The news is largely depressing. Scandal, corruption, and tragedy have become as ubiquitous as McDonald's, Amazon, and high school football. Consider but a brief representative list:

- Sexual harassment allegations against Harvey Weinstein, Bill O'Reilly, and Roy Moore
- Fake accounts by Wells Fargo
- Emissions deception by Volkswagen
- Financial corruption across NCAA basketball
- Sexual abuse of USA Gymnastics members
- Planned Parenthood profiting from the sale of aborted babies' body parts
- Mass shootings in Orlando, Las Vegas, and Sutherland Springs

Sadly, without significant effort, you could compile a similar list. The questions raised by lists like these raise are legion, but the most common include:

- What's the world coming to?
- What's going on in the world?
- Why is this happening?

Those are big questions. Space allows us to discuss only one: the last. For the first two we will simply offer two simple, Scripturally informed responses.

What's the world coming to? The end. Jesus said as much in Matthew 24 when He spoke of wars, tribulation, lawlessness, and cold, hardened hearts enduring while the gospel of the kingdom was proclaimed throughout the world. "Then," He said, "the end will come" (24:14). This world is coming to the end.

What's going on in the world? Sin. Saint Paul said that this sin was obvious and included: "sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these" (Gal. 5:19-21). It's obvious and it's pervasive.

But why is this happening? This is the question over which we will linger. Many have identified the cause for these social evils in greed, abuse of power, lust, and hate. These, however, are but the symptoms of the true cause. The true cause is obvious to anyone with the eyes to see, but few truly desire the truth. Most would rather address the symptoms and suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18). That's what makes truth tellers simultaneously refreshing and dangerous. To truth-seekers Truth is refreshing. To truth-suppressors Truth is dangerous.

Therefore, in order to answer our question, "Why is this happening?" we will turn to one of history's dangerously refreshing truth tellers, Aleksander Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008). Solzhenitsyn was a renowned critic of the unspeakably murderous Soviet Union.[1] Viewed as a danger to the state for criticizing Joseph Stalin in a personal letter, Solzhenitsyn was imprisoned, sentenced to eight years in a labor camp, stripped of his Soviet

[1] This regime was responsible for the deaths of nearly 60 million people. Further, they actively sought to extinguish the Christian confession from Russia. Solzhenitsyn wrote, "Scores of archbishops and bishops perished. Tens of thousands of priests, monks, and nuns, pressured by the Chekists to renounce the Word of God, were tortured, shot in cellars, sent to camps, exiled to the desolate tundra of the far North, or turned out into the streets in their old age without food or shelter. All these Christian martyrs went unswervingly to their deaths for the faith; instances of apostasy were few and far between. For tens of millions of laymen access to the Church was blocked, and they were forbidden to bring up their children in the Faith: religious parents were wrenched from their children and thrown into prison, while the children were turned from the faith by threats and lies..."

citizenship, and targeted, harassed, threatened, and poisoned by the KGB. And yet Solzhenitsyn continued to tell the truth.

So how did he answer the question, "Why is this happening? Why is evil running rampant?" He famously answered this way: "Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened."

What was true for him remains true for us. Men have forgotten God and the results are as catastrophic as they are devastating. Solzhenitsyn expanded on his statement with these insightful words: "The failings of human consciousness, deprived of its divine dimension, have been a determining factor in all the major crimes of this century."

Consider what he's saying. When the consciousness is not formed, shaped, and guided by the truth of God, when it does not have a working awareness of this truth, it turns inward and evil is the result. Saint Paul put it this way: "Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done" (Rom. 1:28), and, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot" (Rom. 8:7).

We, like Solzhenitsyn, live in a time when the human consciousness is being deprived of its divine dimension. Fewer and fewer are the families who regularly and consistently worship the true God together (in public or in the home). Fewer and fewer are the families who actively and intentionally teach the faith in the home. More and more are the individuals who are incapable of articulating the basic tenets of the Christian confession, let alone recite the Ten Commandments and creeds of the Church.

Men have forgotten God. And the effects are ruinous. Marriage is devalued. Sex is commodified. Families are fractured. And young men and women are left crying out for belonging, seeking it in niche political and social groups, angry at a world they believe has betrayed them. Individuals are left struggling to understand their identity, snatching after it in the latest sexual cause to ruinous physical and psychological effects.

In forgetting God, we have embraced, what Solzhenitsyn rightly identified as "numerous freely nurtured falsehoods." We believe the individual is autonomous. We believe we are sexual beings. We believe consent is the foundation of ethics. We believe God is largely irrelevant to human daily existence. These are freely nurtured falsehoods. They are the way modern man suppresses the truth, the way modern man actively and intentionally forgets God.

There's only one way to right our ship. Solzhenitsyn understood it:

> All attempts to find a way out of the plight of today's world are fruitless unless we redirect our consciousness, in repentance, to the Creator of all: without this, no exit will be illumined, and we shall seek it in vain.

