



First Epistle
December, 2018

From the Pastor. . .

GIVING CHRISTMAS PRESENCE!!!

There is one Christmas story in the Bible that rarely gets treated as a Christmas story; it's the story of Jesus in the home of Mary and Martha. You remember it. The two sisters had a lot to do. They were late with their Christmas preparations. The tree was only half decorated; the gifts were not yet wrapped; and Christmas dinner had just been put into the oven. Martha was rushing about trying to get her cards mailed, the mistletoe hung, and the cookie dough cut into those funny Christmas shapes.

Mary had a lot to do, too. After all, she and Martha lived together, and what one had to do, the other needed to get done as well. But Mary took the time to be with Jesus . . . to sit at His feet and worship Him. And when Martha came to the door with flour on her nose, wondering why Mary was not helping, Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, I know that you have a lot to worry about, and so does Mary. But Mary has chosen the one thing that is necessary, and that is to share her presence . . . her very self with me. She has made the wise choice."

You see. . . what it all comes down to . . . is incarnation. That is what Christmas is all about. Spirit becoming flesh, taking on earthly presence. God with us . . . not sending us gifts . . . but with us. And the way we worship God at Christmas [or any time of year!] is with our presence . . . serving Him and serving our neighbor!

The BIG gift that we need to give EVERY year is OURSELVES! WE are the Christmas gifts that matter! May each of us make the wise choice this year and share our presence with God . . . and with one another!

Have a blessed and joyous holiday season!

Living in God's Amazing Grace!

Pastor Mark

Charlie the Church Mouse says:

The magic of Christmas is not in the presents, but in HIS presence!

Are you on Facebook? Have you looked up and liked the First Lutheran Church page? If not, what are you waiting for? Our page is First Lutheran Church-Newton.

If you miss church and would still like to hear the sermon for that Sunday you can see it both on the First Lutheran Facebook page and the First Lutheran website. Another option is to simply join the Facebook live post that happens each Sunday, which streams the Gospel lesson and message, instant church on your computer. You can also go back and watch past sermons or share a particular message that impacted you.

You can also share Pastor Holmes sermon with your friends. This is a great way for others to hear the message for that particular day and spread the good news. Many Sunday's children's message is also posted on Facebook. Why not share these as well?

There is probably no easier way to let others know what is happening at First Lutheran church than to simply share a Facebook post. You can also copy the link to one of pastors sermons on the First Lutheran Church website (newtonfirstlutheran.org) and share that as well. This means that friends who are not on Facebook could still enjoy the Gospel and the sermon for the day.

The Bible tells us to go and share the good news. In this world of instant service, microwaves, and buy it online, why not make First Lutheran Church an instant option.

Choices in Mission for December--God's Barnyard

Choice in Mission for December is God's Barnyard. Choices in Mission will match our dollars up to \$2,500. The congregation can make a huge difference in the lives of those who have experienced disaster, even without driving there with our buckets, mops to help clean up, or our hammers to help rebuild.

Please consider buying an animal and become a part of this Choices in Mission.

January's Choices in Mission is *Bury the Altar*.

If you have a mission you would like to bring forward for this ministry, please visit with one of the Service Committee members--Mark and Judy Monroe, Bob and Sarah Sandquist or Craig and Betty Peterson. Any member can sponsor a Choices in Mission month. The Service Committee members will give you guidance.

ARE THEY CANCELING CHURCH?

The recent snowstorm in southern Iowa caused many churches to cancel worship services. You can rest assured that that will never happen at First Lutheran Church.

Pastor Holmes has vowed that he will be in church each and every Sunday regardless of the weather. During this most recent storm Pastor came to Newton and stayed with a church member the night before.

Now this does not mean that you should risk your life or take chances if conditions are such that you are unable to travel. However, often times what looks really bad at 8 o'clock in the morning is not nearly as rough at 9:20. We are a church family and just like our own families we want to make sure that people are traveling safely. To that point remember that we will always have worship services, but only come if you can do so without peril.

David Goos

A thanks goes out to the First Lutheran family for hosting another successful Pasta Dinner. We have been happy with the free will donation status of this event the last few years, and have generated enough funds from that effort to finance several projects each year. We have also been reaching out to folks in the community needing food assistance and inviting them to come dine with us, through the Salvation Army and our community meals. Many of those folks have walked through the door, and have taken meals home for others as well. A nice way to serve our community, as well as having a visual presence. We also give a donation to the church for the use of the space. Thanks additionally to Barilla who donates the pasta and sauce every year.

Jane Johnson, on behalf of the O.P.E.N board.

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PROGRAM

The Children's Christmas program will be performed on Sunday 12/16 at 6:30 PM. There will be two plays. The first is entitled "Simply Christmas" and the second is entitled "Star Trip." The first play is a more traditional Christmas story performance and the second may leave you feeling like you could have entered another dimension. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend! Children will practice for these plays during Sunday School time the next 3 weeks and there may be an additional Saturday practice 12/15, depending on how things are progressing. We are moving the time for this program to the evening instead of during the church service time to assure we can have as many of our performers there as possible.

December Birthdays

12/1 AvaSumpter

12/2 BlakeBaumgartner

12/3 CailynGrabe

12/6 DarcyVan Dam

12/7 SuzanneVon Seggern

12/8 BarbaraWilcox

12/12 VickiPorter

12/12 PatPutz

12/14 JimMcVey

12/16 LynetteMarvelli

12/26 RobertSandquist

12/27 CraigPeterson

12/28 AshleyFoster

12/30 MaeVanDam