



Pastor's Ponderings

The Advent of our Lord...The arrival of our Lord!

The arrivals I have experienced are sometimes prepared for and expected, and other times they are a surprise. Some arrivals are positive, and one looks forward to them, and others bring dread or worry. Some arrivals are on time, and some are late or even early.

Well, the arrival of our Lord, the advent of our Lord, that we remember, anticipate, and celebrate for four weeks before Christmas is coming too quickly for me this year. I do not feel ready. My mind, heart, and spirit still need to get in line with the joy and hopefulness of Jesus's coming. Maybe you feel the same way?

One of my favorite Bible verses is from 1st Peter 3:15 in which the author challenges Jesus' followers, servants of the Lord, disciples like you and me, to "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence."

It is difficult to "always" be ready and prepared. My readiness ebbs and flows, but it feels like our Lord's arrival is sure. Therefore to acknowledge it, and focus on what that means for us, is our calling for Advent.

Being prepared, and to act in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is a goal of Advent. Getting our lives in order, in order to reflect Jesus in the world. Reflect the light coming into the world. Be to the least of these as Jesus is and was to the lepers, sinners, tax collectors, sick, mentally ill, marginalized, meek, lonely, misunderstood, and to all the humans in our lives.

To prepare for the arrival of Jesus is to "fire up" our energy, to actively obey Jesus' command to

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind: and your neighbor as yourself."

In a kind of circular way, I got to what Advent is all about. LOVE.

May God's Love shine in and through you this Advent season.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Fred he/him/his



Mid-Week Advent Services

Soup Dinner (6:00 PM) / Worship Services (7:00 PM)

- December 6 Abiding Savior LC, 1534 Ruie Rd. North Tonawanda
- December 13 Good Shepherd LC, 2669 Sheridan Dr., Tonawanda
- December 20 St. Martin LC, 322 Old Falls Blvd., North Tonawanda

You are invited to join us on Christmas Eve!
(in-church and on Zoom)

Augustana LC
Candlelight &
Communion Service,
4:30 PM



TOL Candlelight
Service of Lessons &
Carols,
7:00 PM

Annual Budget Meeting

The budget meeting will be held following the worship service on **Sunday, December 10**. Also on the agenda is the election of council members for 2024. Please plan on attending, either in person or on Zoom! Thank you.

TOL Church Council

Pastor Fred's Bible Study: The Book of Revelation

The remaining two classes will be held on Fridays, December 1 and 8 at 10:00 AM at Augustana or on Zoom. All are welcome!

Tai Chi with Charlie Schmidtke at TOL
Monday Evenings, 6:30 PM - 7:30 PM
\$20 per 10-week session

If you are looking for a form of exercise that consists of slow gentle movements, meditation and breathing, consider learning Tai Chi. **Note that Session 2 will begin in March.**

Session 1:
December 4, 11

Session 2:
March 4, 11, 18, 25
April 8, 15, 22, 29
May 6, 13

TOL Chili Cook-off following worship, Sunday, December 3

All are welcome to enjoy delicious chili—and to stay afterwards to play board games!

(A sign-up sheet is posted on the main bulletin board—desserts are welcomed.)



Decorating the Church for Advent and Christmas

Please join us on **Saturday, December 2 at 10:00 AM** to help decorate the church for the seasons of Advent and Christmas. "Many hands make light work!"

Christmas Poinsettias...If you wish to purchase a plant for the sanctuary, please use the sign-up sheet on the main bulletin board. The **deadline** is Sunday, December 17. Please speak to Barb if you have any questions

Trinity Tidings, December 2023

We invite you to join us for worship,
Sundays at 11:00 AM
(in-church or on Zoom)



Seasons of Advent and Christmas

First Sunday of Advent, December 3
Second Sunday of Advent, December 10
Third Sunday of Advent, December 17
Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 24
(combined worship at Augustana LC, 9:30 AM)

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at TOL

December 24 at 7:00 PM
(in-church and on Zoom)

*Come, share the Christmas spirit with others—
invite a friend or relative to in-church or Zoom worship!*

ELCA Prayer Ventures, December 2023

- † The United Nations estimates that 90% of wartime casualties are suffered by civilians. Pray for an end to the violence, loss of life, suffering and injustice caused by war and conflict in the world, especially in Ukraine and the Middle East.
- † *International Migrants Day* Pray for those who, with great risk and uncertainty, have left their home countries and familiar surroundings to seek welcoming communities where they feel safe, respected and free to reestablish their lives and raise their families.
- † *Winter solstice* As the days of the Northern Hemisphere grow shorter, pray that we will be guided and reassured by the light of Christ, which illuminates God's love, mercy and truth in our lives and in every corner of the world.
- † Share with God your hopes, concerns, uncertainties and aspirations for the year ahead. Pray for the Spirit to strengthen our faith in God's concern for us and in God's attention to our prayers — spoken and silent.
- † What stirs joy in you today? Give thanks for the people and experiences that bring joy into your life, even if only briefly. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
- † Give thanks for those who serve our communities during Christmas, including people in health care, elder care, law enforcement, the hospitality industry, emergency services and the military.

