

# Shepherd's Voice



December 2020

## "It's Jesus' Birthday ..."

By Pastor Scott Searl

My niece is five and my nephews are three and one. They are in the prime Santa Claus zone! I'm not sure who is more excited about this... it might be me! While we won't be able to be together for Christmas, I am already planning my gifts and pondering a surprise outdoor, walk by visit from Santa using my family's jingle bells. You just can't beat the excitement and energy of kids on Christmas morning. And I'm sure many of you are dreaming of the same.

At the same time, I was startled by a recent zoom call with our local food shelf, ICA. During the pandemic the need for food has increased dramatically. People are in need. Most stunning to me was the fact that ICA has given out over \$400,000 in rental assistance since the beginning of the pandemic. That is an amazing amount. People are hungry and people are in need of housing. I'm grateful for this significant amount of help not only for those who need rent money but also for the landlords who also have mortgages to pay and buildings to keep safe. During this pandemic time we need to help those who need food and shelter, and we need to ensure that landlords and grocery stores and restaurants are able to keep their employees, employed.

Relatedly I was listening to one of my many podcasts. I was reminded that in times like this people like me with wealth often are able to increase their wealth in ways that others cannot. In early August I contacted my mortgage broker and by late October I was able to refinance my home at a lower interest rate and lower my mortgage payment by almost \$300 per month. My home has significantly increased in value and I was able to take advantage. At the same time there are many who will fall further behind because of this economic recession. Many people who work in the service industry have lost jobs and may lose their homes or at the least won't be able to take advantage of the low interest rates like I did. I will continue to build my wealth, and many others will not. The gap between my wealth and others will grow.

As the pandemic first set in and many people at SOTH received government checks, I got a number of phone calls. People wanted to know where they should share their check. Many didn't need the extra income and decided to give it away. It was really quite amazing the number of people who called and asked. I know one family that has not only shared that money they have also continued to make extra contributions to Resource West.

I know it is so much fun to give gifts to each other at Christmas. It is a time to give thanks and share with one another. I will be giving my niece and nephews something awesome!! (or at least something I think is awesome - like giant nerf guns!) I will also be making gifts in their

**Continued on page 2**

**Shepherd of the Hills  
Lutheran Church  
500 Blake Road South  
Edina, MN 55343  
(952) 935-3457**

**Staff:**

Pastors	Scott Searl, Sherri Otto
Assistant/Visitation Pastor	Fred Jensen
Music Director	Emily Koski
Deacon	Brian Henning
Faith Community Nurse	Kaye Wothe
Administrative Assistant	Shawn Wacholz
Building Manager	Blair Prax

**Church Council Members / Officers:**

President	Todd Biewen
Vice President	Julie Luers
Treasurer	Steve Hanneman
Financial Secretary	Ryan Erickson
Secretary	Adam Driscoll
Serve	Nate Lichy
Worship & Music	Julia Buteyn
Building & Facilities	Peter Barott
Learn	Open
Communications	Jill Miller
Care	Dave Cousins
LMCC	Open
Evaluation	Chris Polston

**Telephone & Voice Mail Extensions:**

Worship Times	1
Directions	2
Shawn Wacholz	11
Pastor Scott Searl	12
Pastor Sherri Otto	13
Brian Henning	14
Blair Prax	15
Emergency Message Mailbox	24
Kaye Wothe	25

**Shepherd Online!**

Pr. Scott Searl	scott@sothchurch.com
Pr. Sherri Otto	sherri.otto@sothchurch.com
Shawn Wacholz	office@sothchurch.com
Kaye Wothe	kaye.wothe@sothchurch.com
Brian Henning	brian.henning@sothchurch.com
Blair Prax	blair.prax@sothchurch.com
Church web site	www.sothchurch.com

**Pastor's Message continued from page 1**

names to places like Resource West or ICA or Reach and Restore. It is possible to give gifts, give thanks, experience the joy of kids and at the same time remember that God has given us our financial resources for us to steward on God's behalf. And it is after all Jesus' birthday, not ours. And since Jesus said whenever you care for the poor or hungry you care for me, please be sure to include Jesus on your Christmas list this year. Now more than ever it is time to share and time to worship with humility by bringing the child gifts.

