

PROCLAIMING A TIMELESS CHRIST IN A CHANGING WORLD

SINCE 1794



THE SPIRE

SAINT PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH ✠ CUMBERLAND, MARYLAND

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December 2020

Pastor's Ponderings

"Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down..." so cries out the old prophecy of Isaiah. A sentiment that has lurked beneath our days for almost a year now. In the Gospel of Saint Mark, Jesus speaks of the day in which the hopeful cry of Isaiah is consummated. He speaks in the language of prophets, but, like them, not to drive people into the arms of God out of fear. Rather his words describe the act of God raising hope up out of the inevitable destruction of turning from God and, thus, from life, life's self. Raising hope that people may turn to God for healing and joy and hope. Advent is a time when we turn our thoughts and hearts to that God who saves and reaches to us in surprising ways--both large and small and always with grace. From on high and from low...always with assurance "you are mine and, so, not forsaken but forgiven and given my life. Live in my embrace." What follows is a story of that embrace...that invitation to live in and out of God's Advent of love.

What I remember, I remember much more clearly than I want to-- the sights, the sounds, the smells. The hall was wide-wide enough to accommodate a large shiny stainless-steel meal cart and two wheel-chairs. Grey tile with little earth tone spots covered the floor and extended up the walls by one row. Special curved tiles were placed at the junction of the wall and floor. It wasn't something you'd find in the your home--not very appealing. But when the maintenance worker came squeaking by with his mop and big bucket on wheels, you understood why. "Merry Christmas," he mutters. You nod and notice the fire extinguisher wrapped in a garland with bells and red ribbons. "Merry Christmas," you reply. The squeaks from the bucket cut through the Christmass carols from the overhead speakers. The Christmass carols are punctuated with electronic pings and the occasional announcements. Light laughter comes from the Nurses' Station--it seems somewhat out of place but its good to hear.

THE REVEREND
RYAN K. VIANDS
Pastor

DAVID RANKIN
Director of Music

DEBBIE SZYMANSKI
Parish Assistant

STEPHANIE WADE
Treasurer

RAMON ROCHE CARDONA
Sexton

continued on page 2

THESPIRE 1

continued from page 1

By now, what I dislike the most has passed. Your nose has finally tuned out or gotten used to- I don't know which-the smell. It hits hard when you first walk in, like an invisible wall. How do you describe it? The discerning nose picks up hints of Lysol, Clorox and industrial Air Fresheners trying their best to overcome the emanating evidence of bodily functions-a sucker punch to the senses. I dislike it the most because it tells you what you are able to see-people; people in wheelchairs not knowing where they are, people in wheelchairs who know where they are and don't want to be there, people without wheelchairs knowing and not know where they are. Some call out to no one in particular. Some raise their hands to you as you pass by and some just sit staring silently at some long-ago memory. You have to keep reminding yourself that as bad as it is they are actually being cared for- and cared for quite well.

As I continue down the hall past the nurses' station. That's when I see her. She's in a wheelchair smack-dab in the middle of the hallway. She's wearing a turquoise robe with ruffles at the end of the sleeves. Peeking out from under the robe is a flannel nightgown decorated with little flowers. Big fluffy purple slippers hide her feet. I have no idea who she is, but her face is aged with years, I'm sure of smiling, laughing, worry and crying, and her grey-white hair is pulled back up upon her small head in a bun. A couple wisps hang in her face. She's cradling something in her small tiny arms. Carefully raising one hand to brush the hair from her eyes with crooked fingers and their swollen knuckles, she catches my eye. "My baby," she says, "Want to see my little baby?"

How can I say, No? I walk over to her. She looks down at the bundle in her arms. Carefully she pulls back the pink quilt. In her arms, wrapped ever-so-carefully is a doll baby. "Here's my baby," she coos. I look at the little plastic face. The eyes are shut as if asleep. "She's beautiful," I tell her. "It's a boy," she says, frowning. "Oh, I'm terribly sorry. He's quite handsome." She smiles. "Yes, he's my beautiful baby boy." She begins singing a soft lullaby, then, stopping, she asks, "Would you like to hold him?" "Sure," I say planning along. Gently she lifts her baby to me. Just as gently, I take him in my arms. I rock him a bit. She smiles proudly. I hand her "son" back thanking her and explaining that I have to go visit someone else. "What's his name?" I ask. She tells me and I continue on my way not quite sure what to think or feel right away. Some of what I remember, I remember much more clearly than I want to, except her-that woman and her little "baby". I want to remember that, every bit of it. Because, you see, in the midst of those smells and sounds and sights, that's when I held baby Jesus in my arms for Christmass.