More education, more money, more programs, have merits, but if devoid of repentance, if devoid of a return to the true God, they will only educate, enrich, and enable sin. God and His truth must return to the center of our consciousness. This task isn't impossible, but it is difficult.

The lies of the world are coated in sugar, making the meaty substance of God's truth initially taste bitter. Sugar, however, never fills. It only increases longing, never satisfying with substance. Those who have realized this and have turned to God, have found the meaty truth of God filling and deeply satisfying and the sweet lies of Satan ultimately vacuous. Man is not autonomous, but dependent upon God for His being and breath. He is not a sexual being, but a created being with numerous God-given desires to be satisfied in God-defined, sanctioned, and blessed ways. Consent is not the foundation for ethics; God Himself is. When these realities define human consciousness, the headlines will change. May we work for that end.

With the barrage of bad news daily bruising our spirits, we yearn to hear of something good, of some truly good news to instill hope, even to heal the bruises.

And this is precisely what we find in the Christian Church's celebration of Christmas. With joyful certitude the Church announces in Christ's birth: God has remembered man! And that changes everything.

Enter briefly into one scene of the Christmas story. Zechariah the priest has been mute for months, a divine decree due to his failure to believe God's promise that he and Elizabeth would bear a son. But the God-ordained time for speaking has come. So, Zechariah, standing before his newborn son John, feels his tongue being loosed by the Spirit, and with joyful certainty he prophesies:

> Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
> for he has visited and redeemed his people
> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
> in the house of his servant David,
> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
> that we should be saved from our enemies
> and from the hand of all who hate us;
> to show the mercy promised to our fathers
> and to remember his holy covenant,
> the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
> that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
> might serve him without fear,
> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days (Lk. 1:68-75).

Read his words again with special attention to the verbs. Look at what God has done! He has *visited, redeemed, raised up a horn of salvation* (i.e. a strong, powerful, triumphant salvation). He *spoke* so that His people should be *saved*. And He acted so as to *show the mercy* promised to our fathers and to *remember* His holy covenant that He swore to Abraham.

And why has He done it? So that we, His people, might fearlessly serve Him in holiness and righteousness forever! All of this, as Zechariah will go on to say, is accomplished in Jesus, whose way Zechariah's son John will prepare.

Space prevents a thorough examination of each word of good news. One word, therefore, will occupy our attention: *remember*. God remembers His people. It's not that He has forgotten and only in Jesus' birth was His mind jogged to recall what He said, because r*emember* is an action verb in Scripture. The parallelism of Zechariah's poetry makes this clear.

> *to show the mercy* promised to our fathers
> and *to remember* his holy covenant

Mercy informs the meaning of *remember.* God's remembering involves showing mercy. In other words, *remembering* is something God does; it's an action God takes on behalf of His people. As Zechariah details, it's something God does and shows in Christ. Look at what Zechariah goes on to say:

> And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
> for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
> to give knowledge of salvation to his people
> in the forgiveness of their sins,
> because of the tender mercy of our God,
> whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
> to guide our feet into the way of peace."

John will give knowledge of salvation in forgiveness *in Christ*. And this Christ is *the tender mercy of our God* who gives hope-infused light to us who grieve in death's shadow and peace to us who experience no daily peace. God – in Christ – has remembered man. And this is truly good news.

The Poetry of the Incarnation

The soul needs poetry. It needs poetry like an artist's canvas needs color and a musician's score needs notes. Without poetry, the soul hardens, dries, and cracks. Eventually, it dies to beauty.

But poetry isn't practical, so many see no need for it. It isn't instantly usable or immediately clear. Its meaning isn't plain and it doesn't yield to cursory readings. Poetry is art, art that invites contemplation and study. And those who pause to appreciate it find a mysterious potency, a living beauty that lifts the reader above the words on the page into a place where truth lives in hope-filled pictures, vibrant colors, and soaring melodies.

Nearly a third of Scripture is poetry and all of our hymns are poetry. If we do not pause to ponder them, if we run roughshod over them because their meaning isn't plain, our souls will eventually confine themselves to a plain life absent beauty. We will simply be unable to appreciate not only the beauty of what God has said, but also beauty of what God has done.

As we move toward Christmas, toward the incarnation of God, we draw near something so marvelous, so mysterious, and something so beautiful, that plain words simply seem insufficient. To assist your contemplation of Christmas, I have included a poem by an 8th century man known as St. Cosmas the Melodist, a devout Christian dwelling near Jerusalem. Linger over his words. Read them aloud. Hear them. Consider them.[2] Let the poetry water your soul and produce the fruit of joy and wonder. – Pastor Conner

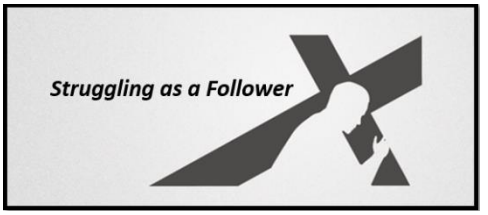
Christ is born! Tell forth His fame!
Christ from Heaven! His love proclaim!
Christ on earth! Exalt His Name!
Sing to the Lord, O world, with exultation!
Break forth in glad thanksgiving, every nation!
For He hath triumphed gloriously!

