

IMMANUEL MONTHLY

December 1, 2011

This incarnate Word still enters our world to give us new life continually.



From Pastor's Desk The Word Became Flesh

By Rev. Jason M. Braaten

As we set our faces toward Bethlehem, we set our eyes upon the Word of God, the Word that created all things in the beginning, that became flesh to dwell among us. During Advent and especially on Christmas Day, we look at and search out the meaning of the mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord, when He took on flesh to bear our sin and be our Savior.

The mystery of the incarnation is best stated by Athanasius, a fourth-century Christian pastor, who wrote a small handbook on the incarnation of the Word of God. In it he states: “the renewal of creation had been wrought by the Self-Same Word Who made it in the

beginning” (On the Incarnation, 26). The Word that from the very beginning created all things, the Word that proceeded from the mouth of God to bring forth light amid the darkness, the Word that separated the light from the darkness, the Word that brought forth every living creature that lives and breathes and has its being, the Word that called forth and formed from the dust of the ground mankind made in God’s own image, that Word—Athanasius wrote—that Word is what became flesh, when the Angel Gabriel spoke to the Virgin Mary, “The Lord is with you.”

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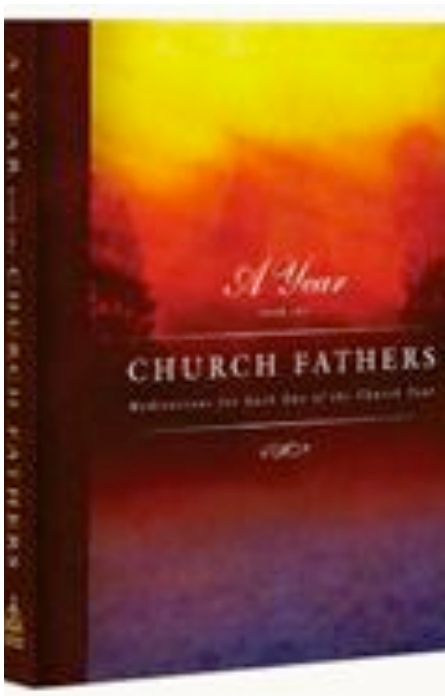
That Word entered the world He created in order to give it life again, to call forth from the from the darkness of sin and from the dust of death, a new creation, a new life to bear God's image in righteousness and purity. That Word entered the world he created, to accomplish this. For it is written: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10-11). So that on the cross the Word made flesh proclaimed "It is finished." The words spoken in His death, now ring out for us with life. It is finished! He rests and so do we. We rest in the new creation where all things are made new in this Word.

This incarnate Word still enters our world to gives us new life continually. We receive this Word in the Word preached and the Word attached to the bread that bear His body and the wine that bears His blood. And in this you receive new life, forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation. For it is written: "My Word is Spirit and it is life" (John 6:63).

This Christmas ponder this mystery: "that the Word became flesh to dwell among us" (John 1:14). That "the renewal of creation had been wrought by the Self-Same Word Who made it in the beginning."

"... the renewal of creation had been wrought by the Self-Same Word Who made it in the beginning."

Athanasius of Alexandria



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From the President

The Faith Flourishes . . . Even Amidst Opposition

By Rev. Matthew C. Harrison

There is no doubt that we live in a time of unprecedented cultural, religious and technological change. In a number of situations, the state has become antagonistic to the faith of the Bible by advocating and advancing views of society and culture that are inconsistent with natural and revealed law.

Consider Emperor Constantine who converted to Christianity in A.D. 312. Shortly thereafter, the Church began to experience all sorts of privileges with the government money, property, buildings, power, access and tax breaks much of it the very antithesis of what Jesus said about the Church in the New Testament. While Christianity became a powerful force, the Church meddled in government, and the government meddled in the Church all to the detriment of the Gospel.

