The cross (and the reason for it) was never too far from the mind of Jesus. Even being newly born, He was under attack - from Herod in the palace of Jerusalem. “Go and find this newborn baby (he ordered the Wisemen), and when you find Him and pay your homage, come back through my district on your way back East and let me know exactly where He is, so I may go and (cough, cough) worship Him, also.”

And the Wisemen, being wise men, did find that Baby and presented Him with incense, gold and myrrh. All of their book learning and astrological studies did give them the information they needed to travel all the way to Bethlehem, that little-bitty village in the land of Judah, from where no one of fame had ever come before. As they packed their camels to make the return trip home, stopping by the palace en route, they were told - in a dream, no less - to take the scenic route and bypass Jerusalem. Herod did not need to know the specifics.

But Herod, also pretty street smart, figured out that enough time had passed for the Wisemen to have found the baby, done their due diligence and somehow, must have missed the marker that pointed out the way to Jerusalem, so Herod, never one to be outdone, outdid himself. He ordered his soldiers to march to Bethlehem and kill any male child who was two years old and younger. And just to be on the safe side, he extended the area of the kill zone to include surrounding lands and towns to cover all the bases, just in case that family of three had moved on.

Thus began Jesus’ earthly life; a life in hiding and not calling attention to Himself. He might have been the first one to be part of the Witness Protection Program (God’s version). Even we don’t have much information about the life of Jesus from this point on. We know He went to the temple in Jerusalem once a year with His parents since He was left behind “in His Father’s house” at the age of 12, but only glimpses are we given - until the fullness of time - when we meet Him, again, as He begins His public ministry.

And especially then, the cross was never too far from the mind of Jesus.
Fifty-five years ago today (December 28), Grace and I were married by her father in Rochester, MN at the church where he was pastor. How long is 55 years, when my mind tells me it was just like yesterday? Many memories of that date are specific. December 28, 1962, was a bitter cold day and there was a lot of snow already for that time of year. Seminary classmates who came from many places were my male attendants. Relatives came from many places. No one seemed daunted by going to a wedding in Minnesota during the season of deep snow. We all were an intrepid lot.

Grace was a recent graduate from Lutheran Hospital School of Nursing in St. Louis who had moved home with her parents until the wedding. She was employed as a surgical nurse at one of the hospitals that served Mayo Clinic. Her wedding dress was slender and beautiful, a perfect match for my bride. The photographer insisted on taking us outside for a picture next to our “getaway” car, a black coupe with assorted Bible passages written on it in white ink. Two I remember were, “Saved by Grace” and “It is better to marry than to burn.” We wore no coats for the photo shot and the wind was so strong that the white crepe paper streamers were blowing horizontal to the earth. So, our life together began. We made a marriage that I have become increasingly thankful for as time went by.

After a few months in St. Louis while I finished the seminary, we moved to Jackson, MS, with my first call and stayed there for six years, where I founded a new mission in a racially-segregated Black community. When we moved to Huntsville in 1969 to be pastor here at Ascension, we were already parents of our two older children, Jenni and John. Philip would be born a year after we came here. Here we lived as a family until Jenni and John got married and Grace died two years ago. For Philip and me, this is our home.

I felt compelled to write these things down as a way to acknowledge the blessings of God in our lives and to express thankfulness to God. Forty-eight years so far in Huntsville, and counting. Three days ago, I got the first notification from the seminary of next year’s class reunions. For me, it’ll be the 55th anniversary of our graduation.

For all of which I can only say “thanks be to God” for His wonderful grace and mercy - to me and through me - from His boundless treasury of divine love that has never faltered or failed. I feel strongly that this posture of giving thanks is the exact expectation of God for us at every stage of our lives.
REFLECTIONS

The text for my sermon December 31 teaches us that there are moments when time stops, as it were, or as the text in Galatians stated, “when the fullness of time had come…..” Being appointed for the last Sunday of the year, this passage struck me as a summary of the entire Bible, since it centered in God sending His only begotten Son into our world to forgive our sins and declare us as sons of God in His eternal Kingdom. It shows us that God uses our time to tell His story. We should expect another “fullness of time” at some point in our future when God will act again to raise the dead, give believers new bodies and usher us all into the Father’s house in Heaven.