Merry Christmas - and Happy Birthday Jesus,  
Pastor Scott



## President's Post: Love in Action at Shepherd of the Hills

By Todd Biewen, Council President

This month I am writing to tell you about something that a small group of dedicated Shepherd members have been working on behind the scenes over the last year. The Community Engagement Leadership Team (CELT) was formed last fall as part of the grant provided by the Augsburg University, Riverside

Innovation Hub. The members of this team included Pastor Scott, Kathy Wiemer, Chris Polston, Julie Luers, Hilary Nelson, and myself. Throughout this effort, the team received wonderful guidance from our consultant, facilitator and coach, Jim Ladoux, from Vibrant Faith Ministries.

The team was small in number, but the desired outcomes of this effort were significant:

- to explore how Shepherd's culture can fully embrace an outward focus;
- to improve how we listen to the communities around us, to learn about and from them, and respond to their needs;
- to build on Shepherd's giving spirit by aligning around a missional focus.

The work of the CELT consisted of these activities:

- 1) we interviewed leaders within Hopkins, from government, business, law enforcement, non-profits, public schools, and other faiths;
- 2) we identified the greatest needs of the community, based on the themes and priorities identified by these community leaders;
- 3) we surveyed members from Shepherd about perceived needs in the community and how Shepherd can minister to those needs;
- 4) we synthesized survey information from the community and from Shepherd to identify new directions for our ministry at Shepherd;
- 5) and we are now working within the church council on these new directions and how they can be embedded into the council structure.

When the concerns for the community and the priorities for our congregants were synthesized, the following areas of focus emerged:

- support children and young adults
- support inclusivity of everyone
- support affordable housing needs

To support these needs, the CELT is recommending two new areas of focus for the council:

- 1) form strong community partnerships with key organizations in Hopkins that support these community needs. The recommendation is to focus on one or two key organizations so that we don't spread these efforts too thin. For the first time, these community connections will be hard-wired in as a focus for the church council.

*Continued above*

## President's Post continued

2) raise awareness of ongoing and current actions of Shepherd members as they serve and volunteer in the community. The goal with this effort is to remind us all how much good is being done by our members and to encourage others to build on these efforts. We are carrying this out by conducting short interviews of Shepherd members. We call these short film clips, "Love in Action". I hope you have already seen some of these vignettes in our Sunday services. Please know that you can view them within the recorded worship services at our website. So far we have featured:

- Lisa Walker, who volunteers with the Blake Road Corridor Collaborative
- Kristen Hanneman, Meals on Wheels
- Jodi Rogness, Mental Health Connect
- Fred Jensen, Hopkins Lions Club
- Rich Shaeffer and Joel Nordin, The Boy Scouts

More members of Shepherd will be featured in the coming year.

The work of the Community Engagement Leadership Team has ended for now, but our plan is that the recommendations of this team will live on within Shepherd, and in this way, our engagement and support for the community around us will benefit from our reach and our love for many years to come.

Mother Theresa reminds us that Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love. Together we can and do make a difference in the communities around us.

How thankful I am for all of you!  
Peace and Merry Christmas.  
Todd Biewen

# Staff Reflection



## IN MEMORY

The family of Bruce Pladson would like to thank you for your love, prayers and remembrances of him. We have felt your presence with us over these last two years. Bruce loved tulips and their meanings so we share this picture of tulips used at his service in honor of him.

## WITH HEARTFELT THANKS

A huge thank you to everyone for their prayers, concern and help during the time of Ed's surgery. Everything was much appreciated. Blessings to all,  
Ed & Betty Edmundson

## 2020 CONTRIBUTIONS

All contributions for the year 2020 need to be received in the church office by noon on Thursday, Dec. 31, 2020 in order to be entered on 2020 giving statements. Any contributions received after this time will be posted on 2021 statements.



