



WITTENBERG WAY

Dec. 2023 – Jan. 2024



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

PASTOR'S LETTER
Page 2

MORE BLESSED TO RECEIVE
Page 4

CHRISMONS FOR CHRISTMAS
Page 5

Faces of Grace
Page 7

Dear Grace Family,

Tis the season! You might ask, "The season for what?" My answer is, "A season for waiting."

The word "advent" means "coming." However, Advent is about more than waiting for Christmas. During Advent, we not only remember that Jesus came to earth as a man; we prepare our hearts for his second coming. When we sing, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," we are not role-playing what the ancient Israelites must have prayed before the coming of the Messiah. No, we are praying that Emmanuel will return and make right all that is wrong with the world. When we sing, "Let every heart prepare him room," we are not retroactively chastising the innkeepers of Bethlehem for not having enough space for the Messiah's family; we are preaching to all of the souls within earshot to be ready to meet their Judge and Maker unafraid.

The truth of the matter is that no one enjoys waiting. Waiting for the doctor's results. Waiting for a college entrance letter. Waiting for that promotion. Waiting in traffic. Waiting is hard, which is why our current economy and society eliminate waiting for most things. I can click a button on a certain website and the product I want will be delivered tomorrow. Slowing down, anticipating, or pausing at all is now a countercultural act. The church calendar gives us a chance to reclaim the act of waiting, where the church regularly sits in times of preparation, rather than celebration. We intentionally remove words like "Alleluia" during Advent from the liturgy to remind us that we are not yet at Christmas. Thus, the liturgical rhythm is like life: we wait, we enjoy, we wait again. We are practicing a deferred joy.

In my opinion, the timing for this emphasis on Christ's return couldn't be better. Just when we would like it to be the happiest time of the year, and are therefore, ironically, the saddest, we remember that not only has Christ come, but He has promised to come again. This life is not our only shot at happiness. It is a brief prelude to the life to come where we will find pleasures evermore. In the presence of Jesus, we will not regret anything we lacked in this life.

The season of Advent brings with it pleasing rituals of happy anticipation. Open a door on the Advent calendar and find a piece of chocolate. The church will light a candle in the Advent wreath and you'll know that we are one week closer to Christmas. Make your lists and check them twice as you look forward to giving, receiving, and feasting.

Last Advent/Christmas was a particularly rough one for my family, so my wife and I started watching Christmas movies and listening to Christmas music far earlier than normal to make up for it. The waiting that comes with Advent is fun because it's finite. We know what's coming at the end of our wait will be good, and we know exactly how many days we have left to wait for it. But all the feel-good Christmas movies enhance the hope of a happy reconciliation in time for Christmas. The lonely are set in families and the long lost make it home to their adorably decorated snow-filled little towns. But in the real world, Christmas often comes and goes without fulfilling the longings of your heart.

That's because much of the waiting that occupies us is open-ended. This is especially hard if what you're waiting for makes life uncomfortable or unbearable. Waiting often brings questions without easy answers. If your life's plans aren't coming to fruition, should you change course or hold out for your heart's desire? Are your unfulfilled yearnings indicators of sinful discontentment or blessings that God simply hasn't yet fulfilled?

If your heart is heavier than you'd like this Advent season, take hope that the joys of Christmas aren't ultimately what you wait for. Even the very best Christmas—the kind that Bing Crosby sings about—is a pale shadow of the rejoicing to come. Let the fact that your heart aches point you beyond Christmas to the better celebration still to come. Join with the voices of Christians around the world, who together pray, "O come, O come, Emmanuel."