Till that moment of time, why should we delay our giving of thanks to God for His gift of saving faith in the forgiveness of sin? As time marches on, may we march boldly with God into His future, always in communion with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Love,
Pastor Bernie
It’s a new year. It’s a time when we take stock of the year past in order to improve the year to come. It’s a time when we sit down to plan and implement what we want to accomplish and even change. Part of that is planning our stewardship for the coming year.

Often we find this difficult and daunting and even joyless. But it doesn’t have to be. In fact, it is really quite simple and full of joy. So here are some tips to make that planning less stressful. You begin by answering these three questions:

1. Who are you?
2. To whom do I give?
3. And how much?

So, who are you? The Table of Duties in the Small Catechism informs us. Are you a hearer of God’s Word? Are you a citizen of society? Are you a member of a family? Stewardship covers these three estates: church, society, family. We don’t particularly struggle to give to society or family. Our struggles, our difficulties and our questions arise in giving to the church.

So, what is our duty as members of the church with regard to giving? The Table of Duties, again, gives us a guide. If you are a hearer, a member of the church who receives instruction, St. Paul taught: “Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor” (Gal. 6:6). This means the local congregation is primary.

Your pastor is the one called to preach the Gospel to you and administer the Lord’s blessed sacraments to you. Your congregation is the place where those things happen. Thus, when God calls us to give to the church, He has the local congregation in mind. For “the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14).

How much do we give to the local congregation? Our only instructions are these:

1. to give regularly (1 Cor. 6:1–2),
2. proportionally (1 Cor. 16:1–2; 2 Cor. 8:12), and
3. generously (2 Cor. 8:20) of our first fruits (Gen. 4:4; Prov. 3:9; Lev. 27:30)
4. with a spirit of eagerness (2 Cor. 9:2),
5. earnestness (2 Cor. 8:7), cheerfulness (2 Cor. 9:7), and
6. love (2 Cor. 8:23).

In other words, giving to the church is not to be an afterthought, given after everything else is spent. In this way, it is deliberate. We give regularly – weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly, or yearly – keeping in mind our own strengths, weaknesses, and limitations. We set it aside beforehand – before anything else is spent.

From those first fruits, we set aside a proportionate and generous amount. Ten percent was the standard for the Israelites. This was a command for the ancient Israelites. We can give as much as we want, but ask yourself: do we really want to be less generous than was commanded of the Israelites? Is the job of the New Testament Church bigger or smaller than the job given to Israel?
And how are we to give it? We give it with eagerness and earnestness. We give it cheerfully and with love, not out of compulsion. For through the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, God has made us His children, forgiven us all our sins, given us grace upon grace, promised us life everlasting with Him in His kingdom, and filled us with His own Spirit, the Holy Spirit. This makes giving a joy, as Jesus said, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

It’s that easy. And it is joyful. For in stewardship, our gracious and giving Lord invites us to take part in the work that He accomplishes here on earth, providing for the ongoing preaching of the gospel as well as those who are in need. Taking part in that makes all our work holy – work that is done in service to the Lord as priestly members of His kingdom.


FOR THE ADULTS

cheerful giver

Jesus came to serve and give to others. This Christmas season, consider how you can follow Jesus’ example by giving your time, love and kindness.

Directions: Cross out every my, me and mine. Then write the remaining words on the blanks below to read 2 Corinthians 9:7, NIV.

mmyeachmineofyoushouldmygivememewhat
youneminemehaveminememinemydecidedmeinmy
myourminheartmemymymetomygivememinenot
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minemymeforminemyemGodminemymylovesmy
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2 ___________________________ 9:7, NIV
Thank you to everyone who helped the children experience the joy of Christ’s birth! There were those who provided gifts for the children, read to them, and helped with crafts at the Christmas story time, and brought refreshments for the CDC program. There were those who put in many hours with the Sunday school Christmas program with practice, preparation of props and costumes, providing the meal, and clean-up after. The children enjoyed the treat bags after their program! Thank you to those who provided special Christmas music before the children’s program as well.

Let us always remember the true meaning of Christmas.

The CDC will recognize National Lutheran Schools week January 22 through 28. The theme for this year is “It’s still all about Jesus” (Yesterday, today and forever). Our children will be doing special activities each day, and on Sunday, January 28 they will sing during second service.

**DCM THOUGHTS**

“If I am doing a new thing!”

*Isaiah 43:19(NIV)*

Thanks to Christmas, we all end the year with new things - new toys for the kids, new clothes (not always the right color or size, but still new), new pounds on our bodies. We start the year off with new things, too - a new calendar on the wall, new bills to pay, and new resolutions for the days ahead.