## You shall not murder...

By Pastor Scott Searl

I've probably watched way too much late-night television over the last four years. While I can't stay up late enough to watch these shows live (or recorded or whatever they are now), I wake up each morning scrolling through my YouTube subscriptions to pull out the late-night show monologues. I noticed during the election this past year the jokes became more and more pointed. Their criticisms became sharper and more passionate. The targets more personal. I started to notice how often the jokes centered around calling someone a name. Words like buffoon, clown, or idiot seemed to roll off the tongues of the hosts with increasing frequency. Even more pointed were the asides when they would show a photo of some official and make up a name for them. The photo would appear beside their faces and they would introduce them as the Deloris Umbridge of the administration, for example. Derogatory name calling.

While I'm sure that irony, sarcasm and comedy have a role to play in public discourse, I am troubled by the prevalence that name calling has found in our everyday discussions. Rather than talking about policy or ideas we have mainly devolved into calling the other party or our opponents stupid, evil or worse. I have to admit I've been a willing participant on more than one occasion. Like all of us there are things for which we need to repent, daily.

I was caught up in my own name calling while reading the small catechism. Which might seem like a strange pandemic devotion book, but the small catechism is the core of our Lutheran faith and this seems like a good time to get back to basics. The fifth commandment seems rather straight forward on the surface, "You shall not murder." Got it, don't kill anyone. Mission accomplished. But Luther's explanation (or as I like to think of them mini sermons of his own confession of his faith and belief about these commands) says, "We are to fear and love God, so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life's needs." While name calling and teasing might not immediately jump to mind, reading Luther's explanation gave me pause to wonder about how our name calling is really intended to shut someone up, or destroy them, or at least discredit them. All acts of verbal violence. Name calling certainly isn't helping and supporting our neighbor in all their needs.

My hope here is to recognize that in order for us as a country, or even as families to move forward, we will need to build trust, not destroy it. We will need to honor one another, not discredit each other. We will need to support and help all our neighbors. I hope that through this reflection you too might notice how often our discourse is designed to verbally destroy rather than love, help or encourage different behavior. I hope that it is time to put away such childish name calling and instead focus on the many ways we can help the poor, the broken hearted, the sick and the suffering. I wonder if we could stop calling each other derogatory names and instead call each other what we really are, children of God.



## “Thanks” Will Never Suffice

By Deacon Brian Henning

In July of 2015, I had the very hard job of planning my new life in Minnesota in the middle of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp in Colorado. I spent the summer of 2015 at Rainbow Trail as the Travel Support Director. I was in charge of making sure our week long VBS camps and hiking trips both went off without a hitch. The majority of my work for this job primarily occurred over three days, so the rest of the week was discerning whether outdoor ministry was my calling or not, amongst office work, doing some on-site programming, and other general site work. I got to check out the life of the director, the inner workings of the office, and the many other areas of outdoor ministry that encompass the necessary work of providing an excellent camp experience for thousands of kids. Ultimately, I decided that being a camp director was not in my future. Nevertheless, I still had to plan the coming months as I chose Seminary classes, found an apartment in St. Paul, and found a place of employment all without a stable internet connection (on a good day). The classes were chosen and the apartment was found, but finding a place to work that was meaningful and actually contributed to my studies was proving to be a bit of a challenge. Eventually, I found a list of churches that were looking to hiring Seminarians to do work in their congregation. After examining the list, there was only one option for me: Children’s Ministry Coordinator at Shepherd of the Hills in Edina.

After several phone calls and a FaceTime interview with Pastor Joanna and the Personnel Team, I was tentatively offered the position. During my first week in Minnesota, I got to meet some of you in Worship and had a sit down conversation with Pastor Scott and Pastor Joanna (a meeting which taught me the perils of driving across the metro at 3pm on a weekday). I remember leaving that meeting decided that I was going to take the job, something I was previously unsure of as the church was far from my apartment and working half-time in a new city while starting my Masters degree was paralyzingly terrifying.

Of course, from the moment I walked into the building, I could tell that Shepherd is a special place. And you have, without hesitation, more than lived up to that high bar.

As announced on Sunday, November 8, I have discerned the time has come for me to leave Shepherd and join my family as we grow our lavender business, Simplicity Lavender Farm. My final Sunday at Shepherd will be December 27 and I will finish my work on December 31.