Or take the formerly Lutheran state churches in Europe, which are a theological disaster. Only the tiniest fraction of the populace is attending



“The Christian faith flourishes as an opposition movement. And the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

Rev. Matthew C. Harrison

church. State privileges for the Church are withdrawing, and states once heavily influenced by Christianity are becoming antagonistic to the faith. The Constantinian era, during which the Church in the West had become privileged by the state, is now slowing creaking toward an end. But the Church will continue, even thrive. Jesus promises that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). The Church flourished in the

earliest centuries under stiff government and cultural opposition, and it still does.

That's our current context. Must the Missouri Synod decline? No. There are several key factors affecting the stagnancy of the growth of the Missouri Synod.

Our LCMS birth rate mirrors that of the broader population of the U.S, which is at an all-time low. So, how do we best encourage our young

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people to treasure marriage and have children? How do we make the point in a freeing and Gospel-oriented way? How do we encourage those capable of having more children to do so? How do we take concrete action in our congregations to care for children and encourage young parents? How do we encourage the adoption option? Be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). It can be a God-pleasing act to have a large, loving, orthodox Lutheran family, and those who are able should not be diverted from this by any self-imposed green limit of 2.1 children per couple.

The second most significant factor is that, by best estimates, fully half of the children we baptize never make it to confirmation, and nearly half of those confirmed don't attend church regularly. This is staggering. How do we deal with this? To be sure, this is evidence of the cultural forces at work in our day. But there are answers. This is a matter of family emotional and spiritual health. It's a matter of congregational and pastoral health and good practice, love, care and hard work. I'd love to hear from you about good things happening in your congregations in this regard.

Finally, there is the external mission. Its time to plant. The Lord is bringing the unchurched world to our doorstep, and they are having lots of kids too! The global South is coming to us. They need Christ, and they are far more open to Him, in many cases, than those of European descent. Its time to plant churches. If you have complained about how this has been done, then help us understand how to do it. Its time to plant. Many congregations are on the edge financially. But many are doing well and have the resources to plant and to call additional clergy. Lets do it.

The era of the Church and of Christianity is far from over. It wont be over until the return of Christ. But our privileged position in state and culture is drawing to a close. So be it. The Christian faith flourishes as an opposition movement. And the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

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“The Church flourished in the earliest centuries under stiff government and cultural opposition, and it still does”

Education Corner

Sunday School Christmas Service, Sunday, December 18, 7:00 PM.

If schmaltzy Christmas cards and lackluster light displays have left you feeling less than in the Christmas spirit, join Immanuel Lutheran Church for an event that will give meaning to the Christmas season and comfort to your life. The church's annual Children's Christmas Program will do just that, assisting you in understanding that YOU are Jesus' reason for the season. The service, called The Celebration of Holy Christmas, will be on Sunday, December 18, at 7:00 p.m.

The program is a translation and revision of a German children's Christmas program by a 19th-century German Lutheran pastor, Rev. Friedrich Lochner, all made possible by the work of Rev. John Fenton.

Rev. Friedrich Lochner (1822–1902) originally wrote this program in 1869 for his congregation, Trinity Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Milwaukee. For several decades, it was the only children's program used there. As late as 1949, it was hailed as "unsurpassed . . . in spite of the many other [children's programs] that have appeared since then."

"Christians celebrate Christmas in joyful thanksgiving for the birth of Jesus Christ, their Savior from sin," commented Rev. Jason Braaten,

pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church. "That is the central theme of this Christmas program. We recount the history of God's salvation from the time when He promised this birth in the beginning and repeated it down through the ages. It was not the birth of any ordinary man, but God Himself born a man of the Virgin Mary. This birth of the Son of God is something to celebrate because, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God offers to all mankind freedom from sin and death."

Throughout the program, the children encourage the congregation to take to heart and take comfort in Jesus' birth as the Savior of the nations. In this way, this children's program is the perfect means to prepare for a full Christmas celebration.

"This service, and all Lutheran services, are for everyone," Braaten said. "They're a little like Pixar films in reverse. Pixar films have something for all ages, but they're created for children, so you eventually grow out of them. Lutheran worship has something for everyone, but they're focused on preparing for the end of life. So you don't grow out of them. You grow into them with a deeper understanding and appreciation for the mystery of God dwelling among us."