Large and small, high and low, Jesus comes to us...come for us...giving himself that we may know the love of never being truly alone...the love of being held in the arms of God and being His Child. Jesus comes, He breaks in through all that would stand in His way or say He is absent...He more than tears open the heavens. He unlocks death's grip upon life to show us eternity in His gracious, healing, love...that's Advent. Keep your eyes open, be alert...ready your heart dear children of God, for the presence of God in the flesh. Look for someone who needs your help, keep watch for those who need care...God tends to surprise us where the two come together.

Where do/will you see Jesus in this holy season of God's love?

continued on page 3

continued from page 2

Let us pray...

Dearest, Lord Jesus Christ, we await your coming, we await to be filled with such hope, knowing your light will shine into our darkness. We await with great anticipation for your peace, believing that one day it will fill our world with your radiance. We await the embrace of your love, may we reach out to share it with our neighbors. We await with such great joy, bubbling us in expectation of your wondrous birth. So Lord, we wait, come soon we dearly pray and fill us with your light and life that is everlasting, a light that no darkness can overcome. Amen.

God's blessed peace by yours this holy Advent and Christmas Season,

Pax, Fr. Ryan +

Advent Bags



During Advent this year, we have provided Advent bags for each household. Most were picked up and several were delivered. There are still a few more available for pick up. Each bag includes an Advent wreath, greens, candles, a devotion booklet, an Advent Calendar, and the four Taking Faith Home for Advent. These resources are a wonderful way to observe a daily and weekly practice in your home for scripture reading and prayer during the four weeks of Advent.



The First Sunday of Advent was celebrated with another “first” - St. Paul worship online!

Worship can be viewed on our website, www.stpaulcumberland.org or on our Facebook page. A link to worship will be posted every Sunday morning at 10:00. A huge thank you to Debbie Streicher for envisioning the possibility and her guidance in making it happen. Thanks also to Pastor Ryan, Debbie Szymanski, and David and Tammy Rankin for their ideas and participation. We will continue to use this format until it is safe to gather in person once again.

A special thank you to the Worship and Music Committee: Pastor Ryan, Ray Hunt, Liz Medcalf, David and Tammy Rankin and Linda Zeller. The team met regularly to develop worship guidelines, using State of Maryland and Synod information and suggestions. The guidelines were reviewed each month and adjustments made when necessary.

Kathleen Ball

Chairman

Worship and Music Committee

A Word from the President

The council met via a Zoom conference call on November 10, 2020 and discussed many items as we prepared for the end of this fiscal year. We mostly discussed issues relating to cancelling our in-person worship services beginning on 8 November, 2020. Given the recent rapid and steep community increase in COVID-19 infections, the health and safety of our members was our primary concern. At this time, it currently appears that we will not have in-person gatherings in the church until January 2021. Our decision to resume in-person gatherings is based on what is happening in the community around us relating to the pandemic. In the meantime, we have prepared Advent season packages for you to use in your homes. They include a wreath, greens, candles, and more to supplement our on-line worship services and LOFT Bible studies. Our intent is to make our congregational Advent observance in your home to be as meaningful and spiritual as possible.

We are still working on setting up the capability for on-line financial contributions through Facebook Payments. Becoming registered for this service has been more difficult than we anticipated, but we continue to progress with getting it done. The council also selected benevolence designations to place on our offering envelopes for next year.

As we enter into the beginning of the new church year lectionary cycle and the Advent season, let us be thankful that we have been able to support each other and have accomplished so much of our congregational ministries during this difficult and challenging pandemic time. I hope everyone will be able to feel the hope, joy, and blessings of this Advent season with your family and friends. Our church council will meet next via a Zoom conference call on 8 December 2020.

(Burt Streicher, Council President)

LOFT Bible Study (Living Our Faith Together)



The LOFT Bible Study has returned to meeting online via Zoom each week. LOFT meets after our online worship. The group meets at 11:30 am. The Bible study is based on the weekly Bible readings during Advent. We begin with Mountain Highs and Valley Lows of our week, then scripture readings, discussion, and a closing prayer and blessing. If you would like to join us, call or send an email to Debbie Streicher

([703-303-7255](tel:703-303-7255)/
dstreicher52@gmail.com)

Mardi Gras
Pancake Dinner
2/25/20



Cecil Bell

Thank you for sharing your bright smile,
hearty laugh, good humor, big heart and
helping hands with us and the community.