Over the past 5 years, I have been in awe of the overwhelming and complete support and care you have shown to me and my family. When I came out as gay, you offered hugs and a standing ovation. When the next step in my journey to becoming a rostered leader was made impossible for me to reach, you made room. You opened your hearts and door to me to take the risk and call me as a first time Deacon. For these things and so much more I am so grateful.

**Continued above**

## Thanks continued

As I prepare to take my exit, I cannot help but reflect on my time with the kids of Shepherd. I will always remember our time together learning about God and our community. I have always appreciated your joy and laughter and I am so proud of each of you as you grow and fully live into what it means to be a child of God. I will miss each of you so much.

Finally, to the staff: there truly are no words to express just how much each of you mean to me. I have cherished every conversation, every moment of joy and sorrow, every opportunity to be vulnerable and to speak truth, and every moment of passion to be the best we can be for the people of Shepherd. I know how rare it is to find a well-functioning, supportive staff and you rank high among the few. God has blessed me with your presence in my life.

It is hard to believe that in a few weeks I will be leaving Shepherd and professional ministry, two goals I fought hard to achieve. I am sad to be leaving, but I am also looking forward to the new adventures ahead. As I close this chapter of my life, I want you to know that you have played an incredibly vital role in my growth as a person and I will always look back on my time with you fondly.

And now, I pray, that God will continue to pour out blessings upon us. I pray that the Holy Spirit may continue to instill the fire within us that pushes us into relationships with our neighbors. And I pray that you may continue to experience the healing and wholeness that only the connection to the Body of Christ can afford. Peace be with you all.

Amen and Goodbye!

## SOTH BOOK CLUB

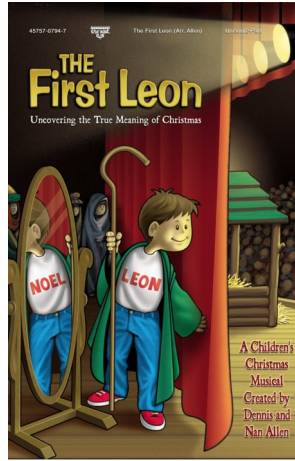
Book club at SOTH is open to all, male and female. Please feel free to join us. We have 2-3 copies of each book. All books will be available all year if you want to read ahead. Please read the book and return ASAP so another person can borrow the book for reading also. We try to get 2-3 readers to be able to read one copy.

For questions please contact Kaye Wothe, Faith Community Nurse at [kwothe@comcast.net](mailto:kwothe@comcast.net)

## Book Club Schedule

Wed., January 13, 6:30 pm,  
"This is How is Always Is"  
by Laurie Frankel

Wed., February 17, 6:30 pm,  
"Us Against You"  
by Fredrik Bachman



## The First Leon 2020 Christmas Program Sunday, December 13 at 9:30 am

Like most things in 2020, this year's Children's Christmas Program will be unlike any other at Shepherd. Since the beginning of October, the kids have been in recording sessions to put this year's program together. We are incredibly proud to present, "The First Leon" during Worship on December 13. This year's Christmas Program will be a virtual program. Our kids recorded the acts on Zoom and recorded their musical parts for several virtual choir pieces. All of these pieces will come together in a special video which will premiered during the Sermon on December 13. I am incredibly proud of the kids' passion for telling the Christmas story year after year and I am so grateful for their flexibility and willingness to try this very usual way of performing the Christmas Program. I hope you will join us on December 13 to see what the kids have been up to.

