

St. John's Lutheran Church NEWSLETTER

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“THE SEASON BEFORE THE SEASON”

A few years ago, right after Thanksgiving, a man received a letter sent out by a good friend. It was his friend's annual Christmas greeting. Toward the end of his beautifully composed thoughts, he spoke about the days of Advent ahead. Almost as a warning, it seemed, he wrote, “Observe them carefully.”

The man never forgot his friend's words. When the days of Advent rolled around each year, he would remember his friend's earnest appeal. “Observe them carefully.” Advent is the season before the season. There's no question that the season coming is Christmas. Emotionally, it's the biggest celebration we engage in as Christians—even though our theology and liturgy point to Easter as the ultimate festival. Then, too, Christmas is THE celebration that can make or break us economically, whether as customers or merchants. It's simply the biggest day around for almost everyone. We put a lot of stock in Christmas!

Because of this, it's good advice to observe carefully the days that lead up to Christmas. It would be a shame to prepare poorly—or lightly—for this great festival. More sadly, it would be a total shame if we missed the whole point of Christmas, hence this friend's warning, “Observe them carefully!” Therefore we have this “season before the season.” Advent is the time to observe carefully the great season of Christmas!

Christmas is coming soon, and this “season before the season” urges us to watch, wake, be ready, prepare, and observe these days carefully. But what is it that we are to be so careful about during this season before the season?

During this season of Advent, we are to become aware that the coming season, Christmas, is never complete in and of itself. The Christmas season only has a fully beneficial meaning for us as we sense and experience its fulfillment during the seasons of Lent and Easter. To put it in visual terms, Advent calls us to see the cross of Jesus hovering over the manger. The joy of the Christmas season comes to its fullness after repentance over our sins and trust in the forgiveness of the cross and the victory of the open tomb. As we gaze into the quiet skies of a Christmas silent night, we need to discern a triumphant, risen Savior coming toward us in victory on the Last Day.

This season of Advent calls us to discern very carefully and precisely what it is about the coming season of Christmas that can bring us to such unlimited and genuine inner joy.

This is another way of asking, “What really is the Gospel of Christmas?” For some, the gospel during the coming weeks will be the Christmas spirit charmingly presented in irresistible characters such as the Grinch, Ebenezer Scrooge, or Santa Claus. This false gospel leaves us as soon as we take down all the decorations. Then we are left in the glare of the same troubled relationships that burdened us before.

For others, the gospel of the coming season will arrive in the form of “baby Jesus.” Parents will openly talk about Him. Even distinguished entertainers will touchingly share with us the songs and poetry about this little stranger. It is as though during an encounter with baby Jesus we will be magically transformed. Somehow cold hearts will be melted. The hard side of our behavior will be softened in response to the appeal, “Come on, it's Christmas!”

These gospels are difficult to reject precisely because they feel so right. But the warning of Advent comes to say, “Keep watch, stay awake!” The profound joy that the Christian has springs from a richer and fuller Gospel than Christmas spirit or family tradition or isolated scenes involving baby Jesus. It is a Gospel that also devastates the other quaint, sentimental Christmas “gospels.” This is a Gospel about the King of kings and Lord of lords. The season of Advent invites us to meet the awesome Son of God, Who came from the Father in the mystery of the virgin birth. The season of Advent invites us to see Christ Jesus among us in the humiliation of a crude and drafty manger. The season of Advent invites us to see Him as being materially poor and forced to flee Bethlehem while still an infant. The season of Advent invites us to see Him as the Savior of the world, crucified, died, buried, and risen again, seated at the Father's right hand until He comes again in all His divine glory. This Christ of the Nativity and Lent and Easter brings a joy so full and embracing that heaven itself echoes with jubilation. This is the full and complete Christmas Gospel!

This season before the season warns us not to miss any of that! Do not miss the joy that reaches deep within you. This joy of your salvation that changes everything: history, hearts, and homes. Do not miss the Gospel that makes us new people! For it is the cross of Jesus Christ that forgives our sins. His blood cleanses our hearts. Raised with Him by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are overtaken by a living Easter faith that instills in us a joyful determination to live as the people of God.

HOLIDAY WORSHIP SCHEDULE

**CANDLELIGHT
CHRISTMAS
EVE**
at 7:00 p.m.



CANDLELIGHT
SERVICE



**CHRISTMAS DAY
Communion
Service**
at 10:00 a.m.

For unto us a child is born,
to us a son is given ...
Isaiah 9:6

ADVENT CANDLELIGHT SUPPER

On Sunday,
December 3rd, you
and your family and
friends are invited to begin the Ad-
vent Season with St. John's Annu-
al Candlelight
Supper and devotion beginning at
5:00 p.m. This year's theme is *A
Luther's Christmas*. The WINGS
will prepare a stuffed chicken
breast chicken meal. Chicken
nuggets will be available for
children.

