

FAITH MEMORIAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Embraced by God through Jesus Christ our Lord, we share this gospel of hope and healing within and throughout our community

Deck the Halls!



Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! ⁵ For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100:4-5)

Most of us probably know the old Christmas song that begins, "Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly!" Which makes sense because we see holly in all kinds of Christmas Decorations. Holly is used in everything from mistletoe to any number of what most would likely consider secular Christmas decorations. Throughout the centuries holly has been given many different symbolic meanings. However, Christians have also assigned it a special meaning of our own.

If any of you have holly bushes growing in your yard, like my family does, you can probably testify that holly is a very hardy shrub that can survive some of the most extreme temperatures. As a result a holly bush has become a symbol that represents immortality, a gift granted to us by the very savior whose birthday we celebrate each Christmas.

Known for its attractive red berries and sharp green leaves, holly can be quite beautiful. However, I can tell you from experience, holly's leaves also have an unpleasant side in the form of several sharp points on each leaf. These prickly leaves have been seen as a symbol of the crown of thorns that pierced Jesus's head during the crucifixion. This has resulted in holly sometimes being called "Christ Thorn" in parts of Europe and "Christdorn" in Germany. The shiny red berries also remind us of the blood of Christ shed on our behalf. As a result, Holly serves as a reminder of why Jesus was born and the price he paid so he could graciously give us the gift of immortality and an eternal relationship with him. This is also why in parts of Europe holly is not only a Christmas decoration, but used at Easter as well.

One last thing I think is worth noting is that the name holly can also mean Holy one. Whether it is the green of new birth and immortality, or the thorny tips and red berries of Christ's sacrifice, at the heart of it all stands a holy Savior. The holiness of Christ sets Him apart. Yet out of love for us, the Son of God stepped into our sin scarred world and became man, so that He could redeem us and be our righteousness. Because of Christ, we too have been set apart, given new life, and a renewed relationship with God. This is truly something both to embrace and to celebrate.

This year as you look around and see various holiday decorations including holly, I hope they will serve as a reminder of all that Christ has done for you. When they do, take a moment to lift up a prayer of thanks and celebration, and look for some opportunities to share with those around you the full story of why we Christians celebrate Christmas. After all, if a beautiful but prickly shrub can do it, so can you.

In Christ,

Pastor Eric Schoech

Pastor Eric Schoech

P.S. There are several great opportunities, to deck the halls this Christmas. I want to personally invite you to all of our special services and events. Many of these are mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter. Don't forget to bring a friend!

NOTES FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Recently we had a week that demonstrated for many of us the abundance of blessings we members receive from Faith Memorial through our called workers and from each other as well. On November 15 we celebrated the life of Susan Montania and recalled what she meant to her family and, indeed to all of us. The next day during Sunday worship, we confirmed two young men, Marc Nicholson and Ethan Snowdin, who gave powerful statements of their own spiritual journey in self-crafted "faith statements". We were all so proud of them and thankful to Pastor Schoech for leading them through the confirmation process.

As we all now begin preparation for Advent and the Christmas season, we look forward to the beauty and significance of this sacred and blessed time.

In January, Pastor Schoech will conduct a retreat for all leadership teams within our church to establish a variety of new directions, ventures, outreaches, and services both for our members and for other members within our greater community. May 2015 continue to demonstrate to Faith Memorial Lutheran Church the many blessings our Lord visits on us.



CHRISTMAS EVE AND CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICES

Christmas Eve: Service of Lessons and Carols, Dec. 24, 7:00pm

Christmas Day: The Nativity of Our Lord, Holy Communion, Dec. 25, 9:30am.

(a full schedule of worship services for December can be found on page 4 of this newsletter.)

ADVENT WORSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP

Join us on December 7 when our church's children will play a part in our service by sharing with us several symbols of the Advent/Christmas Season. Then stay for a time of fellowship, as we "Deck the Halls" of our church with our second annual church "greening".

Please gather with us on Wednesday nights, December 3rd, 10th and 17th for worship, fellowship and food.

The theme for this year's Wednesday night Advent series will be "The Sights, Sounds and Scents of the Season". Service begins at 7:00pm following a 6:00pm supper.



SHARE THE JOY OF THE SEASON!

Buttons and postcards will be available in the Narthex to share your faith and invite friends and neighbors to church services during this Christmas season.

CARE COMMITTEE

Holidays can be a lonely time for individuals both young and old. The Care Committee asks that all of us make a concentrated effort to reach out to family, friends, neighbors and strangers during the holiday season. Little acts of kindness can go a long way in brightening their holidays. Sharing, giving and smiling are just a few ways to "pay it forward". If you know of anyone that could use a call from Pastor, the Care Committee, or any other person, please contact Pastor, the church office, or someone on the Care Committee. Shopping and monetary lunch bags for Christmas baskets will be placed in the Narthex, as well as the "Giving Tree" adorned with ornaments of Christmas wishes. All unwrapped gifts and shopping bags are to be returned to the church by Sunday, December 14 for distribution. Contact Cindy Splitgerber for additional information.