Everybody likes new things, including God. He’s called the Ancient of Days, but He says, “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” God begins His book with the story of His creating a new world; He ends it with His plans to make a new heaven and new earth.

Our heavenly Father wants to do new things in the lives of His children. He desires to teach us new truths about Himself, provide new opportunities for ministering to others, take us to higher levels of worship and deeper levels of trust. But too often, we’re like the Israelites when they were traveling in the wilderness.

God promised to provide for them by raining down bread from heaven six days a week. He instructed them to gather only enough manna for each day, except for the day before the Sabbath when they were allowed to store up two days’ worth. When some of the people disobeyed and tried to hoard extra manna, it became rotten and full of worms by the next morning.

I’m like that, sometimes. God wants to do new, fresh things in my life and in my ministry for Him. But often, I try to hold on to yesterday’s stale manna. I don’t want to let go of what is comfortable and familiar - some old way of thinking, a certain way of doing things, my usual area of service to Him. I may miss new and exciting things God has planned for me if I don’t fully trust His guidance, even when He seems to be leading me down unfamiliar paths.

One of the best ways to keep our faith fresh and new is to develop a habit of daily Bible study. God’s Word is timeless - old and new at the same time. Just as God’s “compassions are new every morning” *(Lamentations 3:22-23)*,
a daily dose of His Word can give us new understanding, fresh insights, and renewed strength.

We can drink in the Psalms to help us “sing to the Lord a new song” (33:3 and others). We read in Ezekiel about God’s promise to give us “a new heart and a new spirit” (chapters 11, 18, 36). We rejoice along with Paul as he declares, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Studying the letters of Colossians and Ephesians reminds us that we have taken off our “old self with its practices” (Colossians 3:9) and are to “put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24).

If we need motivation to live like a new creation, God has provided two keys in His Word. It’s important to look backward to the New Covenant, the source of our salvation. We can meditate on Hebrews and thank God again that the sacrifice of Jesus made “a new and living way” for us to enter His presence” (Hebrews 10:19-22). And we also keep looking forward to our future by reading Revelation. We can find comfort in thinking about the time when God will right all wrongs, heal all hurts, and give us a new name and a new home.

A good way for a child of God to celebrate the New Year is to let go of anything that has gone stale or rotten. Then we’ll be free to live each day expecting new, fresh things from the One Who promises, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:5)
This has been a joyous musical month! Thank you to all of those who made it wonderful! We are blessed to have such talented members in the church to share their gifts and time.

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel.”

Matthew 1:23

The origins of this plaintive carol date to medieval times. In the 800’s, a series of Latin hymns was sung each day during Christmas Vespers from December 17 to 23. Each of these hymns began with the word “O,” and were called the “Great” or “O” Antiphons (the word antiphon meaning psalm or anthem). These hymns were apparently restructured into verse form in the 1100’s, and finally published in Latin in 1710. In the mid-1800s, they were discovered by an English minister named John Mason Neale, who wove together segments of them to produce the first draft of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” which was published in 1851. Neale’s original version said, “Draw nigh, draw nigh, Emmanuel.”

Neale is a man worth knowing. He was born in London on January 24, 1818, the son of an evangelical Anglican clergyman. He attended Cambridge University and proved to be a brilliant student and prize-winning poet. While there, Neale was influenced by the Oxford Movement and became attracted to Roman Catholicism. In 184, he was ordained into the Anglican ministry; but his poor health and Catholic leanings prevented him from gaining a parish ministry.

He was appointed instead as the director of Sackville College, a home for old men. (Sackville College, started by Robert Sackville, Earl of Dorset, in the early 1600’s as a home for the elderly, is still going strong today in east Grinstead, Sussex.) This was the perfect job for Neale, for he was a compassionate man with a great heart for the needy, but he was also a scholar needing time for research and writing.

As a high church traditionalist, Neale disliked the hymns of Isaac Watts and longed to return to Christianity to the liturgical dignity of church history. He was an outspoken advocate of returning church buildings to their former glory. He campaigned, for example, against certain types of stoves that spoiled the tastefulness and charm of English churches. He also worked hard to translate ancient Greek and Latin hymns into English.