You can also call 568-1417 to
make reservations.

DECORATING the CHURCH

for Christmas will happen in two
stages. The first stage will be
downstairs on December 2nd at
10:00 a.m. with the fellowship
hall, lounge and upstairs foyer
being cleaned and decorated. Gary
Wolfe will be in charge of outdoor
lighting on that day also. The
sanctuary will be cleaned and
decorated on December 16th at
1:00 p.m. Anyone who would like
to help are welcome. Many hands
make for light work.

OFFICIAL ACTS:

Confirmed on November 5 -
Robin Snape-Peet

Buried on November 20 -
Richard Schneider who received
his crown of glory on November
16.

2017 ADVENT MID-WEEK THEME: "Songs of Advent"

Music is generally
connected to special days
from the patriotic songs of
Independence Day to the carols of
Christmas. Throughout this 2017
Advent season, our midweek
services will explore the different
songs associated with Advent and
Christmas.

Wednesday, December 6:

"Mary's Song" (Luke 1:39-56)

Wednesday, December 13:

"Zechariah's Song" (Luke 1:57-80)

Wednesday, December 20:

"Simeon's Song" (Luke 2:21-35)

The Divine Service will begin at
7:00 p.m. in the Lounge.

A Mid-Week service will be
held at 11:00 a.m. followed by a
simple luncheon on Wednesdays
for individuals who do not desire
to drive at night.

The following have
signed up for flowers
for the month of
December & January:

- December 3 - Sienkiewicz (1)
- December 10- Lacey (1)
- December 17- Open
- December 24- Ferst
- December 31 - Open
- January 7- Sienkiewicz (1)
- January 14- Sienkiewicz (1)
- January 21 - Open
- January 28 - Sienkiewicz (1)

We can do up to three bouquets
per Sunday. If anyone would like
to have flowers for a particular
Sunday, please sign up in the
flower book located in the church
foyer or see Jane McClure (562-
0492). The flower book pages for
the new year are now in the book.
The cost for each bouquet is
\$21.00. Please make checks
payable to St. John's Altar Guild.



St. John's Clothing Drive ends on
Friday, December 8th. Please
bring all donations as soon as
possible to the church so the
clothing can be boxed.



Dear St. John's Family,
Marcia and I thank
the Lord to have been
blessed to serve Him
through our ministry
at St. John's. The friendships
we have made will always be
treasured in our hearts. Thank
you so much for the wonderful
reception, your kind words and
hugs, and for the very generous
Home Depot gift card. It will be
put to good use in our new place
in Boynton Beach, FL.

The Lord has blessed St. John's
in so many ways. May the Holy
Spirit continue to guide and bless
you as you worship and praise our
great and wonderful God. Cantate
Domino!

Yours in Christ, Paul and Marcia



Poinsettia plants
will be available for
purchase through St.
John's Altar Guild.



The plants will adorn the altar and
will be available to take home after
the Christmas Day Service. To
reserve a plant, fill out the form
located on the round table in the
foyer or contact Jane McClure
(562-0492).

Prices are for one size only (6
inch pot) for \$8.00 each. The
poinsettias come in red or white
colors.

Orders will be taken from now
until December 17th. Checks may
be made out to St. John's Flower
Fund. Payment is due with order.

A MESSAGE from our TREASURER:

As Christmas approaches,
Iva Duval will once again be
accepting your contributions
toward the annual Christmas Fund.
If you would like to contribute,
you can place it in an envelope
marked Christmas Fund and place
in offering plate or give to a
Church Council member. As most
of you know, this offering is
shared with our staff workers as a
THANK YOU for their dedicated
service this past year.



Advent is here and soon

Christmas: There are many Sundays coming up that are available for sponsorship. Please help in the continuing outreach mission project of our Radio Broadcast of Sunday morning Worship. Broadcasts can be heard each Sunday at 7:30 a.m. on WHYN (560 AM). The cost for the program is now \$125 per week. If you are interested in sponsoring a broadcast (or a part of a broadcast) in memory of or in honor of anyone please call the church or sign up on the sheet outside the office door. Donations of any amount are welcome.

Additionally, we have posted previous weeks' broadcasts on our website along with the associated bulletin. Just log onto <http://stjohnswestfield.org>; links to the broadcasts and the weekly bulletins are on the main page. If anyone would like a CD copy of any radio broadcast, please contact Bill.

Please see/call Bill Schneeloch (413-568-4906 or 860-604-5264) or e-mail at radio@stjohnswestfield.org with any questions.

Elders' Report – December 2017

Elders are: Paul Brose (Chairman), Gary Wolfe, Bill Wigham, Rich Conroy, & Bill Schneeloch. Each month there is an Elder of the month. The Elder of the month will be assigning lectors for the upcoming month. If you are interested in reading, please speak to the Elder of the month:
December- Gary Wolfe
January - Bill Schneeloch
February - Paul Brose.