*Rest in peace and rise in glory
faithful servant and dear friend.*



Bountiful Blessings
Inventory and Distribution



The wedding of
Ed and Nancy Ayers
6/20/20



Bountiful Blessings Volunteers

Below are thoughts and remembrances of Cecil Bell from recipients of our Bountiful Blessings ministry that were shared with Pastor Marsha.

from Victoria

I'm shocked, such an awesome guy that joked around with me every time I would see him. He would ask me if I was behaving myself today and I would say I'm trying. So many great memories. I could go on.

from Tina

Heartbreaking. Very nice man. I had the pleasure of volunteering with him at Bountiful Blessings. He always had a smile.

from Theora

Sorry for your loss. Cecil was a great man. He will be missed by many. Bountiful Blessings will not be the same without him. My prayers are with your family.

from Melissa

Praying for all of his family and friends.

from Belinda

Wow, what an angel. He accomplished so much in his life. RIP

Puppet Ministry Team News



Due to the surge in COVID 19 cases in our area, the puppet ministry team will no longer be presenting *Christmas Under the Sea* for this year. We are hoping to post a Christmas message video on our website the week before Christmas. You will be able to find it on our website, stpaulcumberland.org, under the tab Lifelong Faith Formation and then Puppet Ministry Team.



Please plan to join us on Friday, December 18th at 6:00 p.m. as we adorn the front portico in preparation for Christmastide. Please call the church office and let us know if you're able to help. Thank you!

**The words of
Martin Luther in 1527
and so very relevant
to today:**



“Therefore I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. ... See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.”

Book Club



Please join us in reading
***The Book Woman of
Troublesome Creek.***

Inspired by the true blue-skinned people of Kentucky and the brave and dedicated Kentucky Pack Horse library service of the 1930s, ***The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*** is a story of raw courage, fierce strength, and one woman's belief that books can carry us anywhere—even back home.

We will plan to discuss this book in January via Zoom.

All are welcome!



December 25th
Happy Birthday,
Sharon Clark!!