### *The First Leon Synopsis:*

*In this charming musical, you will see the Christmas story through the eyes of Leon. You see, Leon is... special. Ever since he discovered that his name spelled backwards is Noel, he's felt called to tell the world the true meaning of Christmas. But when he tries out for every role in the annual pageant, he finds that he's the only one who doesn't get a part. Rejected, Leon understands better than anyone how Mary and Joseph must have felt when they heard the words, No room that night in Bethlehem. Without really trying to, however, Leon does uncover the true meaning of Christmas when he identifies the real Star of Bethlehem.*

## WEDNESDAY NIGHT SPEAKER SERIES

**Date:** Wednesday, December 2, 2020 from 6:30-7:30 pm  
**Topic:** It's not Your Birthday – North Minneapolis:  
Rebuilding a Vibrant, Yet Forgotten Neighborhood.  
**Speaker:** Veronica Hawman, Executive Director, Redeemer  
Center for Life

**Description:** The Harrison neighborhood in North Minneapolis is a vibrant community where people live, work, learn, and grow. Yet, it is often forgotten, oppressed by poverty and social systems. There is another town that was uncelebrated and forgotten - Nazareth. Yes, the place "Jesus of Nazareth" grew up. Where we live and grow matters. Connectivity, relationships, and the ability to self-advocate for better conditions matters. Join me as we explore what it means to create a place for people to come together to learn, work, and discover community.



## **CHRISTMAS AT SOTH** **9:30am on Sundays** **4:00 pm on Christmas Eve**

For the last couple months we have been planning to host an outdoor worship for Christmas on Saturday afternoons. Unfortunately we are no

long able to host these kinds of outdoor gatherings. We are so disappointed. We will continue to worship on Sunday mornings, via zoom at 9:30am. For Christmas Eve we will have one afternoon service at 4pm on zoom. If the governors orders change, we will let you know if we are able to host any additional outdoor worship opportunities. For now, we will pray that everyone stays home when possible, wears a mask and washes your hands often. To remember how long to wash during the Christmas season you can sing Happy Birthday Dear Jesus!!



## **Hope in Darkness Service** **December 20th, 2020** **5:00pm**

Christmas may not always be a “merry” time for people, especially when there has been a loss in your life. Loss of a job, loss of community, loss of a loved one can all become too heavy of a burden to carry alone when everyone around you is filled with holiday

cheer. During this pandemic, many of us have faced such losses and our fear, anxiety and loneliness remain high. Please join us on Sunday, December 20th at 5:00 pm for a special service via Zoom. This service is filled with music, prayer and a time for silent reflection, to allow you to grieve and to hope as we await the birth of Jesus. If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Sherri at [sherri.otto@sothchurch.com](mailto:sherri.otto@sothchurch.com) or 612-251-1342.

## **HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS AND SMALL GATHERINGS**

The CDC’s website has excellent information on guidance for gatherings during the upcoming holidays. It is best to gather only with those you live with or a very limited number, wearing masks and distancing. The CDC’s website is <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>

## **MEALS ON WHEELS**

Calling all SOTH Members! Let’s let our Meals on Wheels recipients know we’re thinking of them this holiday season by donating small gifts that can be delivered along with a hot meal.

There are many ways you can help:

- Buy and donate small, useful items such as large-print activity books, decorated hand or dish towels, notecards, candles, candy, etc
- If you are crafty, donate handmade items like hotpads, dishcloths, towels
- Mail a check to SOTH made out to ‘Meals on Wheels’ with ‘gifts’ in memo line
- Kids can draw pictures to send with gifts

There will be a labeled plastic donation bin just inside the Meals on Wheels entrance to the church (on the West side of the church, opposite the little parking lot by the parsonage). It would be extra helpful if the gifts are wrapped and labeled with a post it note indicating what’s inside. That door is open from 10:00 am to noon on weekdays so you can just pop by, drop it in the box, and be on your way. Donation deadline is Wednesday December 16th. Thank you!



## A Different Year

By Pastor Sherri Otto

I was driving home the other day from the grocery store around noon, when I noticed a man sitting at a bus stop. As I came to the light, I looked over at the man. He was sitting down on a bench, unscrewing the cap of a bottle. It was a bottle of vodka. The light turned green and I drove away. My heart was heavy, and two thoughts came into my head. The first was that this man must be in a bad place. He is sitting at a bus stop, alone, at noon, unscrewing a bottle of vodka so that he can have a drink. This made me sad and I began to think about all of the people that are alone right now, trying to deal with life. My second thought was this. I was wishing that there would be a place for me to pull over and park. I wished that I could walk up to the man and ask him if I could join him.