For your 2017 contributions to appear on your 2017 financial statement, they must be at the church no later than December 31. Help us meet the church's budget needs with your generosity.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Should you wish to send a Christmas greeting to your fellow church members, you may attach your card to the special banner in the church foyer. This could save you time and money, both of which could then be used in some way to serve God.

GREAT GIFT IDEAS

The Youth Group have the following fundraisers which make wonderful gifts or stocking stuffers for the Christmas Season.

2018 SCRIPTURE CALENDARS \$8.00 each

2018 SCRIPTURE POCKET CALENDARS \$5.00 each

GOLDEN NOZZLE CAR WASH TICKETS

\$6.00 each or 4/\$20.00

2018 ALTAR CARE:

A sign-up sheet is located in the foyer for those who are willing to volunteer to clean our church altar. If you are unable to do a full month, two weeks would be fine. All are encouraged to help with the task. Training will be provided if needed.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR:

On December 13th at 6:30 p.m., Westfield Athenaeum speaker Pat Perry presents Christmas at the White House. Come with Sneak Peek Productions as we walk through the grandeur of the White House at Christmas time. From Presidents past, we look at decorations, trees and ceremony through pictures, words and music. If you want to experience an old-fashioned Christmas, this is the show for you!



He will be called
Wonderful Counselor.
Mighty God.
Everlasting Father.
Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6

FAMILY PIZZA and MOVIE NIGHT

on Friday, December 15th at 6:00 p.m.

Everyone is invited to join in the fellowship, fun and food for a movie night with a great Christmas Classic: *Miracle on 34th Street*. Pizza will be served followed by this wonderful movie. Invite your family and friends for a fun Friday night.

Busy times for Orphan Grain Train

The effects of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma had OGT volunteers step up and respond as they always do. Our New England Branch made shipments to help out folks in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. Additionally, we will be making a "regular" shipment on December 15 to Moldova.

As always, financial donations are very much appreciated. Orphan Grain Train– New England c/o LCMS – New England District 400 Wilbraham Road Springfield, MA 01109-2723 Attn: Branch Manager – Bill Schneeloch

Please keep OGT in your prayers.

Thanks to all who support us!

West Of The River ProLife will be merging with ProLife of Pioneer Valley effective January 1, 2018. This decision was one that we feel our Lord laid before us as the obvious direction to go regarding the best way to champion the cause of those who believe (as the Bible teaches) that life begins at conception and ends at natural death. God brings life into this world and will call it home again at his time. Meanwhile, ALL life is worth living. Our purpose is to be a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves: the unborn, those born but who cannot speak for themselves, and those who are approaching their end of life here on this earth.

We encourage all who hold life precious to support ProLife of Pioneer Valley.

<https://www.prolifepv.com/>

It Was So Simple

What Christian ever tires of hearing the Christmas story? First we hear about the Angel Gabriel. He was a busy guy, delivering messages from God. He must have enjoyed this task, though, because he was bringing good news. To Mary he said, "You're going to have a son, and you shall call His name Jesus." To Joseph, who understandably was a little unsure of how to proceed with Mary, Gabriel said, "Don't worry Joseph. This is God's doing. Mary's going to have God's Son." Simple, right? Just follow God's plan.

Then there's a decree from Caesar Augustus. He had no idea he was just a pawn in God's hands. As the powerful ruler he was, he issued a decree: "Everybody has to go to his hometown to be registered for the census." And everybody went, including Joseph and

Mary. Even though Mary's pregnancy was quite advanced, she went on that arduous trip. Why not? She was in God's hands, too, although far from a pawn. She was God's channel. Through her God would bring to earth the greatest gift ever received.

Just in time, the innkeeper said they could stay in his barn – just in time for the birth. No hospital, no neonatal unit, no Lamaze – God brought His Son into this world.

Some poor shepherds were out in the fields that night, just like most nights. But it wasn't like most nights, for the night sky filled with light as angels appeared and "the glory of the Lord shone around them." Those shepherds looked and listened, and then they acted. "Let's go see what God's been doing in Bethlehem," they said to each other, and they went.

And they believed, and they told others what they had seen and heard and now believed.

Sounds simple, doesn't it? Not complicated like the world is today? Not exactly true. The world was complicated then, too. Political intrigue abounded; wars were being fought; the greedy still coveted more and more; some people then, as now, were too busy to see the angels or hear their message. But not everyone! Then as now, some will put aside the hustle and clamor. We'll slow down and listen for angel's wings, and we'll hear the message of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!" We'll take time to peek into the manger and worship God's Son and we'll eagerly "[make] known the saying that [has] been told [us] concerning this Child."