In today’s hymnals, we find Neale and Watts side-by-side, the old differences having been forgotten. We owe a debt of gratitude to John Mason Neale every time we sing one of his Christmas carols: “Good King Wenceslas,” “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” “Good Christian Men, Rejoice,” and his Palm Sunday hymn, “All Glory, Laud, and Honor.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xtpJ4Q_4
MISSIONAL OUTREACH

The opportunities for joining a group to sing and read Scripture are growing. Join a group that fits your schedule and come as often as you can.

- Regency on Max Luther Drive Sundays at 9:30 AM
- Regency every other Wednesday at 10:15 AM - See Dates
- HHR on Chris Drive every other Wednesday at 10:00 AM; See Dates

Introduction - Pastor Ansorge
1st Song
2nd Song

First Reading - Old Testament
3rd Song
4th Song

Second Reading - New Testament
5th Song
6th Song

Third Reading - Gospel
7th Song
Benediction Song

One-on-one Visits

If you have any questions, please call Bob Smith (256) 778-8655 or send him an email at smithrms@hughes.net.

DATES AND UPDATES

Around the Church . . . and Out the Doors

January 1 - Office Closed
January 3 - 10:15 AM - Regency Missional Outreach
January 6 - 10:00 AM - Taking down the Christmas Decorations - Help needed!

January 9 - 10:00 AM - Women’s Bible Study (Every Tuesday)
January 9 - 6:00 PM - Board of Directors

January 10 - 4:45 PM - Confirmation (Every Wednesday)
January 10 - 10:00 AM - Missional Outreach at HHR

January 10 - 6:00 PM - Adult Choir Rehearsal (Every Wednesday)
January 11 - 6:00 PM - Lutheranism 101 (Every Thursday)

January 13 - 10:00 AM - LWML
January 16 - 6:00 PM - Board of Elders
January 17 - 10:15 AM - Missional Outreach at Regency

January 23 - Reflections Articles Due

January 24 - 10:00 AM - Missional Outreach at HHR
January 27 - 8:30 AM - Men’s Morning Prayer Breakfast - all men welcome!

January 28 - 10:45 AM - CDC Children to sing for National Lutheran Schools’ Week

January 31 - 10:15 AM - Missional Outreach at Regency

Worship Service Schedule

8:00 AM - Worship Service with Communion
9:15 AM - Meet and Greet in Fellowship Hall
9:30 AM - Bible Study and Sunday School Classes
9:30 AM - Regency Retirement Village
10:45 AM - Worship Service with Communion
NEW YEAR’S NOISEMAKERS

Ring in the New Year with these fun noisemakers!

What you need:
- Wooden craft sticks
- Metallic paint (gold and silver)
- Paint brushes
- Jingle bells (gold and silver)
- Hot glue gun
- Metallic ribbon
- Scissors
- Adult help

What you do:
1. Paint half the sticks gold and half silver. Let dry.
2. Glue three bells to each stick.
3. Cut a six-inch piece of ribbon for each stick. Tie a bow and glue it to the noisemaker. Celebrate!

REFLECTIONS

KIDS’ CORNER

Puzzle

How to give

We can give in a variety of ways, including our money, possessions and time. But God says there’s only one attitude to have when we give.

Finish the puzzles by matching the pieces and writing out the letters in order to complete 2 Corinthians 9:7, NIV.

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your ...

... not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a ...

http://ascensionhsv.org
REFLECTIONS

LIFE AND DEATH

“...I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

2 Timothy 4:7-8

“He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world... "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Matthew 25:34, 41

As most of you are aware, Jimmy Damron had triple bypass surgery on December 15. Jimmy and Sharon have been good friends of ours for years, so Joanne was naturally worried about what might happen during this surgery.

The night before his surgery, Joanne asked me to be sure and pray for him. This led to a discussion about Jimmy in which Joanne was surprised by my attitude towards his surgery. To her, I seemed uncaring as I didn’t seem concerned about his surgery and the potential risks associated with it.

When a Christian dies, it’s a sad day for those left behind who must continue on in life without a dearly loved one. However, for the Christian who dies, it is a glorious day. It is the day when his struggles in this life come to an end, when he leaves this sinful world to spend eternity with his Lord and Savior. This is not a day to feel sorry for him, but a day to rejoice with him!

No man can know what’s in another’s heart. However, I have known Jimmy for many years and I have confidence that he is a believer, a member of the invisible church, a saint (and a sinner). When he dies, I strongly believe that he will be welcomed into Heaven. Therefore, when he is facing a life and death situation, as heart surgery surely can be, I don’t fear for him. If anything, I am happy for, maybe even jealous of, him. The day Jimmy dies will be, as Paul so aptly puts it, the day he finishes the good fight, completes the race and receives his crown of righteousness.