The thought of this got me thinking about what outcome could have taken place from my action. If I had walked up to this man would he laugh at me, would he yell and tell me to mind my own business or would he invite me to sit and have a sip of his vodka. I will never know. But it got me thinking about how often it is that we consider doing something but often don't follow through with it because we are too busy or it's too hard or it's a bit crazy and then we wonder what could have happened if we had.

As I continued to drive, I fumbled around for a radio station to listen to and came across one with Christmas music. Now I need to tell you a few things about myself. I love Christmas music! Jolly Old St. Nicholas, The First Noel, What Child Is This, Silent Night, O Come All Ye Faithful... the list is endless, and I love this season! The decorations, the lights, the shopping, the music and yes, even the Hallmark movies!

But this year has been different. And that is an understatement! I have not been as excited or enamored with any of these things. My heart has been heavy with worries, with regrets, with things left undone, and with the things that I love to do but cannot this year. No Christmas parties, no family gatherings and no caroling of beloved Christmas songs (except maybe alone in my car!)

This year has been different. And challenging. And uncertain. And crazy. And unbelievable. And... (you can fill in the blank).

That man sitting at the bus stop alone got me thinking about another year that was different. The year when Jesus was born. And I wondered if Mary, as she sat alone and pondered the things that had taken place, felt like him and like us, with the challenges, the uncertainty, the craziness of it all and how it may have seemed unbelievable. And yet, she says yes to God! She follows the instructions of the angel and says, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Luke 1:38

**Continued above**



## A Different Year continued

Think about all the “different” things that Mary went through. She was visited by an angel saying she was going to have a son who would be the Savior of the world. (Unbelievable) She was a virgin and yet she was pregnant. (Crazy) Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem and found themselves without a place to stay. (Challenging) Mary gave birth to a son in a manger, among the animals. (Uncertainty) Shepherds came to them and bowed down to Jesus, her little baby. And Mary pondered all of these things in her heart.

When I revisit this story in Luke, I find comfort for the challenging times we are in. I find hope in this story, hope which I sometimes forget, especially with this past year and all that has taken place. I find strength to do things, to help others, to be a light for others in their darkness. I need to be reminded of this story, of a God that can do anything and put my hope and trust there. “For nothing will be impossible with God.” Luke 1:37. I pray that you do the same.

This December, as we wait for the birth of Jesus, may you find comfort, hope, strength and a kind of peace that this world cannot give. May you know that all things are possible with God. And may you feel the love of Christ in every situation that you are faced with.

I leave you with these words from my favorite Christmas song... O Holy Night.

*O Holy night, the stars are brightly shining,  
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope the weary soul rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.  
Fall on your knees. O hear the angels voices!  
O night divine, o night when Christ was born!  
O night, O Holy night divine.*

*Truly he taught us to love one another,  
His law is love, and his gospel is peace.  
Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we  
Let all within us praise His holy name.  
Christ is the Lord, oh praise His name forever.  
His power and glory evermore proclaim!  
His power and glory evermore proclaim!*

Peace,  
Pastor Sherri





mental  
health  
connect

We help open doors

**MENTAL HEALTH CONNECT**  
Mental Health Resources and  
Education can be found on their  
webpage:  
[http://www.mhconnect.org/  
events](http://www.mhconnect.org/events)

## **Mental Health Monday Speaker Series**

### **“It’s Personal: Clergy, Faith and Mental Health”**

**Speaker: Pastor Meta Herrick Carlson, Bethlehem Lutheran and  
Father Jim Debruycher (ST. Joan of Arc Catholic Community**

**Monday, January 11, 2021**

**6:30-8:00 pm via Zoom**

(Please note there is no session December 2020)

The Monday Night Mental Health Speaker Series is free and open to the public.