Man, in God's own Image made,
Man, by Satan's wiles betrayed,
Man, on whom corruption preyed,
Shut out from hope of life and of salvation,
Today Christ maketh him a new creation,
For He hath triumphed gloriously!

For the Maker, when His foe,
Wrought the creature death and woe,
Bowed the Heav'ns, and came below,
And in the Virgin's womb His dwelling making
Became true man, man's very nature taking
For He hath triumphed gloriously!

He, the Wisdom, Word, and Might,
God, and Son, and Light of light,
Undiscovered by the sight
Of earthly monarch, or infernal spirit,
Incarnate was, that we might Heav'n inherit;
For He hath triumphed gloriously!

[2] If you find yourself unsure of some of the language or Biblical allusions (for there are many), you are welcome to visit with me. I'd enjoy the conversation!



Struggling as a Follower
Part 2: Consider Job…

Last month we started considering the question, how exactly do I suffer and struggle as a follower of Jesus? Because on the one hand, we want to be faithful people. The kind of people who listen to Jesus; the kind of people who stay in the church even when times get tough.[3] On the other hand, we're emotional creatures. We experience anger, frustration, sadness, and you can add more emotions to the list. And these emotions are particularly raw during trying times.

I've experienced a great amount of frustration and confusion. Here I am, *straight off the boat* as I like to say (i.e. straight out of seminary). All I want to do is jump into being a pastor. I want to make the biggest belly flop into the pastoral pool even if it's going to leave the biggest red mark on my tummy. But in many ways I've been prevented from jumping off the diving board. I can't go at the speed I like due to treatments and recovery. It's hard not to wonder, "What exactly am I supposed to be doing, God, since all these medical roadblocks are getting in the way of the ministry?" It's confusing and frustrating.

Point being, there's a tension of wanting to be faithful, good Christians during suffering as well as acknowledging the terribleness of the situation – that is to express our thoughts, feelings, emotions.

Which leads us to Job. We all know that when suffering comes up or when we're watching someone suffer we're supposed to turn to Job. And that's right. James commends Job: "You have heard of the **steadfastness** of Job…." Steadfastness. That's not a word that's gets thrown around a lot! And the book of Job has a great deal to say about a lot of things (see Pastor Riggert for his study sheets on the book of Job).

I would like to focus in on one aspect of suffering that Job brings to light:

The experience of suffering introduces a <u>relational</u> problem between Job and God.

Translation: As Job suffers, he feels as if God is far off. Uncaring. Maybe even, nonexistent. Job can't see what God's up to. So Job can't tell if God is on Job's side or not. He has to start taking stabs in the dark to figure out what God is thinking or doing. Take a look at one such stab:

"*For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me*." Job 6:4

Without some sort or relational connection, Job is left to assume that God is not for him – or at least that's what he's assuming here. Without some sort of direct connection to God through which Job can talk to God one on one, he's left wandering and wondering emotionally and spiritually: What exactly is God doing? Does God like me? Does God even exist?

So Job lays out a real life divine (God) problem. During suffering, pain, trials, my being a believer in God does not necessarily make the suffering any easier. Arguably, it makes the experience even more difficult, especially when the people around you might not be encouraging you to believe in God ("*Curse God and die."* Job 2:9). Without a direct line from God, you start to wonder did I do something bad to deserve this ("*As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same*." Job 4:8 – that's not Job talking by the way).

[3] It's probably worth noting, we don't stay in the church for its own sake. Rather we stay in the church because Jesus has attached Himself to the church. Where the church is so is Jesus. We're there in church in order to meet and hear from our Lord.

God may indeed have a "plan" for my life in spite of these current circumstances, but without some sort of clarification from God – which isn't coming – that plan may include you wearing a tutu as you walk down Main Street. Get my point? Without God clueing you in, acknowledging that there is a plan for your life is difficult to hear for those going through trials because in the moment God already feels far off (and the details of His grand scheme aren't necessarily inviting).

What Job does then is he introduces and articulates the major problem of suffering for a follower. God seems to be far off. Now, identifying the problem moves us closer to seeing how exactly we suffer and struggle as a follower of Jesus, which we'll talk about next month.

Luther Fest *remembered*

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH MANILLA, IOWA
PROCLAIMING PEACE IN CHRIST'S CROSS

A big thank you to everyone who helped, donated, and attended Luther Fest. We had a lot of fun! And new families had the opportunity to experience and see Trinity.