On the other hand, when an unbeliever dies, it is a tragedy. His future is worse than his past. His struggles in this world are multiplied with his struggles in eternal damnation. This is so incredibly sad that I am brought to tears whenever I really think about it. The thought that people I care about (and even those that I don’t), and I know more than a few headed down the wrong path, are facing this kind of future is more than I can handle. No wonder God would have all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), for He knows far better than we what truly awaits the condemned sinner, the unbeliever, the goat.

REMINDER OF OUR BAPTISM

By now, you surely have noticed that the Baptismal font has been moved from its previous position behind the lectern to its current position in the aisle in front of the Communion rails. This was done based on a recommendation from the Worship Committee. The purpose for this change was to bring focus to our Baptisms and to our need for daily repentance, forgiveness and spiritual renewal.

The next time you enter the sanctuary, take a moment to reflect on your Baptism, on the day when you were welcomed into God’s family. Then reflect on your sins and your need to again receive the forgiveness of sins that came with your Baptism. You should then be properly focused to confess your sins and receive absolution, to listen to and digest the Word of God and to partake of Christ’s body and blood during Communion.
Flowers

The new Flower Chart for 2018 is hanging on the bulletin board in the hallway. Please feel free to add your name to any of the available dates if you would like to contribute flowers for a special Sunday. Flowers are delivered by Mitchell's Florist and cost $64.50. Just sign up on the chart, put a check in the offering plate with “flowers” on the memo line, and Cyndi Peebles will take care of the rest.

Prayers Needed

Susie Carder December 31, 2017
Home from the hospital; pray for continued recovery and no further episodes.

Rhonda Abello December 28, 2017
Currently in Crestwood Hospital for blood clots in chest and lower extremities. Pray for physicians’ wisdom and God’s hand in dealing with decisions and treatments.

Bella Reese December 28, 2017
Little Bella is Nadine’s family member who is undergoing more treatment for continued seizures of unknown origin. Pray for successful medical treatment as opposed to more surgeries if the medical treatment fails. God is all-powerful and does answer our prayers.

Harvey Fischer December 31, 2017
Home from hospital, but still under observation and homebound. Pray for resolution of his malady.

Continued Need for Prayer December 31, 2017
Milton Aponte; Nancy Campbell; Criss Patteson; Bob Hirschbuehler; Jerry Heaper; Lynne Heaper; Amber; & Waques Miller; Jean Shaver; Dan Gehring; Adaleigh Toole, as she continues to improve and moves into next phase of surgical procedures; Carl Engel; Jimmy Damron; Harvey Fischer; Sheila Reese.

Don’t Forget Our Shut-ins December 31, 2017
Mary Ecker; Toni Hypes; Adele Williams; Don Akins; Kathy Pool.

These folks have addresses in our Phone Directory if you care to remember them with cards.
THE REAL SAINT NICK

As the time of Christmas passes, we remember Christ and His coming to the world to save us from our sins - and rightly so, as He is the Savior of the world. However, there is usually talk of another man who bring gifts this time of year, or as he is known in the Church, Saint Nicholas. He is a man with many legends about him which we can find, today, but we have much to thank him for that are not legends. And now, the real story of Saint Nicholas.

In AD 325, Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea, the very first ecumenical council. More than 300 bishops came from all over the Christian world to debate the nature of the Holy Trinity. It was one of the early church's most intense theological questions. Arius, from Egypt, was teaching that Jesus the Son was not equal to God the Father. Arius forcefully argued his position at length. The bishops listened respectfully. Nicholas strongly disagreed. The debate ended suddenly when Nicholas punched out Arius then and there on the floor of the council! This gives new meaning to the ditty: "He's making a list and checking it twice, he's going to find out who's naughty or nice!"

The mental image of Santa Claus punching out Arius on the floor of the Council of Nicea with Emperor Constantine looking on has to fundamentally change the way one would ever see Santa Claus again. While I might not agree with his methods, I certainly admire his passion for Christological orthodoxy and doctrinal purity.

So the next time you think of Santa Claus, here's something to think about: Think of someone with an unparalleled passion for doctrinal purity. And to top it off, think of someone whose whole purpose in life was to point people to Jesus. Now, that's my kind of Santa Claus!
# January Calendar

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Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you. O Israel.