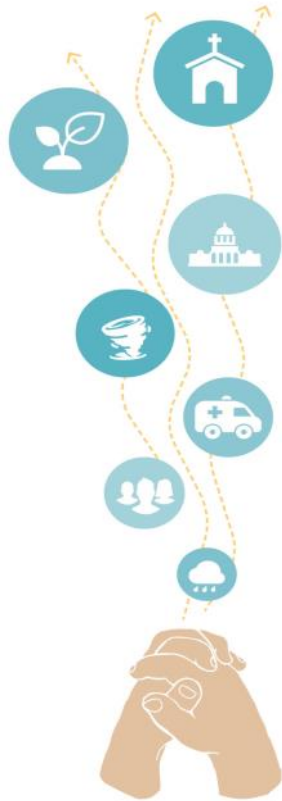
A blessed waiting season to you all,



Pr. Thomas



WHAT IS THE “PRAYER OF THE CHURCH”?



The Prayer of the Church (or the “Prayers”) is the time of the service when the pastor leads the congregation in a series of petitions, or prayers. Each prayer is introduced by a “bid,” an invitation to the congregation to join in each of these prayers. The bid is not part of the prayer, but it gathers the congregation’s thoughts together and directs them toward the specific petitions and thanksgivings that we are about to pray.

Why is this so important?

Do you know anyone who needs God’s care? During the Prayers, we pray for all the people of our congregation, particularly those who are sick and shut-in. We also pray for our government, for all believers and many others. No wonder it is called the Prayer of the Church!

Parents:

Before the Divine Service, remind your children to pay close attention to the words of the prayers. Encourage them to concentrate along with the rest of the congregation. Try using bids in your family prayers.



UPCOMING EVENTS

EPIPHANY LESSONS & CAROLS Saturday, January 6th



Worship Service 5:00 p.m.
Epiphany Dinner 6:00 p.m.

ADVENT MIDWEEK

WED. DEC. 6, 13, 20
Soup Supper at 5:30 pm
Evening Prayers at 6:30 pm

CHRISTMAS EVE

SUNDAY DECEMBER 24TH
10:00 AM AND 6:00 PM

CHRISTMAS DAY

MONDAY DECEMBER 25TH
10:00 AM

EPIPHANY

SATURDAY JANUARY 6TH
Worship Service at 5:00 pm
Epiphany Dinner at 6:00 pm

Christmas is indeed the season for both giving and receiving, but often we get the comparative value of these reversed. This misunderstanding of parents - yes even Christian parents - has been passed on to children for generations. Perhaps you also were taught as a child that when it comes to gifts, 'tis more blessed to give than to receive. If there is a conflict between giving and receiving - if a choice must be made - it is thought best to do the giving rather than receiving. The logic for this is obvious: giving is virtuous, receiving is not. Who can argue with that? Moreover, if the choice between the two involves very important people, say Jesus; then perhaps it is even more virtuous to give than receive.

We might imagine that this was Martha's conviction when Jesus made a surprise visit to her house. She frantically rattled her pots and pans in the kitchen trying to provide Jesus with a good meal on very short notice. And to make matters worse, she was not getting any help from her bump-on-the-log, do-nothing sister. Confident that Jesus shared her perspective about Mary, she implored Jesus: Tell her to help me! To Martha's shock, however, Jesus did not share her concern. "Mary has chosen the good portion [meaning the better part] and it will not be taken from her" (Luke 10:42).

It is important to understand both the point Jesus is making and also the point he is not making. Jesus is not questioning that the greater virtue is serving or giving to others. Rather he is indicating two things. First, he is indicating that when Jesus shows up, he is always the host, because he is the Lord of Hosts. He is the Suffering Servant who has come into this world to serve, not to be served. Secondly, his indication to Martha that her sister Mary has chosen the better part - to receive Jesus and his Word - implies something very important for us to remember, especially during the Advent season.