Ministry Apps

Applying the Gospel to Hearts and Homes (December 2017): Zion and Trinity Lutheran

"To Do!"

In one form or another most of us have "to do" lists—an app on the phone, a sheet of paper, or a mental accumulation. December's list is typically longer and more detailed. Sometimes our December listings remind us of the limitations of time and resources. Our listings also remind us of the worldly focus on materialism. Our all-knowing, all-doing God doesn't need lists to govern His creating. While God's plan of salvation was not the result of God checking off the people and places of His plan, we can celebrate God's attention to every detail. Advent celebrates that at just the right time, in God's ordained places, through God's chosen people, Jesus is born. Because God got it done, we are privileged to respond to His grace. We got things "to do" in His name.

Advent Worship

The Advent series offers a "to do" list that differs from the world's list. Instead of buying presents, sending cards, sharing experiences, and wrapping gifts, our Midweek services (5:45 p.m.) will emphasize:

- Wednesday, December 6: "Be Present"
- Wednesday, Dec. 13: "Send Peace"
- Wednesday, Dec. 20: "Share Joy"
- Sunday, Dec. 24: "Wrap with Love" (Sunday morning service)

The services are designed to be Christ-celebrating and child and family "friendly." Friends and neighbors are always welcome. Following the services, Zion youth and families will again host the Advent meals. The free-will donations support Zion youth ministry.

Sunday Evening, December 17 at 6:30 p.m.: Please celebrate Jesus' birthday with our Sunday school children as they joyfully share the message with special music. Beginning at 6 p.m. several children will share their piano and instrumental music gifts. Please consult the Zion calendar and other newsletter sections for other December worship and fellowship opportunities.

Share

Many charitable organizations invite your end-of-year or Christmas response. Remember the gifts of God's grace at Zion and with joy and generosity share to support our mission and ministry together. The "Zion Strategic Plan" lists some major gift opportunities. Donations for banners in the education wing are still welcomed. Contact the pastors for other special gift suggestions. Mission Central welcomes gifts for missionary support. Camp Okoboji appreciates annual gifts as well as gifts to complete the Discover campaign. Lutheran Family Services provides counseling support for individuals and families. The local Food Pantry provides for daily needs of community families.

Anticipate

Sunday school classes will not be held on December 24 and 31. Enjoy family worship and fellowship.
A Monday morning Bible study will begin again on January 8. Meet Jeremiah!

Pray

"Come Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free; From our fears and sins release us; Let us find our rest in Thee. Israel's strength and consolation, Hope for all the earth Thou art, Dear desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart." *LSB* #338

On That Note

Treasuring our Musical Treasure

On Sunday, December 3, the Church, as it enters the season of Advent, turns its focus to Christ's coming, both His coming in Christmas and His second coming at the end of the age. Our hymn of the month, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" invites the Church to pray fervently and Scripturally for His coming. Translated into English in the 19th century by J.M. Neale, our hymn finds its roots in a 6th century tradition called the *O Antiphons*. The word *antiphon*, when broken into its lexical parts, *anti* (meaning "in return") and *phon* (meaning "sound"), means "to return/repeat sound." So, when the Church repeats certain phrases or verses at the end of a psalm or song, it's employing an antiphon.

The "O" Antiphons, as you might guess, repeats the word "O," a word communicating desire or longing for something to come about. These ancient "O" Antiphons are recorded on page 357 in our hymnal, *Lutheran Service Book*. Each antiphon is based on a different Old Testament title for Christ. Briefly, the seven included are: *Wisdom, Adonai, Root of Jesse, Key of David, Dayspring, King of the nations,* and *Emmanuel*. Historically, these antiphons were prayed during the final week of Advent (December 17-23) in anticipation of the incarnation of Christ to be celebrated in the Christmas season. Our hymn is a versification of these antiphons.

As we consider each verse, we will find ourselves diving deep into the Old Testament and its profound longing for and pointing to Christ.

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear. *Refrain*

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

Drawing from the aforementioned *O Antiphons*, the hymn, with the desire-drenched vocative "O," pulls us into the Church's great longing for Christ's coming. *Emmanuel*, meaning "God with us," was first promised by the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (7:14). Matthew, in chapter one of his Gospel, joyfully announces the fulfillment of the promise in the birth of Christ.

Isaiah (35:10), and his fellow major prophet Jeremiah (31:11), speak of captive Israel as the ransomed of God, the ones who mourned in exile, but rejoiced when God ransomed, set free, and brought them home. Building on the image of exiled captives, our hymn invites us to view our lives in parallel. As we, God's Israel, mourn in the exile of our sin-cursed world, we long for and pray for Emmanuel to come, for the Son of God to appear.

And with His incarnation and return in view, we rejoice in the hymn's refrain: Emmanuel will come!