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Prayer for Trinity Old Lutheran and Augustana Lutheran Churches

Inspire us to be good stewards of the resources you have entrusted to us. Teach us to give freely of ourselves and to offer our lives in service. Show us your will for the ministries at Augustana and Trinity Old Lutheran.

Trinity Tidings

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December Mission: Lutheran World Relief (LWR) Crisis Alert

"Israel and Gaza need your help: Civilians
Caught in Danger and Need You"

"Lutheran World Relief has a long history of reaching our neighbors in Israel and Gaza. We join you in praying urgently, and we thank you for standing ready to care for innocent civilians caught in the crossfire.

The compassion of faithful people like you is needed in the hardest to reach places — places where innocent children, women and men are suffering.

Your caring gift will deliver critically needed resources like medical care, food, water and essential supplies where they are needed most."

[from: www.lwr.org/israel-gaza. © 2023 Lutheran World Relief]

Please place your donations in the marked envelopes in the narthex or mail your donations to the church office (indicate on your check that it is designated for LWR Israel-Gaza).

November Mission: Veterans One-stop of WNY

Thank you for your donations to Veterans One-stop of WNY! Your support helps ensure that veterans and their families will have access to valuable services and resources offered by the organization.



Your donations supporting the Community of Good Neighbors Mobile Food Pantry in Buffalo and Good Shepherd Lutheran's pantry in Tonawanda are greatly appreciated.

Please use the narthex shopping cart or leave them in the elevator entrance during the week (Tuesday to Friday, 9:00 AM to Noon). Thank you!

"Christian Cancer Support"

If you are on a cancer journey and are in need of support, please contact Linda Sokoley. She is on a journey as well and she can offer you support, hope and healing.



Please contact Linda through Augustana LC's office at 716-832-5720 or by email at augustchurch@yahoo.com.

God's Work; Our Hands

"No one should go to bed hungry. No one should worry where they'll sleep tonight. Everyone should know they have a friend they can turn to when they need help."



So reads the motto at "Friends of Night People" where six of us volunteered from 4:45 PM until about 7 PM on Friday, October 20. Matt organized this for TOL. Those who attended were Elaine, Stephanie, Peter and Faith, Matt and me. It was a new experience for many of us. Although I often help make sandwiches in the church kitchen as part of our weekly mission, I've never actually visited the facility on Hudson Street in Buffalo.

The building is bright, clean and welcoming. There were volunteers from other places helping that night also. We met the head chef who showed us the ropes and let us have a taste of the delicious chicken stew that was being served.

My assignment was in the 1st floor clothing room run by an organized, energetic, vivacious young woman with eyes in the back of her head. She works at Roswell days and volunteers here evenings.

Clients are allowed 4 pieces of clothing and one pair of shoes per visit and as much bread as they want (donated from local businesses). They were especially enamored with the pink bagels! My job was to help keep the clothes organized. This included directing people to the right area, picking up hangers off the floor and placing them on a rack in a back room. There was a sign which told patrons to leave their hangers on the floor after removing the clothes they wanted. I never asked why this was a better option than leaving them hanging, but all the bending was a good workout!

There was a constant stream of people coming and going the whole time. I heard a lot of friendly banter; it was heartwarming to see how everyone was treated with respect and dignity.

It also was very impressive how organized and well-run everything was. People helping people can make a difference. (TOL has a bin in the hall outside the narthex where you can donate men's clothing.)

If I were asked to come up with a motto for our experience at "Friends of Night People," it would be:

KINDNESS LIVES HERE

Diane S



Operation Christmas Child

Our 54 boxes of love were dropped off for Operation Christmas Child—that is a new record!! A big thank you to everyone who helped make this possible from donating items to fill a box to providing the funds to send a box.

Stay tuned for an update as to where they were sent. Thank you again!



God Bless,
Debbie and Kelly

Thank You Letter from Carol Murphy, Harvest House Buffalo (excerpts; the full letter is posted on main bulletin board)

Dear Pastor Fred and Faithful Friends,

On behalf of Harvest House, thank you so much for participating in the Harvest House Baby Shower! We are so grateful for your donations. This effort is truly a gift from God for us. Donations like these are vital to helping us make a difference in this community, and this will help us serve so many more.

The COVID-19 pandemic, the racially motivated shooting at Tops just down the street, and the continued influx of immigrants, have created a further disparity between East Buffalo and the rest of Western New York. Your donation will help us provide expanded services to people who are suffering the most.

The Baby & Children's Ministry has seen an **80% increase** in the number of children we have served this year. We continue to have expanded hours of service, both in-store and curbside, helping parents and caregivers in crisis safely gain access to clothing and basic needs for their children.

We are grateful for your support and faith in our ministries. Thank you and God Bless,

Carol Murphy
President

Personal handwritten note: "What a blessing! Thank you so much on behalf of children in need."

Ways to Give to TOL

Online: Tithe.ly is available. For instructions, please visit the church website at www.trinityoldlutheran.com or download the Tithe.ly app to your smartphone. Please call the church office at (716) 836-4868 if you have any questions.