If Jesus shows up and you are a sinner, 'tis more blessed to receive than to give. And, of course, both were the case with Mary and Martha, and both are the case with each of us this Christmas season and every season for that matter. During Advent, the matter of giving and receiving has everything to do with appropriate preparation for the arrival of Jesus. Jesus' rebuke of Martha was not a denial about the virtue of giving. Giving is indeed virtuous behavior. It is the essence of exercising our faith, and living for

others by giving in our vocational pursuits. Our Lord's point however is this: virtuous behavior contributes nothing to overcome our problem of sin and death. Virtuous behavior will not reconcile us with our Heavenly Father. It will not grant us the forgiveness of sins. It will not overcome the sharpness of death, nor will it merit a happy forever. Indeed, all our giving and serving, even to Jesus, renders no blessings that can overcome any aspect of our problem of evil. What can we learn then from Mary as we prepare for receiving Jesus this Christmas? What can we learn from Jesus' unexpected visit about how to order our lives this Advent season to prepare for the coming of Christ?

"If there is a conflict between giving and receiving - if a choice must be made - it is thought best to do the giving rather than receiving."

Follow Mary's example (and Jesus' approval of it) and do what may be the most difficult thing this busy time of year: do nothing! Stop and provide some time for doing nothing. Stop all your hustle and bustle in the kitchen, at the shopping mall, at Amazon, at whatever. Put down your lists of what to do and what to give. Stop being frantic about so few days left until Christmas. Rather, during this Advent season, rest yourself at the feet of Jesus in his Word, and sit yourself at his meal, doing nothing but getting ready to receive. Get ready to be served by the coming Immanuel, God-with-us. Get ready for the receiving of Christmas. Get ready to open again your gifts of grace and mercy and be amazed and thrilled that he has come to give you just what you need: forgiveness, life, and salvation. Sit down to his prepared meal, the body and blood of the Lamb of God who has taken away the sins of the world. Feast on the Lamb and know that there is more where that came from in preparation for the Great Feast to come. And then smile at him and at one another during this most inconvenient time to do nothing. And, let us say to our children, Christmas is coming! And that means that Jesus is coming and because that is so, it will be more blessed to receive than to give!

CHRISMONS FOR CHRISTMAS

Thanks to Cindy Hansen our sanctuary Christmas tree has been properly adorned with Chrismons from *Ad Crucem*, a Lutheran company in Colorado. Chrismons are the symbols and monograms of the ancient and historic Church that confess the Holy Trinity, the atoning salvation achieved by Jesus Christ, and the central doctrines of the Christian faith. They were first made by Frances Kipps Spencer and the women of Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, VA. The word Chrismon is a combination of Christ and monogram (meaning symbol). The idea quickly spread to other churches.



The History of Christmas Trees

1510 – The first written record of a decorated Christmas Tree comes from Riga, Latvia. Men of the local merchant’s guild decorated a tree with artificial roses, danced around it, and then set fire to it.

1530 – There is a record from Alsace, France (then German territory) that trees were sold in the marketplace and brought home and set up undecorated. Laws limited the size to “8 shoe lengths” (slightly over 4 feet).

1600s – By the 17th century, it was common in Germany to decorate Christmas Trees with apples. This practice was a holdover from the 14th and 15th centuries when evergreen boughs hung with apples were the only prop used in the “miracle plays” that were performed at the churches on December 24. December 24 was Adam & Eve’s Day in the early Christian calendar, and the plays were used as ways of teaching the Bible to a largely illiterate population.

1700s – In parts of Austria and Germany, evergreen tips were brought into the home and hung top down from the ceiling. They were often decorated with apples, gilded nuts, and red paper strips. Edible ornaments became so popular on Christmas Trees that they were often called “sugar trees.” The first accounts of using lighted candles as decorations on Christmas Trees come from France in the 18th century.

1800s – The Christmas Tree was introduced in the United States by German settlers. It rapidly grew from tabletop size to floor-to-ceiling.

1851 – Christmas Trees began to be sold commercially in the United States. They were taken at random from the forests.

1853 – Franklin Pierce is credited with bringing the first Christmas Tree to the White House.

Late 1800s – The first glass ornaments were introduced into the United States, again from Germany. The first ones were mostly balls, but later chains of balls, toys and figures became more common.