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
Who ord'rest all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in her ways to go. *Refrain*

The antiphon echoes with the same request, "O come," but with a new Old Testament title for Christ: "Wisdom." The pages of the Old Testament abound with references to God as the source of wisdom. And, Scripture says, it was "by wisdom" (Jer. 51:15) that God established the world and "in wisdom" (Ps. 104:24) that He brought forth His works. In the New Testament, this Wisdom is revealed to be Christ Himself: "Christ… the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23-24). So by this Wisdom and Power God mightily orders all things. And because this is true, the hymn leads us to pray both for the coming of this Wisdom and for our instruction in it.

O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times didst give the Law
In cloud and majesty and awe. *Refrain*

Again the hymn invites us to echo the desire-drenched "O." O, Come Thou Lord of might. The original antiphon employed the Hebrew name for God, *Adonai*, a word that connoted sovereignty or might. This Adonai demonstrated His sovereign power at Mt. Sinai as the mountain was shrouded in thick cloud and overwhelmed by crashing thunder and flashing lightning and as Heaven's trumpet announced God's terrific presence. On this mountain God gave His Law to Moses as Israel trembled at its base. But this mighty God had not come to destroy Israel, but to redeem them and to make them His treasured possession. It is this Lord of might who has come among us in Christ to, likewise, make us His own.

O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's tree,
Free them from Satan's tyranny
That trust Thy mighty pow'r to save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave. *Refrain*

Our longing now turns to the "Branch of Jesse's tree." Isaiah first spoke of this branch in Isaiah 11. Israel had been reduced to a stump; the Babylonians had defeated them and sent them into exile. Isaiah prophesied of a shoot of new life springing from the stump of death, but instead of connecting this stump to David, thereby indicating that this new branch would spring out of (be descended from) David, Isaiah indicates that this shoot would spring from Jesse, David's father. This shoot would be a new David! And this new David will free God's people not from any earthly opponent, but from Satan himself! Even more, this new David will give His people victory over death!

O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery. *Refrain*

O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Refrain

O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace. *Refrain*

The next verse turns our yearning to the "Key of David." The phrase was originally spoken of Eliakim the son of Hilkiah (King Hezekiah's finance minister), who Isaiah prophesied would replace the corrupt Shebna (Isaiah 22:15-25). Eliakim would be given authority to use the assets of the Kingdom for the benefit of the people. Isaiah says: "He will open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (22:22). These words, then, are attached to Jesus in Revelation 3 where John writes of Him: "The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens" (3:7). So our hymn prays for the Key of David to come to open Heaven and to close death and misery, because if He does it, none will be able to close what He has opened or open what He has closed.

Our prayer for Christ's coming now focuses on the "Dayspring," a poetic word for dawn's hope-filled light. Isaiah turned the hearts of Israel to this light repeatedly as he encouraged the people who walked in darkness with the good news of a great light that was soon to dawn on them (Isa. 9:1; 60:1). And Zechariah joyfully sang of the dawn of this great light as he spoke of Christ: "the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Lk. 1:78-79). So our hymn implores Christ, like the morning light, to come and cheer us, to banish night's gloom and to drive away death's depressing shadows.

As our hymn closes, our hearts are turned to the great desire of the nations, Jesus Christ. This doesn't mean that all nations openly desire Christ; it's a confession that what all people are truly desiring, even if they don't recognize it, is Jesus. The phrase "Desire of the nations" comes from Haggai 2. In context, God is promising to fill His temple (rebuilt after its destruction by the Babylonians) with the desire (the ESV renders it "treasures") of the nations. In other words, the thing that nations most desire or treasure will fill God's temple and bring it glory. The true treasure of the nations is Christ. So we pray for Him to come to unite the hearts of all mankind, to erase our divisions, and to be our King of Peace.

Each stanza has echoed the ancient prayer of the Church found in the "O Antiphons" and each stanza is answered and will be answered in Christ, our Emmanuel. This is why we rejoice!

Although the air was cold, the hot dogs and S'mores were hot as nearly 50 people gathered to enjoy Zion's annual hayride and hotdog roast. Special thanks to Shelly Gruhn, Dan Dawson, Joni and Tim Kienast, Pastor and Diane Riggert, and Don Lamb for their service!

Our Frozen, but happy volunteers!

Carly Arp shivers while enjoying her S'more

Shannon Walters worries that she will be the only adult on the back rack.

Heather and Kora Kusel wait for the hayride to begin.

Casie and Courtney Eischeid, Don Lamb, and Timothy Conner anticipate their roasted hotdogs.

