



December 24, 2023

Pastor Note:

Books have been written, lots of movies have been produced, and watched countless times, about the “spirit of Christmas.” Often the plotline is about some grumpy and doubting person having to be convinced to embrace the true “spirit of Christmas,” or someone overcoming great obstacles to make a Christmas celebration happen because they have an extraordinary measure of “the spirit of Christmas,” or better yet, combining both into a marvelous and moving story.

I can tell you this, my early encounters with “the spirit of Christmas” are a very mixed bag. My earliest memory is of Saint Nickolas (he came on December 6th in Germany, and in this instant was most likely my Uncle Erich) coming into the candle-lit living room of my grandparents and instead of giving me a present outright, bartered with me, a chocolate train for my pacifier - a trade I deeply regretted as soon as bedtime came around.

Fast forward a little, Saint Nick showed up in Kindergarten (I was four or five) with his helper Rubrecht, who was dressed in a brown robe, like a monk, and had a bundle of willow switches under his arm. Rubrecht definitely lacked “the spirit of Christmas,” as did the Head Kindergarten lady, because if she didn’t put you on the nice list and scribbled you down on the naughty list, you didn’t just not get a present out of Nick’s bulging sack, you actually got a minor whooping – ahh the good old days.

Fast forward some more, starting with Christmas Eve afternoon the adults and kids who were old enough, got busy setting things up beginning with the tree. All of this took place behind closed doors, while we the kids were going crazy with anticipation and impatience, which only added to the stress of the adults who at some point started barking rough, spirit-of-Christmas-lacking warnings, and began to calm their nerves with some high-proof and liquified “spirit of Christmas.”

On the other hand, a different spirit showed up when we finally bundled up, stepped into the cold and dark evening, and walked together to the old Lutheran Church in the center of our small town. Inside the lights were dim, and off to the right of the altar rose an enormous Christmas tree with actual electric lights instead of candles. It would be packed, the organ would fill the room with sound, the brass ensemble would reply out the Aspe, then the choir up on the balcony next to the organ would join, and finally, the congregation lifted their voices with them. In my little mind, it sounded and

felt like what the shepherds experienced. For a brief and holy moment all thoughts of presents, treats, and hoping for what you really wanted vanished, and were replaced by the presence of the Holy Spirit of God and a spirit of the worship of Jesus, of “Christ the Lord”, that the real “Spirit of Christmas” always inspires. Even my little mind, not even having the word incarnation in its vocabulary, knew and understood that God did an incredible thing in sending Jesus.

When the music stopped and the preacher climbed up into the pulpit and started talking about Christmas way over my and the other kids’ heads, we usually stared with amazement at that electrified Christmas tree. Beneath it was an oversized and very old Nativity you were not allowed to come close to much less touch it (which became a challenge and a dare – I passed). There he was, baby Jesus, in his straw-stuffed cradle, under the shelter of the tree branches, silent and not moving. The scene under the tree was in stark contrast to the life-sized, thorn-crowned, bleeding, and pierced Jesus, who hung from the cross behind the altar between the Nave and Aspe, silent and not moving. That Jesus was always there, every Sunday, every day, when the church was full and when the church was empty. They somehow connected, that baby Jesus and the big dead one on the cross, but the one on the cross was more fascinating, hard not to look at, wonder about, and be gripped by the Spirit of Christmas, the Spirit of God, when you looked at him.

That moment would pass quickly, it doesn’t take long or much to distract a little boy. Most often, I remember, I would stare at the preacher in his funny robe in the pulpit opposite the Christmas tree, and notice something else weird and funny about him, like hairs sticking out of his nose, or whether he was dressed or naked under that robe. Or I would look around a begin a staring contest, or try to bug the kid in the pew in front of me without any adult noticing, or ... And before too long impatience set in, some other kind of “spirit of Christmas” returned, and I couldn’t wait to get out of there.

Don’t miss the true Spirit of Christmas, the Holy Spirit of God, inviting you, leading you to worship Jesus to proclaim him as Lord, your Lord and Savior, and worship him.

Merry Christmas, to God be all glory, Pastor Hans



Lord Hear Our Prayers

PRAYER REQUEST

Shirley (bereavement), Mabel Mayes, Julie Ebel,
Jack (Brother in-law to Judy Mahar),
Bart Anderson, Rayella (health & Insurance), Denise (health),
Sam ,(Health & encouragement), Foster Children and
those who foster, And that we do “SHARE”.

If you notice someone has been absent from Small Group or
Worship Services for awhile, why not call them or stop by to
let him/her know that they have been missed. A kindness that
cost you nothing could mean everything to someone who is
suffering in the silence of self-exile.

Military And Those Serving

Michael Berger, Austin Downing,
Noah Martin, John Michael Chavez,
Chris Kelly, Austin Kroeker, Brian Sula,
Thomas Hoffman, Joel Thelen,
Clayton Brown, Jonathan Grinols, Joshua Grabowski,
Christopher Sula

CARD & FLOWER MINISTRY

If you know of anyone who is ill or hospitalized, please let us
know by calling: **Lynnette Barrera** – (559)400-1862 and
Rachel Aratin - (209)206-5236
Prayer Request e-mail to: **Judy Mahar** ldpbepayer@gmail.com

Church Board Members:

Hans Frei - Pastor . Richard Mayes - Head Deacon ,
Dan Hankemeier . Sue Kluding .
Gabi Cox . Chuck Arndt



Mark your calendars
for Sunday January 7, 2024
(after church)

if you are interested in helping plan for
our Pastor's
40th church anniversary celebration.
This will be our initial meeting to start
planning.

We are in need of another
“Kids Church Caregiver”
to serve once-a-month.
If interested. Talk to Susie ASAP

Sermon Notes:

December Announcements

Upcoming Events

- Men's Gathering - Tuesdays @ 6:00 P.M.
- Women's Morning Bible Study— Wed. @ 10:00 AM
- Wednesday Night Bible Study for all ages - 7:00 P.M.
- Food Ministry - 1st Wed. & 3rd Tues. @ 9:00 AM - 11:00 A.M.

Fellowship Time Snacks were provided
By - "Beverley's Class & Youth"

Thank you

Next week Merle's Class is up!!



A Bit of
Humor
Corner



Giving

December 17, 2023

Offering:
\$1,518.00

Food Basket:
\$1,650.00

Lottie Moon:
\$202..00

Facilities:
\$115.00

Attendance:
63

Weekly Events

Sunday School/Small Groups:

9:00 AM

Sunday Morning Worship Service:

10:30 AM

Sunday Evening Worship Service:

6:00 PM

Tuesday: Men's Gathering: 6:00 PM

1st Wednesday & 3rd Tuesday

Food Ministry:

9:00 AM -11:00 AM

Wednesday:

Women's Bible Study - 10:00 AM
Bible Study/Small Group - 7:00 PM
Grief Share - On Hiatus

Thursday: Chicken Foot - 1:00 PM

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S H A R E



1 Timothy 6:18



December 25th - December 31st

DAY 1 - Matt. 1-2
(Prov. 25)

DAY 2 - Matt. 25
(Prov. 26)

DAY 3 - Matt. 26
(Prov. 27)

DAY 4 - Matt. 27
(Prov. 28)

DAY 5 - Matt. 28
(Prov. 29)

DAY 6 - (Prov. 30)
DAY 7 - (Prov. 31)

Welcome all of you who are guests with us today. Our desire is for you to relax and be blessed by worship, God's Word, and fellowship. We, the members, have committed ourselves to underwrite the church financially. We do not expect you to contribute to the offering, but you are free to participate. We would like to get to know you and for you to know us better.