The theme for the 2020/2021 series is "Hope for the Journey". Join us on the 2nd Monday of (most) months to talk about important topics related to mental health. Zoom link can be found at [mhconnect.org/events](http://mhconnect.org/events)

## **Let’s Connect Thursday**

**Thursdays, 8:00-8:45PM**

"Let’s Connect" is a virtual community. We meet together via Zoom for a time of connection and discussion about how our week has been, how we’re feeling, and we will share resources, encouraging one another. 2020 has brought us many unexpected challenges - isolation, working from home, layoffs, missing friends and family, stress and uncertainty are just a few of the concerns we are experiencing. We NEED each other and a community to safely discuss life. If you have been longing for a group to connect with, like many of us have, join us each Thursday, beginning July 30th. A trained facilitator will lead the conversation. Free! All welcome! No registration necessary.

## **ResourceWest Toy Chest Drive**

**Donations accepted up to Dec. 11**

Help a child celebrate the Holidays. Donations of gift items for ages 0-12 and 13-18 are being collect at ResourceWest (1011 1st Street S., Suite 109, Hopkins).

Visit their website <https://www.resourcewest.org/toy-chest-program/> for more details.



## The Year It Was Advent All Year...

By Kaye Wothe, Faith Community Nurse

In some ways, 2020 has been one very long Advent experience: a watchful time of waiting. Sitting in the dark, expecting and waiting for the light.

What is God calling us to do during this time? Where is God in this?

Some years, I am frankly annoyed we have to go through Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, etc. again. Some years it seems like we “just did that.” Some years I want a new cycle because I already know what happened in this cycle of church holidays. When I examine it closer, I realize what I am really tired of is the commercial aspect of these times of the year.

BUT this year I really need Advent. I really need the birth of a Savior to remind me of the hope, light, and omnipotent power of God.

The story of Jesus’ birth has some timeline similarities to our days this year. Like this year for us, there was a census being taken. The census then, and maybe now, had/has political implications. I suspect for each of us, who the current-day Herod and Pharisees are is unique to our own political views.

The hotels (or this year our hospitals, where we typically give birth) are full, there is nowhere to go. We are dependent on the kindness of a stranger to help; in Mary and Joseph’s case, to offer a place to stay, or in our situation, to behave in ways that limit the spread of the virus, or help us get groceries safely, or to offer us medical care, etc. Is the world really so different? There was good and evil. There were the poor and wealthy. There was a struggle for power, most notably played out in the struggle for power to govern either over others or with others. Some gathered in crowds to yell things like, “crucify him!” Back then, or more recently, “lock her up,” “I can’t breathe,” “stop counting,” “count every vote,” etc. There was exhaustion with the extremes, with oppression, and not feeling heard. There was fear of loss of what seemed a limited amount of power available, which drove harsh political rhetoric as Herod scrambled to retain control.

Everyone worked to survive and dreamed of flourishing. Undoubtedly, people worried about their future and the future of their children, living one day at a time leaning into their community and gratefulness. Babies were still born every day, bringing with them hope for the future that marched on, like it or not. Little did people realize one of those lowest of babies came to be the Savior of all the people of the world. In His lifetime on earth, He would be a role model for us to show us how to care for those with less and who are more vulnerable, to see the “woman at the well” in our midst and care for her or him, to forgive freely, to judge less and love more, to let our actions speak, to heal others through our care and acceptance of them, to serve and to claim that call—not run away from it. Baby Jesus came to be our hope, our light in the darkness of what feels like a very dark time in history. To remind us that the good in the world has survived Herod, Hitler, and many other self-serving people who somehow rose to power. I, for one, need to cling to that hope, that light and keep myself immersed in those promises.

## The Year it was Advent continued

Maybe because of my age or maybe because of the year it has been, no gift that can be wrapped under the tree can bring me excitement or light. It is the gift of the baby Jesus, the life I know He role modeled on earth and His power to save, that brings me hope like nothing else can. You, Community of SOTH, are that hope and love embodied for me, for one another and for so many others in the world. I look forward to moving forward into a new year of grace-filled hope, love and action in the world around us together.

Wishing you a Safe and Merry Christmas and a Hopeful New Year filled with the Light Only Baby Jesus can Bring!

Kaye Wothe  
Faith Community Nurse

*Continued above*

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church  
500 Blake Road South  
Edina, MN 55343

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Hopkins, MN  
Permit No. 132

Dated Material



merry christmas!

COME, LET US ADORE HIM