Around 1883 – Sears, Roebuck & Company began offering the first artificial Christmas trees – 33 limbs for \$.50 and 55 limbs for \$1.00.

1900s – Due to overharvesting, the natural supply of evergreens began to be decimated. Conservationists became alarmed, and many magazines began to encourage people to substitute an artificial “snow” covered tree, consisting of a branch of a deciduous tree wrapped in cotton.

1901 – The first Christmas Tree farm was started in 1901 when W.V. McGilliard planted 25,000 Norway spruce trees on his farm in New Jersey.

1930s – President Franklin D. Roosevelt started a Christmas Tree farm on his estate in Hyde Park, New York.

1966 – The National Christmas Tree Association began its time-honored tradition of having the Grand Champion grower present a Christmas Tree to the First Lady for display in the White House. That year, Howard Pierce of Black River Falls, WI, presented a tree to Pres. Lyndon Johnson and First Lady Lady Bird Johnson.

Today – Approximately 25-30 million real Christmas trees are sold each year in the United States.



GLC’s tall Christmas tree adorned the sanctuary sometime in the early 1950’s. It was so large it was placed in front of the Lectern.

WORD OF THE YEAR

I won't keep you in suspense. Merriam-Webster's Word of the Year is "authentic." According to an article on *Wordplay*, the M-W website, *authentic* was selected because it was the word with the most significant increase in definition lookups in 2023.

For as long as I can remember, the word has been synonymous with *real, actual, not fake or imitation*. But like so many words in our culture, *authentic* is getting nuanced through the looking glass into Wonderland. It can now mean "being true to one's own personality, spirit or character." Many people, *Wordplay* explains, are increasingly uncertain about the nature of reality. That might account for three other words on the M-W annual list: *deepfake* (creepy-good CGI); *deadname* (a birth-certificate name jettisoned after gender transitioning); and *dystopian* (a future bereft of reason and devoid of hope.)

Today's version of authenticity is one of those navel-gazing aspirational goals pursued by self-absorbed individuals, social media influencers and woke brands. It is, *Wordplay* informs us, the "gold standard for building trust," no longer a real thing but a marketable performance. Or as somebody (nobody really knows who) famously said, "once you can fake sincerity, you've got it made."

Since this is a prolife column, I can't think of a more appropriate example of our trust in God's Word than the children of Grace Lutheran.

Thankfully, we don't have to aspire to manufactured authenticity. We are surrounded by and fed with that which is unassailably authentic and trustworthy. We have The Word for this year and forever. Since this is a prolife column, I can't think of a more appropriate example of our trust in God's Word than the children of Grace Lutheran. Their parents have ignored the current trend that says children are an inconvenient burden, an obstacle to finding one's own true self-fulfillment. Grace Lutheran is blessed with preschoolers, toddlers and babies (with more on the way). *Hallelujah for that!*

GOT QCDs?



As the end of the year approaches, some parishioners have retirement brokerage accounts from which they must take annual Required Minimum Distributions ("RMDs"). If you would like to donate a portion of your annual distribution to the Church, please consider making a Qualified Charitable Distribution ("QCD"), whereby the funds are donated directly to the Church, and you may receive certain tax benefits.

Please contact Richard Segarra if you have questions, and consult your tax advisor for advice regarding how QCDs fit into your RMD strategy. To complete a QCD, you will need Grace Lutheran's Non-Profit ID [95-1684781] and mailing address [3967 Park Blvd/92103]. Thank you for your generosity to Grace Lutheran and its mission.

NOVEMBER 2023 GIVING

November Actual Offerings	\$ 20,020
Giving Tuesday	\$ 6,540
November Budget	<u>\$ 19,760</u>
Overage	\$ 6,800
YTD Actual	\$211,634
YTD Budget	<u>\$237,120</u>
Shortfall	\$ 25,486

HOW TO GIVE

- Your offering envelopes or those in the pews
- Online from your bank website
- Scan the QR code here
- Text the amount to 84321
- The Giving Page at grace sandiego.com
- Time and Talents



FACES OF GRACE



Ashley Stokes was baptized and received Holy Communion on Nov. 26th. Ashley is Nathan Russert's fiancé and they will be married next year.