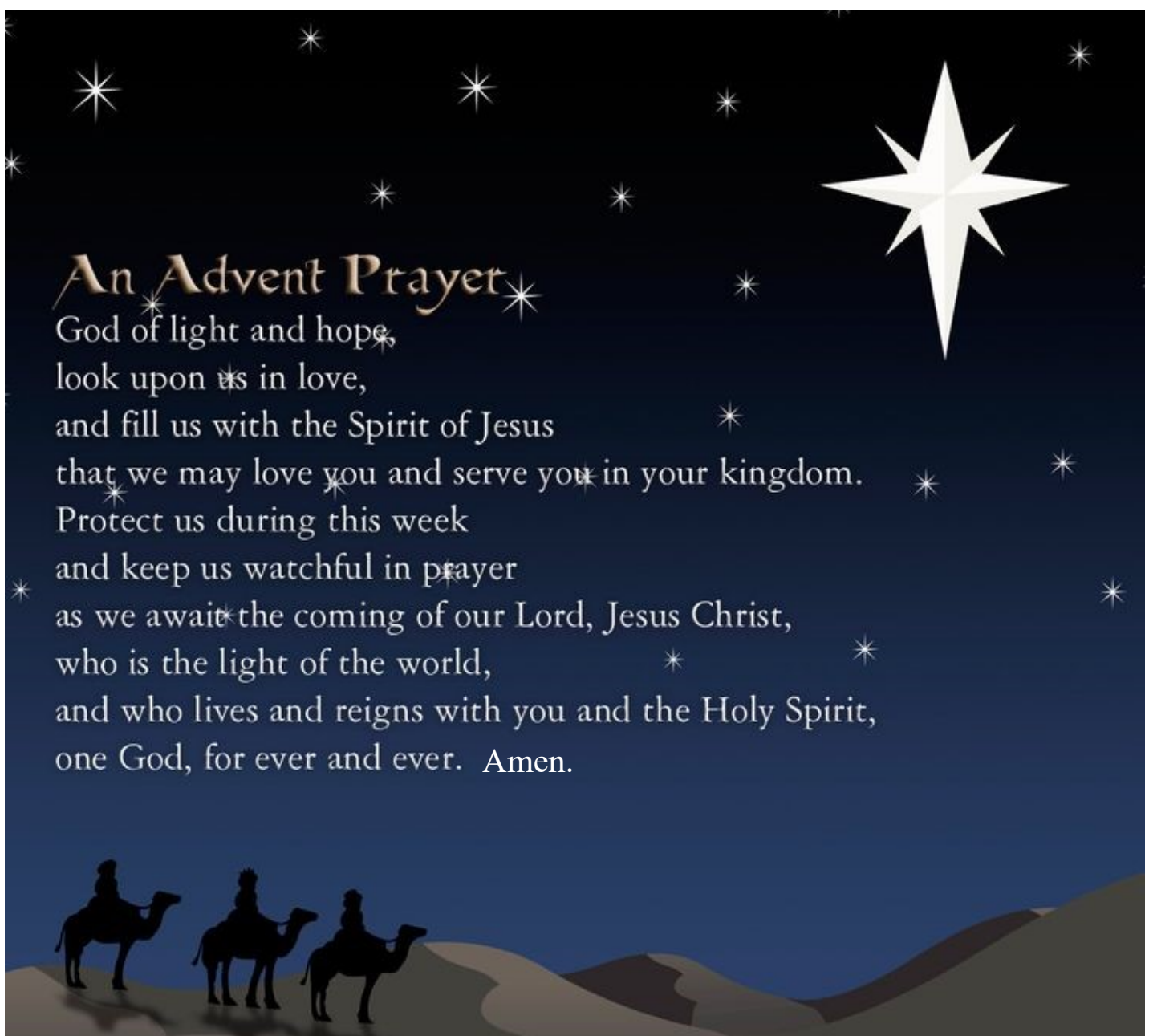
*Thank
you*

To the members of St. Paul
Lutheran Church and of the
Intercessory Prayer group,

Thanks so much to all of you for
the prayers.
When I saw my name on the prayer
list, it made me feel close to you.
Take care, stay safe and God bless
all of you.

Gregg Mazzone

Sunday	December 6
10:00 AM	Online worship
11:30 AM	LOFT via Zoom
Tuesday	December 8
10:00-12:00	Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers book study
5:30 PM	Church Council meeting via Zoom
Thursday	December 10
4:00-6:00	Drive-thru Bountiful Blessings
Sunday	December 13
10:00 AM	Online worship
11:30 AM	LOFT via Zoom
Tuesday	December 15
10:00-12:00	Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers book study
Wednesday	December 16
5:00-6:00	APPS drive-thru distribution
Friday	December 18
6:00 PM	Hanging of the Greens
Sunday	December 20
10:00 AM	Online worship
11:30 AM	LOFT via Zoom
Tuesday	December 22
10:00 AM	Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers book study
12:00 PM	Beginnings Half Day
Thursday	December 24
7:00 PM	Christmas Eve Online Worship
Sunday	December 27
10:00 AM	Online worship
11:30 AM	LOFT via Zoom



An Advent Prayer

God of light and hope,
look upon us in love,
and fill us with the Spirit of Jesus
that we may love you and serve you in your kingdom.
Protect us during this week
and keep us watchful in prayer
as we await the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ,
who is the light of the world,
and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Heavenly Father, keep us vigilant as we follow all cautions to protect our health and well being. We pray that those who have the virus will be restored to full health. We ask for protection for medical and support workers as they treat those infected. We pray that we will be generous, remembering that we share a common humanity and a responsibility for one another. Amen.

Most Gracious Father, we thank you for answered prayers. We thank you for those who are working diligently to develop a vaccine for the Coronavirus which continues to claim so many lives. We pray for the scientists and medical staff who believe a vaccine will be available to the public in the near future. We pray that when available, the dispensing will be orderly, the vaccine will be effective and will have no adverse side effects. Amen.



Bishop Gohl's *2020 Christmas Message*

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory ... John 1:14

In a year where nothing seems right, where Easter came and went with hardly a trumpet, lily or fanfare;

In a year when we have been shut in, anxious and fearful, protecting our health and the health of others;

In a year when we have prayed for the church, the world and all those in need, with renewed sincerity and refreshing truth;

In a year when the pandemic threatens to rob us of gathering with family and friends, cherished traditions and being in our beloved church homes for worship;

The Word still becomes flesh and dwells among us.

Indeed, behold the glory of God this Christmas:

In your sacrifices and struggles, Jesus is born;

In your generosity and creativity, Jesus is born;

In your care for the most vulnerable and the often forgotten, Jesus is born;

In your ability to name and see those that are overlooked and blend into the backgrounds of our lives, Jesus is born;

In our finding ways of *being the church* anew, even when we can't *go to church*, Jesus is born.

While, I too, am struggling with sorrow and loss this Christmas; I am also seeing you embody a God who so loves this world, that I can't help but experience the Word made flesh, dwelling among us, and shining with a simple, but resilient glory.

My love and prayers for you and yours,

The Rev. William (Bill) Gohl, Jr., Bishop
Delaware-Maryland Synod, ELCA