Care for your
neighbour's needs
if you can



THOUGHTS FROM THE DEACONESS

A New Church Year

Are you one of those people who struggle with sleep? Do you have trouble falling asleep? Is it difficult to stay asleep? Does your life pass before your eyes almost every night? Do you relive the days' events? Do you stress over the next day or week or even years? Taking into account the number of television commercials for sleep aids, you are not alone.

Whenever I teach a class on the Psalms, I am always amazed at the Jewish interpretations of creation and humans and God. They have much to teach us about how to live in a full relationship with God. One of their beliefs concerning creation and God is not one that is practiced in the lives of most Americans. For the Jewish people, the new day begins at 6pm, not 6am. Gathering around the supper table is a chance to begin a new day. As they crawl into bed, the previous day has been completed for several hours and the new day already has a strong foothold. With that belief comes the more profound realization that God has wiped clean the past day with its pain and regret. God is now working in the new day. As we sleep, God is at work in the present and future. God is there long before we open our eyes. What a wondrous way to greet the day when we awake. God is at work and in charge of the day and of our lives before our feet hit the floor.

Advent is here again – a time of beginnings and a new church year. As God is even now working in the new day, God is at work in this new year. We have no need to replay the past year. We have no need to live with regrets and guilt. God has wiped those from the past. In fact, God is so deep into the future of this new year, that we can live confident in God's love. For God has already given us Jesus Christ in the manger, on the cross, and outside an empty tomb.

Maybe sleep won't be so elusive for us.

*Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us; Let us find our rest in thee.
Blessed Advent!*



CHRISTIAN GROWTH AND FELLOWSHIP CHURCH "GREENING" FELLOWSHIP

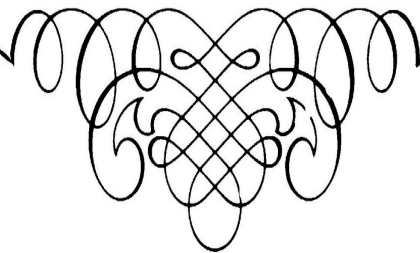
Join us immediately following our Sunday Service on December 7 for a time of decorating, food and working together to prepare the church for the Advent/Christmas season. This event was a huge success last year and we look forward to it being so again. More information will be shared prior to our services in the weeks ahead. For questions contact Marilyn Lindner through the church office.

SUNDAY BIBLE STUDY: BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

Christ warns us that as Christians we will indeed face conflict. Join us in a study of why we as Christians often face conflict, even with each other, and how we can handle this conflict in a truly healthy way that allows us to grow, work together and support each other and the world around us. The first week of study begins January 4 at 10:30am.

MARK MAKERS

You are invited to join this "crafty" group that includes both congregational and community members. Our January 7 meeting will focus on making valentines, including some for our shut-in members. Come discover or embrace your artistic side and bring some of your friends. Our meetings begin at 7:00pm, with a brief lesson focused on that week's project so no experience is necessary.

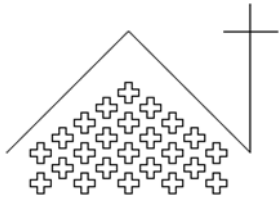


WOMEN WANTING WISDOM—will not meet during December due to Wednesday Advent Services. Please join the group when they resume Wednesday, January 14 at 7:00pm here at Faith Memorial.

**Faith Memorial
Lutheran Church**

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MENS' OVERNIGHT SHELTER

We provide dinner at the Men's shelter on the third Saturday of the month at Immanuel Lutheran Church. We will host the dinner again on December 20 at 6:30pm. A sign up sheet is in the narthex for those who would like to provide food or help serve. For questions please see Fran Marton.

**OPEN ARMS WOMENS'
SHELTER**

Faith Memorial provides overnight shelter for women on Mondays beginning at 6:00pm. Shift times are 6-10pm, 10pm-2am and 2am-7am. Questions? Speak to Michelle Grossnickle.



FAITH MEMORIAL WORSHIP SCHEDULE

The First Sunday in Advent, November 30, 9:00 am, Holy Communion
Advent Evening Service, Wednesday, December 3, 7:00pm Evening Prayer

The Second Sunday in Advent, December 7, 9:00am, Childrens' Service
Advent Evening Service, Wednesday, December 10, 7:00pm Evening Prayer

The Third Sunday in Advent, December 14, 9:00 Holy Communion
Advent Evening Service, Wednesday, December 17, 7:00pm Evening Prayer

The Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 21, 9:00am Holy Communion
Christmas Eve, Wednesday, December 24, 7:00 pm , Service of Lessons & Carols

The Nativity of Our Lord, Thursday, December 25, 9:30am Holy Communion
The Holy Innocents, Martyrs, Sunday, December 28, 9:00am Holy Communion