Our annual celebration for veterans was a time to thank and acknowledge the sacrifices our veterans and their families have made in service to our country. John Downey led the celebratory Marine Corps birthday tradition of having our oldest Marine (Paul Himmelberger) pass the first slice of cake to our youngest Marine (Autmn Laning) to symbolize passing on to the next generation.



Grace's Annual Voters' Meeting was held on Nov. 26th and the 2024 Budget was ratified. Our new Council members voted in for 2024 are: Shannon Carreiro as President; Josh Mellor as Ad-Hoc member; and Kelley Schmidt will continue as Fellowship Chairman. Daniel Paylor was appointed Secretary to fill Shannon's final year. Many thanks to John Hansen, President and our Council members that have completed their terms.



Godspeed and Farewell to Philip and Rachel Hawthorne as they move to Corpus Christi, TX for Philip's new duty assignment in the Navy.



3967 Park Blvd.
 San Diego, CA 92103
 619.299.2890
 gracesandiego.com

The Reverend
 Brian W. Thomas
 brianwilliamthomas@gmail.com
 Director of Parish Music
 Dale Sorenson
 dalesorenson2@gmail.com

Church Secretary
 Gretchen Jordan
 gjordan@gracesandiego.com

Sunday Divine Service
 8:00 am & 10:30 am
 Sunday School on Recess
 9:30 to 10:15 am
 Nursery available

JOHN HANSEN
 Council President

RICHARD SEGARRA
 Treasurer

SHANNON CARREIRO
 Secretary

HEATH RUSSERT
 Trustee

KELLEY SCHMIDT
 Fellowship/Activities

JOHN BARBER
 Members-at-Large

CARL LEHMAN
 Education

TED NILSEN
 Head Elder

JEREMY FULLAM
 STEVE HOLLMAN
 JASON HUNTLEY
 DARYL NEWTON
 Elders

PRAYERS

PRAYERS FOR STRENGTH AND HEALING

Dave, Bill, Phil, Edward, Mike, John, Rita, Grace, Jim, and Doris

PRAYERS FOR THOSE EXPECTING A CHILD

Jeremy & Jessica Belgau and Carl & Elsie Lehman

PRAYERS FOR OUR MISSIONARIES

Rev. Tyler McMiller, Joshua Salas, Lorenzo Murrone, Luiz Lange,
 Michael & Nance Morizio (Lutheran Church planters & seminarians in Italy),
 Rev. Dr. John Bombaro, and Rev. Dr. Tardelli Voss

PRAYERS FOR OUR MILITARY MEMBERS

Rev. Mario Ancira, John Campisi, Tajy George, Nathan Farish, Philip Hawthorne,
 Matthew Morgan, Jeff and Jordan Gruetzmacher

PRAYERS FOR THOSE UNABLE TO ATTEND

Joyce Rochester

DECEMBER AT GRACE



AN ADVENT MIDWEEK SERMON SERIES MAGNIFICENT VERBS OF THE MAGNIFICAT

Join us this Advent Season on Wednesdays

He Regards - 12/6/23

He Exalts - 12/13/23

He Remembers - 12/20/23

Soup Suppers - 5:30 p.m.

Evening Prayer - 6:30 p.m.



ADVENT MIDWEEK
 WED. DEC. 6, 13, 20
 Soup Supper at 5:30 pm
 Evening Prayers at 6:30 pm

CHRISTMAS EVE
 SUNDAY DECEMBER 24TH
 10:00 AM AND 6:00 PM

CHRISTMAS DAY
 MONDAY DECEMBER 25TH
 10:00 AM



CONNECT WITH US