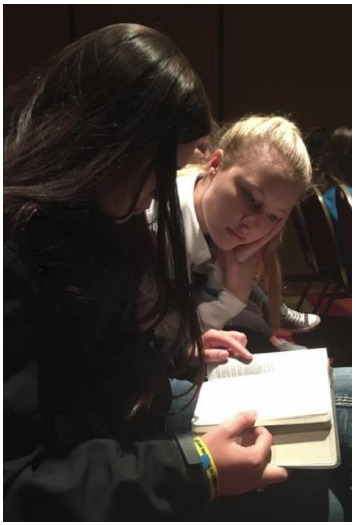
Pastor and Tiffany Johnson enjoy the fellowship.

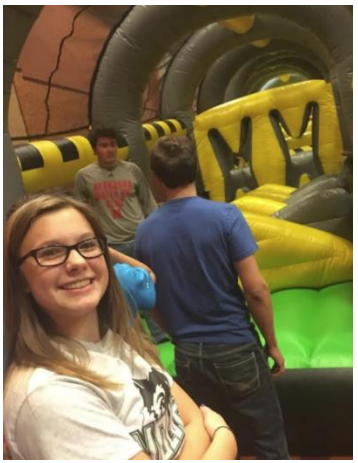
Jill Arp and Jen Morris prepare to wow everyone with their driving ability.

On November 17-19 the Trizion (pronounced trisen) youth group attended the Nebraska District Youth Gathering. We had ten kids and two adults in attendance. This year's theme was Heroes. We looked at various Bible stories, such as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; David and Goliath; David and Bathsheba; and Esther. We attended mass events, where Sarah Salzberg and another speaker led us through these Bible studies. We looked at what it means to have courage and faith like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, being willing to give up all of our baggage to trust that God is in control and will save us.

We learned that we are not the hero of our story, but instead Jesus is in the story of David and Goliath, because often we see ourselves as the David figure, having to fight for ourselves, stepping forward in faith that we are going to do the right thing, when in reality, that isn't our job. Our job is to trust that God is fighting the giants for us. We are to have faith that Jesus walks with us and is there fighting for us, just as Exodus 14:14 states, "The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." We discussed our sins, and how they affect our lives as we looked at David and Bathsheba, and Esther was placed in her position for just a time as that, just as we are placed in our daily lives, to honor God in the moments that He sets up for us. During large group Bible studies, we looked at various super heroes and how we see God in them. We looked at Wonder Woman, and discussed how she mimics our Savior in the movie through her grace and mercy.

After the Bible studies were done, we spent time having lots of fun! The kids did a servant event with a bunch of other youth groups making mercy meals to be sent overseas to those that may not have food. Together, as a conference we made over 27,000 bags of food to be shipped. Other youth groups went other places, some painted, some built things, some moved boxes, or cleaned. Our kids had a great time taking part in the nightly activities which included inflatables, bingo, dance parties, etc. We had a great time as a group, and the kids came up with an official name for our group. The name Trizion (pronounced trisen) is a mixture of Trinity Lutheran Church and Zion Lutheran Church, with the reminder that our Savior is risen, He is risen indeed! The kids went around all week saying "He is trisen!" It is important for them to recognize that we, as a youth group are united as one, but we have our origins in two different churches as well. We will start looking for a Bible verse to be our youth group verse when we get home. The group bonded, and as always we had a lot of fun! We look forward to going back to our youth group this coming week, and helping serve Trinity by making cookies.





Ladies Guild of Zion
November 8, 2017

Pastor Conner opened the meeting with prayer. After a discussion about what contents are found in hymns, he led us through the hymn "The Church's One Foundation," pointing out how praise, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Trinity, and prayer are all included. Christian Life Chairman Margaret Backhaus read a piece based on Psalm 118. It remarked how our lives are always adjusting to the changes being made around us, but that God's Word and promises never change. The mite box prayer was read and the offering taken.

President Buhr led us in the LWML pledge and called the business meeting to order in the name of the Triune God. Roll call was answered by 11 members telling how they expected to spend Thanksgiving. The secretary read the minutes of the previous meeting and they were approved as read. In the absence of the treasurer, President Buhr read her report. Human care chairman, Audrey Roe, said she was getting quilts ready to give to the Adopt a Family drive at Christmastime. The Advent by Candlelight evening was discussed. There are still desserts needed, but the tables are filled and the program is arranged. The church and fellowship hall will be decorated on Saturday, December 2nd at 8:00 A.M.

There was no old business except to remember the guild collection items: postage stamps, box tops for education, soap, cell phones, and computer ink cartridges that are non-refillable.

New business: President Buhr asked if there were any community project ideas. Sandra Vahl said she was using her Thrivent card to buy Christmas gifts for the Plaza residents. Audrey Roe will check on the people living at the former Quakerdale property to see if they have need of quilts. Door decorations for the church were discussed and it was decided that was not a project the guild wanted to do.

The nominating committee placed the name of Sue Puck for secretary and Mary Grimm for treasurer in nomination. There being no further nominations there was a unanimous vote cast for the ballot as presented.

Plaza Bingo is November 24th. Darlene Vollstedt is chairman with Audrey Roe, Mary Grimm, and Carol Kahl on the committee.

