

## Your Pastor's Ponderings

For me, the beginning of January is both a time of great anticipation and of slight melancholy. It's sad because I hate to see the season of Christmas and all the wonderful holiday times come to an end – I already miss that time with family and friends, that time spent eating delightful meals and noshing on all the wonderful buttery, chocolaty, cinnamon type of treats (cookies, cakes, and candy). I already miss the slow rhythms of the week between Christmas and New Year's – reading books near the tree, taking naps in the recliner, or walking in the woods.

But these times aren't meant to last forever (else we wouldn't treasure them so much) and so we turn to the New Year. And the great thing about the New Year is that the slate is wiped clean, we get a fresh start, a chance to begin again. And that's wonderful news (especially for those for whom the previous year wasn't so great, for those for whom the holidays were actually a little rough and not so wonderful). The New Year is a time to look ahead with hopes for a brighter future, with renewed energy for trying something new. That's why we make all those new year's resolutions isn't – because we want to start fresh, begin anew, take another try at something that didn't succeed previously. The New Year is exactly that – a fresh start and something to look forward to.

And I'm struck that this is exactly what the message of the recently born Christ child brings to the world. Jesus brings something new to the world – a picture of God with us, God for us, a God who loves, wants to be with us, and fill our lives with blessing. While the dates of December 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> may be past, the church is still celebrating this message, still in its celebration of Christmas (at least for a couple of more days). In the church, the Christmas celebration is to last from December 25<sup>th</sup> to January 6<sup>th</sup> (Epiphany) twelve days – twelve being a holy number (the 12 apostles, the 12 tribes of Israel). And those twelve days of celebration spanning the end of the old year and the beginning of the new one focus on the celebration of Christ – the hope, joy, peace, and love that he brings to the world. His coming brings a new hope into a dark world. The gifts that the Magi bring at Epiphany to the child reminds us not only of the gifts that we have received this Christmas but also of the gift that God has given us in Christ.

The gifts of the magi (gold, frankincense, and myrrh) all point to the gift of the cross – the sacrifice that Christ will make on our behalf. Gold is a gift fit for a king (as in the King of the Jews inscribed above Christ's head). Frankincense is an aromatic resin often used in religious ceremonies to represent life and new birth. It is also used in anointing a

body for burial. Myrrh is an aromatic gum resin/oil that comes from a small thorny tree in the East. (think crown of thorns). Myrrh is often used as anointing oil for both the last rites as well as healing rituals. In this oil as well as all of the Magi's gifts, we have the duality of the cross – symbols of both death and new life. And thus the gift of life that comes at Christmas (the new born babe in the manger) is also the gift that leads to death and resurrection, the cross and new life. All of which stems out of God's love for the world, all of which offers hope for a new day, a new beginning, a New Year.

To be sure, when it comes to our New Year and especially our resolutions, that fresh perspective, that clean slate doesn't always last as long as we'd like. Inevitably, our resolutions get broken, our good fortunes hit a bump in the road, our new perspective slips back into the same old, same old. But this is why the gift of the Magi, the gift of the cross, the gift of the Christ, the gift of baptism (all of which we remember and celebrate at the start of the New Year) is so exciting. Because in these gifts, we are reminded that there are always opportunities for a fresh start, for a new beginning – not only at end of a calendar year but every day. Every day -- in which we remember that we are God's beloved, in which we remember that we are baptized children of God, in which we remember that we are followers of the cross, in which we place our weaknesses before the cradle and the cross – we are reminded that we are forgiven, that we are loved, that we belong to something greater than ourselves, that we have been given the gift of new life, not just in the hereafter but here and now.

And because of this, even though our New Year may eventually start to feel old and commonplace, we can take hope and comfort knowing that in the cross of Christ, in the forgiveness and love of God with us, every day is a new day, a New Year even. Happy New Year!

That's what I believe.

*Pastor Will*



**Business Meeting**  
**REMINDER: Joint Council Update** – Due to inclement weather and holiday schedules, the first meeting of the Joint Parish Council has been moved to Tuesday, January 10<sup>th</sup> @Samuels. Because of the rescheduling, there will be **no** potluck at this time – we will reschedule that meal for later in the year.