“So come and participate. Buy a tin (or MORE!). Get your tasty, Christmas homemade goodies from us, and help a good cause at the same time. I bet you never knew doing good could taste so good.”



The LWML Annual Cookie Walk Fundraiser

By Joyce Alexander

The LWML will once again host their annual cookie walk fundraiser on Sunday, December 18, in the Fellowship Hall between the Divine Service and Sunday School hour.

This event is the LWML's main fundraiser. And thanks to everyone's help, this fundraiser has always been a success.

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans is offering matching funds up to \$300 for this project. We are looking for donations of cookies or candies—any kind and any amount.

Proceeds from this fundraiser are used to fund a variety of local and national projects. Immanuel's LWML

have helped SAM Pantry, BETHs Place, The Christmas Bureau, as well as, a number of national needs, the most recent being aid to Lutherans in need after the tornadoes that destroyed Joplin, Missouri.

So come and participate. Buy a tin (or MORE!). Get your tasty, Christmas homemade goodies from us, and help a good cause at the same time. I bet you never knew doing good could taste so good.

For questions, please contact Joyce Alexander at (217) 493-9015.

Facts and Figures; Dates and Times

Greeters List

- 4 Dec Laverl Byers – West
Becky Kappes – East
- 11 Dec Tim & Teri Pollock – West
Harold & Irene Wattjes – East
- 18 Dec Donna & Gunnar Campbell – West
Jim Dyer – East
- 25 Dec Joan Vukelich – West
Laverl Byers – East
- 1 Jan Becky Kappes – West
Tim & Teri Pollock – East
- 8 Jan Harold & Irene Wattjes – West
Donna & Gunnar Campbell – East
- 15 Jan Jim Dyer – West
Joan Vukelich – East
- 22 Jan Laverl Byers – West
Becky Kappes – East
- 29 Jan Tim & Teri Pollock – West
Harold & Irene Wattjes – East

Coffee Committee

- Dec Pastor & Lauren Braaten

Altar Committee

- Dec Ann Carroll, Holly Wikoff,
Sherrie Hoel & Tonia Timlin
- 1 Jan Sue Danielson
- 8 Jan Joan Vukelich
- 15 Jan Joan Vukelich
- 22 Jan Joan Vukelich
- 29 Jan Joan Vukelich

Bi-Monthly Missions

- 4 Dec Christmas Bureau

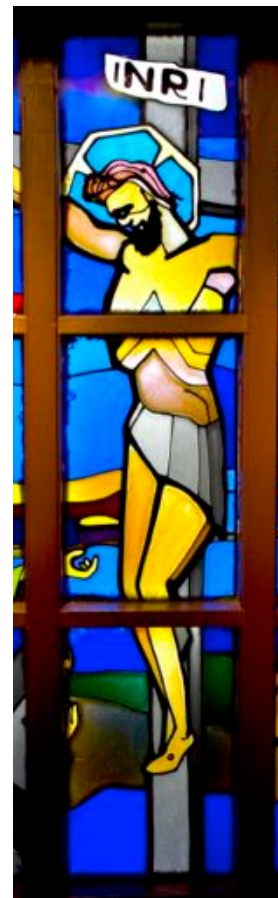
Elder On Duty – Communion

- 4 Dec Greg Nau
- 11 Dec Greg Nau
- 18 Dec Geof Danielson
- 24 Dec Geof Danielson
- 25 Dec Geof Danielson

ATTENDANCE			OFFERINGS		
Date	Saturday	Sunday	General	Missions	Building
6 Nov	13	87	\$2,198.21	\$110.00	\$0.00
13 Nov	19	92	\$1,925.87	\$0.00	\$0.00
20 Nov	19	78	\$1,449.50	\$0.00	\$0.00
23 Nov		42	\$910.50	\$0.00	\$0.00
27 Nov	21	73	\$1,838.32	\$0.00	\$220.00
Subtotal	72	372	\$8,322.40	\$110.00	\$220.00
Total	444		\$8,322.40	\$110.00	\$220.00

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Immanuel's stained glass window in the Narthex.