The next guild meeting is a noon potluck on December 13th. All ladies of the church are invited. Hostesses will be Connie Ahrendsen and Joene Bohlman. There being no further business the meeting was adjourned with the Lord's Prayer and the table prayer. Refreshments were served by Monica Christensen and Charlene Hickman.

Preschool Praises for November 2017

This month was not quite as hectic as last month, but we still kept busy! We started out with Parent/teacher conferences which went great and we are so thankful for all the wonderful parents and children that we have!

The second week of November we studied turkeys and the letter T. The children made an adorable letter T that was decorated like a turkey! We worked on ordering objects by size and telling what object is different in a group of other pictures. Library Linda visited the morning class and read them some great books about being sick and what to do. We also talked about Noah and the Ark which made some of the children nervous until I explained that God promised to never flood the world again and that we can see his promise each time we see a rainbow! Pastor talked to the children about the Tower of Babel during chapel time and explained that we are all part of one race, the human race!

The third week we studied being thankful and what we are thankful for and who we are thankful to. We went around the circle and asked what each child was thankful for and pointed it back to God. We worked on identifying the letter H and the sound it makes and enjoyed making invitations for the Grandparents for Grandparent's Day. Pastor spoke to the children about Abraham and Sarah and the promise that God made to them that they would have a child and that God ALWAYS keeps his promises!

The fourth week was Thanksgiving week so we only had one day of school which we used to celebrate Grandparent's Day! The children came with their grandparents and enjoyed a story, a couple songs, coloring a place mat for Thanksgiving, playing bingo and putting together puzzles as well as making their own butter for the muffin snack we all enjoyed! Thrivent sponsored the event through an action team and each child received a Thrivent t-shirt. The church and preschool provided each child with a beautiful Story Bible so that they can see the same book at home as we use in the classroom and share it with their family! What a blessing!

The last week of November we will be beginning a 2 week study of the 5 senses and we so enjoy the different games that we get to do including "Guess that smell" and "Guess that sound" to name a few! I love seeing the children get so excited and learning at the same time!

I pray that your Thanksgiving was a wonderful one and that we always keep in mind to whom we are the most thankful to - our God!

Blessings, Mrs. Gore & Mrs. Nemitz

ZION Lutheran Preschool
Manning, Iowa
Christ Centered... Child Focused... Family Connecting

ZioN
Lutheran Preschool
Manning, Iowa
Christ Centered... Child Focused... Family Connecting

!Amigos En Cristo!
News from ***La Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Amigos en Cristo:*** *Friends in Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church:* **Pastor Daniel Vogel**, Denison, Iowa

Iowa District West, LCMS
Year 13, Issue 12, December 2017

To the Saints of Zion Lutheran Church,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! I thank you very much for your steadfast support of the mission of Amigos en Cristo, Denison IA. It is truly wonderful to see local congregations supporting outreach in their communities and those nearby. Since being installed as pastor of Amigos a lot has transpired. I have made contact with every member on record and made many new connections. It is good to get to know these people and hear their stories. Most of the congregation is from Mexico or El Salvador. They all now call either Denison, Manning, or Deloit their home.

I'd like to share with you the story one couple who are currently enrolled in new member classes. They are Wendy and Antonio. They are a young couple in their twenties with two young children. Wendy works in Denison and Antonio in Manning. They came to the United States when they were children and have never had a church home. They visited Amigos and were attracted by the historic worship and the clear Gospel proclamation. They are now learning the Small Catechism for the first time. They are eager to learn the things of God. Both of their children have now been baptized in the Lutheran church! This is the quiet work of missions that is often overlooked. It is praying with the people and answering their questions, patiently and consciously catechizing. It is slow work but it is good work and work worth doing. The same work that is faithfully carried out by your own pastor in his vocation.

All member classes at Amigos are designed around the same Small Catechism that many of you all learned as part of being raised in the Lutheran faith. It is truly amazing to see these new members soak up these wonderful truths and receive such teaching with joy. This would not be possible without the generous support of congregations like Zion. With all sincerity, I thank you for your support. Please keep us in your prayers and you are surely in ours.

In Christ,
Pastor Willie Grills

***Please Continue to Support* our church**: For our mission friends financial support checks should now be sent to: Amigos en Cristo Lutheran Church, 1004 1st Avenue South, Denison, Iowa, 51442

CONTACT:
Pastor Willie Grills
1004 1st Ave. South Denison, Iowa 51442
Church: 712-263-2235 Pastor's Cell: 606-225-2122
pastorgrills@gmail.com

Deepened Faith Through the Tithe

Have you ever prayed to God to deepen your faith in Him? Have you ever begged Him to strengthen your relationship with Him? Have you ever pleaded with Him to help you grow spiritually? We all have. But have we ever stopped to consider that God's answers to these prayers often involves us, that He accomplishes these things through changing us? For example, it's often said that when you pray for patience that God provides opportunities for you to develop this virtue. God doesn't grant an instant download of patience from heaven, but He involves us in His answer to our prayer.