New council members please plan to join us for this first meeting and please note that normally Council meetings are held on the first Tuesday evening of every month.



**Adult Choir @M**

Please remember that for the next couple of months (pending further notice), the Adult Choir for Messiah will be practicing on Wednesdays at 1pm. Please join us if you're able – new members welcome at any time.



**ELCA GLOBAL LINKS**

Stay informed. Be inspired. Get involved.

**Southeast Asia: strong monsoons rains cause massive flooding**  
 Four tropical storms and heavy monsoon rains since July have caused widespread flooding throughout Southeast Asia, including in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Burma and the Philippines, resulting in over 900 deaths and affecting an estimated 9 million people. See [www.elca.org/disaster](http://www.elca.org/disaster).

**Order the new 2012 Global Mission Map Brochure now!**  
 Filled with a panorama of photos and stories from across the globe, an overview of mission rooted in relationship. Learn how your gifts and offerings are turned into effective ministry around the world. Perfect for Epiphany and annual meetings. To order 10 or fewer copies, call 800-638-3522 or email [ris@elca.org](mailto:ris@elca.org). To order more than 10, see [http://resources.elca.org/Products-Global\\_Mission.html](http://resources.elca.org/Products-Global_Mission.html).

**Chinese Christmas: an opportunity for evangelism**  
 The Rev. Dorcas Wang, ELCA missionary in China, reflects on the secular

nature of Chinese society. She observes how Chinese congregations use Christmas as an opportunity to reach out to non-believers. Read the entire story at [www.elca.org/handinhand](http://www.elca.org/handinhand); click either the copy-ready bulletin insert or the Winter 2011-12 issue of the Hand in Hand newsletter.

**Senegal: ending an era of service**  
 Viking and Marissa Dietrich's call to missionary service in Senegal was driven by the opportunity to use Christian witness in a Muslim context as a means of fostering community and peaceful relations. They recently reflected on their years of service; watch a short video at <http://blogs.elca.org/handinhand>. (While you're there, check out the next story too.)

**Japan: young (very young!) missionaries and Christmas**  
 "Our 9-year-old, Emilie, came home from school today with quite an amazing story of witness. She was chatting with a couple of friends about Christmas, saying "Well, you know it's not all about presents and Santa Claus, right?" Her friends looked at her with astonishment, and asked in their local dialect, "Eh? No way! Well then, what is it?" Read the rest of this story at <http://blogs.elca.org/handinhand>. (While you're there, check out the previous story too.)



**Prayer List Names -- Reminder**

Please be advised that Pastor Will is pleased to receive names of loved ones to include in his prayers as well as put on the parish prayer list. But to assist his memory and to ensure that your loved one is included in prayer as soon as possible, it is also helpful if you would please call the church office and leave their name on the church voice mail or send it to us in an email as a reminder. (926-2215 or [nclutheran@zoominternet.net](mailto:nclutheran@zoominternet.net).)

Thank you for your assistance in these highly important spiritual matters.



**COMING SOON: First Communion Class –Why do we eat Bread and drink Wine in church?**

Pastor Will is looking at offering a First Communion class in March for children who are of an advanced pre-school, kindergarten, or elementary school ages. This class will focus on helping children understand the meaning of communion and why we eat Bread and Wine in church every other Sunday. All parents who have children who they would like to participate in this class, please contact Pastor Will before Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> and let him know of your interest so he can have some idea of how many might come. In addition, a parent or parents are asked to attend this class with their children.

Right now he is looking at having class on the following dates  
**Sat. March 3<sup>rd</sup>, Sat. March 24<sup>th</sup>, and Sat. March 31<sup>st</sup>**  
At one of the following times:

**11:30am til 12:30pm**      **OR**      **1pm – 2pm.**

Please let Pastor Will know (by phone call, email, or chat) if you are interested and which class time you would prefer. Due to the availability of resources in his study, he is holding the class at Messiah.