Giving by mail: Please send your checks to the church and to the attention of the Financial Secretary.



Monday Afternoon Adult Ed. Classes, led by Charlie Schmidtke

Our next class will meet on Monday, **December 4** in the Fireside Room or on Zoom (1:00 PM to 2:30 PM). The topic will be Deborah's Victory. Please contact Charlie for a Zoom link.

Classes for January and February 2024 are listed below.

2024

January 22: Elijah and the Prophets
February 5: Babylonian Captivity
February 19: Last Supper



Adult Ed. Classes with Charlie Schmidtke
Study Notes: Jesus' Family

Part II: Gospel of James, continued

At 12 years old the priests decide that Mary is becoming unclean because of her menstruation, so Zechariah selects Joseph to become her husband. He has children from a former marriage and no longer has any interest in sex. So, Mary remains a virgin her entire life. Joseph lived in Nazareth and returned there after the betrothal, while Mary remained in Jerusalem (or lived with Elizabeth in Hebron). Joseph returned six months later and found her pregnant. He rebukes her and was afraid the temple priests would assume he was the father, which they did. But Mary was born sinless and remained sinless her entire life. Her sinlessness was connected to her perpetual virginity. To prove the point, James goes on to say that Salome checked Mary to prove it was a virgin birth.

(Salome may have been the mother of the apostles James and John, or she may have been Mary's half-sister. Mary's father was only one of three husbands her mother may have had. There is a belief that Anne had three daughters with three different men and named each one Mary.) In James' Gospel, Salome's relationship to Mary is ambiguous. However, her examination of Mary was used to renounce the temple leaders saying that Joseph had fathered the child. In fact, when Salome was examining Mary, her hand withers—but is restored when she prays to God and an angel tells her to touch the baby, Jesus. According to James, the couple didn't make it to Bethlehem, instead the child was born in a cave. Joseph ran to get a midwife. When he returns, a cloud overshadows the cave, an intense light fills the cave and suddenly a baby is at Mary's breast. Salome was one of the midwives who had come to help with the birth, but her services weren't necessary. Thus, Mary's womb was never involved in sexual activity or even in giving birth.

James includes the story of the Magi and the slaughter of the Innocents. He also says that Zechariah died a martyr when he refused to tell where the baby, Jesus, was hiding. His gospel has been a primary source for the adoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although influential, it was never included in our bible.

There is considerable confusion about the relationships in Mary's family lineage. Scholars generally accept that Joachim and Anne were her biological parents. There is a lot of evidence and speculation that Anne had more than one child. She may have had one or two other daughters named Mary. The problem is that both of the parents may have died when Mary was a child. If that is the case, then what about Mary's sister or sisters? The Gospel of James says that Anne and Joachim were childless until they miraculously had Mary. If they died soon afterward, then how could Mary have any sisters? This confusion also impeaches the credibility of the Gospel of James. Let's assume that Mary was raised by Elizabeth and Zechariah

after her parents died. That would explain why she went to Elizabeth to share her news of her pregnancy.

Here are the complications: Mary, the wife of Zebedee, was also known as Salome and may have been Mary's older sister. She may have been at the birth to help Mary. We have no idea who the women were who helped Mary give birth. Joseph would not have helped. Thus, Salome would contradict the Gospel of James' version that Mary's parents were barren. However, many scholars believe that the gospel's idea of their childlessness is mistaken. Many theologians believe that Salome, the wife of Zebedee, is really Mary's sister and becomes the mother of James, called the Major and John, the gospel writer. So, the first apostles were Jesus' cousins. A third Mary is the wife of Alphaeus and mother of James (the Minor, another apostle) and Joses (sometimes called Joseph). This Mary may have been another sister of Mary. If that is true, then another apostle, James the minor, would have been Jesus' cousin too. A fourth Mary is married to Clopas who may have been Joseph's brother, making this Mary, Mary's sister-in-law. Of course, there is also Mary Magdalene and Mary and Martha. These Mary's have been confused over the years. We'll spend some time with the different biblical Mary's when we discuss Mary Magdalene in a later class.

So, Jesus' family would include Mary and Joseph and their children (Jesus, James, Joses, Judas, Simon and sisters); Mary/Salome and Zebedee who have James and John (who become apostles); and Mary, wife of Alphaeus, who has James (another apostle) and Joses (some even say Matthew, the apostle, was their son too). These relationships indicate that Jesus' first apostles were: (1) followers of John the Baptist and (2) probably related to him. The idea that the apostles were strangers that he called while they were fishing seems to be mistaken beliefs.

The Catholic Church has elevated Mary to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the primary intercessor to her son. Her humanity seems to get lost in the devotions and dogmas. The Protestant Churches tend to ignore Mary and only deal with her on Christmas. The reality is probably somewhere in between. Her role as mother and caretaker should never be forgotten. Her influence on Jesus would have been profound. Dehumanizing her may lose the importance of her influence as a mother. Is she diminished if people accept that she had sex and at least six more children?

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