. It is a thought that can guide how we act and what we say during the situation itself, whatever it is. If say, I will not be part of the particular set of circumstances in which I am currently involved, how will people talk and think about me after I leave?

Jesus had the thought as he neared the end of his life. He knew that his Apostles and followers would want to stay in contact with him somehow, continue to make him part of their lives, continue to look to him for guidance. At the Last Supper, when he knew that the Apostles would very shortly be completely lost with regard to what to do, he wanted to say

to them that he would always be present to them. All they had to do was remember that they could celebrate his presence by a simple act, what many religions have come to call the Eucharist.

When the hour came, Jesus took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I shall not eat it again until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God." ... Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you" (Luke 22:14-20).

It is an interesting thought when one applies it to a love and



dating situation, as Taylor Swift does in her song "Wildest Dreams." Let's say the situation is not working out, and the person knows that he/she will move on as they try to discover further romantic love in his/her life. How does a person want their present "significant other" to think of them when they leave? Is it a good image that they have? The lady in the relationship has broken up with the man, and she is thinking about how he is going to feel about her when she leaves, saying that she wants to be remembered a certain way.

"He said 'Let's get out of this

town, drive out of the city, away from the crowds.' I thought heaven can't help me now. Nothing lasts forever, but this is gonna take me down. He's so tall and handsome. I can see the end as it begins. My one condition is: say you'll remember me standing in a nice dress, staring at the sunset, red lips and rosy cheeks. Say you'll see me again, even if it's just in your wildest dreams."

The application of the song to real life includes romantic involvement. Stated as a fact, it reads that if we want to be thought of in a good way after we leave, we will be very concerned about what we do before we leave. If we want to be thought of well or spoken of well after we leave, we must try to be the type of person who is good and decent during the time we are present.

Jesus knew that those who loved him would want him to remain with them. He was remembered well because he cared for people during his time with him. Such is a lesson that all of us should learn.

Good and gracious God, Your Son has remained with us in our belief of His Presence with us now. Give us not only the grace to respect Him for this gift, but the grace to also learn how we want to be remembered when we leave a situation. Be with us, we pray.

THE GOSPELS IN FR. MIKE'S TOP 5 (as of Nov. 15)

- 1 - "Wildest Dreams" / Taylor Swift Luke 22:14-20
- 2 - "Stitches" / Shawn Mendes Luke 22:39-44
- 3 - "Hotline Bling" / Drake Luke 18:1-8
- 4 - "What Do You Mean" / Justin Bieber John 18:37-38a
- 5 - "Here" / Alessia Cara Matthew 11:28-30



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Fr. Jarett Konrade

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Reconciliation: Saturday at 4:00 PM

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Vigil Mass Dec 7 - 5:30 PM English

Holy Day Dec 8 - 8:00 AM English
12:15 PM English

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December 12 - Mass - 7:00 PM



Posadas - December 16 through 23 - 7:00PM

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CHRISTMAS COLORING CONTEST

Below are the runners-up in this year's ECMA coloring contest. The theme was "Follow the Star."



Kelly Parr, sixth grade, Trinity Lutheran Church.



Emma Rae Theresa Rupp, fourth grade, St. Fidelis.



Kamryn Daniels, second grade, Hays Christian Church.



Landon Schmidtberger, fourth grade, St. Ann-Walker.