**Communion FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN** – if you have younger children who are curious about communion, please be aware that Pastor Elisa and our sister parish are holding an introductory communion class for young preschoolers on February 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> at Mt. Calvary at 10am. Each class will be about 30-45 mins in length.

**UPDATED**

**Operation Christmas Child Update:** We have received word about the destination of some of our shoeboxes. They ended up in Ecuador and Iraq.



**The Mission Trip is On**

The mission trip for next year has been decided. It looks like we will be heading to northern Alabama to help out with all the rebuilding following last year's tornadoes down South. If you are interested in joining us, please let Pastor Will or Gloria Pritts or any other member of

the Mission Team know so that we can include you in our planning. At this time, it appears that we will be driving down to Alabama. Further details we will be posted as they arise.



**Soup for Southern Tornadoes – A Laurel Mountain Mission Team Fundraiser**

LAST SUNDAY to Sign Up -- Sign-up sheets for soup orders have been placed in the narthex at each church. Orders for Ham N Bean or Beef Vegetable are now being accepted. Sunday, January 8<sup>th</sup> is the last Sunday to sign up – call in orders will be accepted at the church office until Thursday morning, January 12<sup>th</sup> (926-2215). Proceeds will go towards the Laurel Mountain Mission Team and their efforts to help out with the rebuilding in Alabama. Please watch future bulletins for further details.

The last day to order soup will be January 12<sup>th</sup>. Pick up will be Sat., January 21<sup>st</sup>.



**Thank you** for those who delivered & packed, gave donations and made cookies. Because of the generosity we were able to give 24 food bags out this year. We also were able to give out 2 gift certificates to 2 families.



**Wisdom in the Word:** – The Return of Revelation  
After a break in December, our Parish Bible Study resumes this month as we continue to look at the various churches to which the letter of Revelation is addressed (chapters two & three). We covered four of the seven churches so far. We hope to cover the final three churches – as found in chapter 3, if you'd like to read ahead.

Our Bible Study meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month. This month, we meet on **Tuesday, January 24<sup>th</sup> at 7pm @Messiah**. Come join us – prior attendance not necessary, we're always happy to catch folks up.



**On the Horizon: Worship Happenings in January 2012**

## January 8<sup>th</sup> – Baptism of our Lord Sunday

On this day, we remember and celebrate the gift of Our Lord's baptism – an identifying moment in his life. While the Son of God is the sinless one and doesn't require the forgiveness baptism brings, he is also the earthly one (God with us) and as such desires the spirit and the strength that come with baptism as he begins his earthly ministry. In baptism, the gift is not just one of repentance and forgiveness, but, as the Acts text emphasizes, also involves the Spirit living and acting in the baptized. Here, the Spirit symbolizes God's blessing, empowers Jesus for his work, proclaims his Sonship, and propels him forth into the world – in much the same way, our own baptism's reflect the same godly calling and presence in our lives.

In worship today, we remember this calling, this strength, this presence, and the Spirit's empowering ability in our lives and in our ministries.

## January 15<sup>th</sup> – Come and Follow Sunday

Invitation is an essential part of our walk of faith, but we frequently see ourselves not as the invited but rather the one who is supposed to be doing the inviting. But today's gospel (John 1:43-51) emphasizes not invitation as our call to others to join the walk of faith but rather Jesus' invitation to us to follow him. Jesus' invitation is not that we carry him with us but rather that we follow where he would lead. When Christ invites Philip to "follow me," may we hear that invitation in our own ears to see what the future might hold.

## January 22<sup>nd</sup> – The Cost of Discipleship Sunday

Stories of the call to discipleship continue as the Epiphany seasons plays out the implications of our baptismal calling to show Christ to the world. Jesus begins proclaiming the good news and calling people to repentance right after John the Baptist is arrested for preaching in a similar way. Knowing that John was later executed, we see at the very outset the cost of discipleship. Still, the two sets of fisherman brothers leave everything they have known and worked for all their lives to follow Jesus and fish for people.

## January 29<sup>th</sup> – The Power of God Sunday/Rite of Healing and Anointing

In Moses' announcement about prophets, in the Psalmist who proclaims God's great works, in Jesus healing on the Sabbath, God shows the people the power of God's works. For the church these are ways of

pointing to the unique authority people sensed in Jesus' actions and words. We encounter that authority in God's word, around which we gather, the word that trumps any lesser spirit that would claim power over us, freeing us to follow Jesus.

Today we will proclaim God's authority and power in the world through a Rite of Healing and Anointing for all those in need of hearing a personal blessing from God's good word, so that we might each be free to trust in Jesus.

## Thank You!!!!

It is with grateful spirits and humble hearts that Pastor Elisa, Lydia, Timothy and I would like to thank everyone at St. Paul's, Samuel's, and Messiah for your very thoughtful Christmas gifts. The gift certificates are very much appreciated and will be put to good use. It is truly touching to be remembered by you at this blessed time of year. Know that you are very much a blessing to us and we are very thankful that God has placed us in your midst to provide leadership and to do ministry together.

Also, we want to thank all those individuals who sent us Christmas cards, prayers, well wishes, and other thoughtful gifts during the holidays. Your kindness is touching and our children were very excited to receive so much special attention and such fun presents. Your caring has brought joy to our hearts and a smile to our faces. Thank you so much. May God Bless You All in the New Year.

In the name of the newborn Christ,  
Pastor Will



## THE RETURN OF CONFIRMATION

Confirmation class resumes this Sunday, January 8<sup>th</sup> at 5:15pm. **Please note that with the calendar change, we also have a location change for our class.** Since we are working in partnership with the Lavansville-Bakersville Parish, our class will be **meeting at Mt. Zion** in Bakersville for the remainder of the confirmation year.

Schedule for January

Jan. 8<sup>th</sup> – Class, 5:15pm @Mt. Zion, Bakersville

Jan. 15<sup>th</sup> – Class, 5:15pm @MZ

Jan. 22<sup>nd</sup> – Class, 5:15pm, @MZ

Jan. 29<sup>th</sup> – Class, 5:15pm, @MZ



**Snow Camp Info** – Snow Camp Forms were sent to each confirmand prior to Christmas. They are due back into the office by January 15<sup>th</sup>. If there is anyone (confirmand or otherwise) who would like to go to Snow Camp and did not receive forms, please let Pastor Will know as soon as possible.



**Baptism of Our Lord** is on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and the Children's Sunday School will meet at 10:15am @ Messiah to Celebrate.

The children will participate in the Children's Sermon and Communion. We hope you can join the group.

### **Reminder from the ELCA**

#### ***Resolved to do Better This Year***

This being the season for making New Year's resolutions, I thought we might be inspired in our own commitments by a few of the 70 resolutions made by a young man when he was about 20. His powerful resolves helped shape not only his own destiny, but also that of a nation.

1. Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many soever, and how great soever.
2. Resolved, to be continually endeavoring to find out some new contrivance and invention to promote the aforementioned things.
3. Resolved, if ever I shall fall and grow dull, so as to neglect to keep any part of these Resolutions, to repent of all I can remember, when I come to myself again.

4. Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God; nor be, nor suffer it, if I can avoid it.
5. Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.
6. Resolved, to live with all my might while I do live.
7. Resolved, never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.
8. Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God.
9. Resolved, to be endeavoring to find out fit objects of charity and liberality.
10. Resolved, never to do any thing out of revenge.
11. Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.
12. Resolved, after afflictions, to inquire, what I am better for them, what good I have got by them, and what I might have got by them.
13. Resolved, always to do that, which I shall wish I had done when I see others do it.
14. Let there be something of benevolence in all that I speak.

Jonathan Edwards (1703—1758) entered Yale University just shy of his 13th birthday and graduated at 17. One of the leading intellectual figures in colonial America, his sermons in the 1730's and 1740's led to a series of revival movements later known as the Great Awakening. Considered what he determined in youth, it's no wonder.

**James McAlister**