Might a prayer for a deeper faith, a stronger relationship, and a more mature spirituality mean the same thing? Think about it. If you were God, what might be one way that you'd answer your prayer? Scripture details one means through which God strengthens faith. Deuteronomy 14 says, "Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year… so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always." (22-23)

Process that. God's Word exhorts Israel to tithe[4] for this expressed purpose: "that you may learn to revere the LORD your God." Tithing was a merciful command given by God for His people's benefit.

Might tithing benefit us, too? Does it not still have the power to teach us to revere the Lord? And might it not be a means through which God answers our prayer for a deeper faith, a stronger relationship, and a more mature spirituality?

I know, tithing isn't a command given to the Church. But didn't Jesus teach that our hearts follow our money? He did. Check out Matthew 6:19-21. And didn't Jesus endorse the tithe? He did. Check out Matthew 23:23. If we're praying for hearts more in tune with God and His Kingdom, why are we resisting the tithe? Might tithing, in fact, be God's gift to us?

Think about it. Scripture doesn't encourage the tithe because God needs the money. God doesn't need a dime; He owns the world. He's got plenty of money – the streets in Heaven are paved with gold, the gates are solid pearl, and the foundations of the city are covered in precious stones.

God mercifully invites us to tithe not because He needs to receive it but because we need to give it. He knows we're weak and easily stray from what we confess to believe and He knows that tithing with lead our hearts to Him.

I think Mark Allen Powell said it well in his book *Giving to God*, "on a simple, practical level, I find … it is easier to sing hymns and not really mean them than … to part with my money and not really mean it" (12). God knows this. For this reason He lovingly invites us to tithe so as to continually strengthen and deepen our faith and trust in Him.

Tithing helps us practice what we confess—and isn't that exactly what we so often pray for?

Remember, tithing is God's gift to us and it may be His answer to our prayer. Tithing teaches us to confess Him as Creator, Sustainer, and Provider. And tithing helps us to "revere the Lord our God always." – Pastor Conner

[4] The tithe refers to a tenth of one's income. Traditionally, Christians have given their tithe to their local congregation. Once the tithe has been met, Christians look for opportunities to give charitably as they see need and are able to meet it.

Praise for Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University

Over the past several months, Zion was privileged to host Financial Peace University. Below are several of the comments shared by participants upon completing the course.

How has Financial Peace University changed the way you think about personal finance?

I need to be much more mindful of where my money goes, not just think it's ok as long as I have money in my checking account.

I no longer rely on credit; I'm using cash. And I'm being persistent about paying off debt.

It's incredible to realize that a person's financial status is all about behavior. Who knew?!? Sometimes we just need to pay the bills. However, the money left over needs to be assigned and not "wasted" on things that I "deserve."

We can manage money better. We can save, pay for things we need, and tithe, and do good things with our money.

How has Financial Peace University changed your life?

It has made me seriously look at a budget and follow it. It is way too easy to go to the grocery store every day and get something, which turns into a cart full. Using the cash envelope puts it all into perspective.

We are more financially hopeful and more focused on the legacy we will leave for our children.

We are starting to pay off debt persistently. It has changed our perspective on spending now vs. saving, especially since we want to build a house some day!

Would you recommend Financial Peace University to a friend?

Of course! I already have to lots of people!

Absolutely. It truly is about giving.

Yes. We have learned more about how to use our finances in this class than we had in our lives to this point.

Absolutely! This class is a game changer.

UPCOMING EVENTS @ ZION & TRINITY

December 2 **Cookie Walk (at Trinity)**
9:00-11:00 a.m.

December 3 **Advent by Candlelight (at Zion)**
Experience the Christmas story through narration and song in the enchanting candlelight setting of Advent by Candlelight.
Tickets: $5, or sign up to host a table.

December 6, 13, and 20 **Midweek Advent Services**
5:45 p.m. at Zion with meal to follow
5:30 p.m. meal at Trinity with worship at 6:30 p.m.

December 17 **Children's Christmas Programs (at Zion)**
Child musicians will begin playing at 6:00 p.m.
The pre-k – 1st grade program will begin at 6:30 p.m.
The 2nd – 8th grade program will begin at the completion of the first program. Birthday party for Jesus to follow

December 24 **Christmas Eve Services**
9:00 a.m. Divine Service at Zion
4:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Service at Trinity
6:00 p.m. Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at Zion

December 25 **Christmas Day Worship**
9:00 a.m. at Trinity
10:00 a.m. Hymn sing and brunch at Zion
Members bring a brunch dish to share
Members are also invited to bring a favorite table decoration.
We'll eat, worship, and then open the floor for hymn selections.

January 28 **Zion and Trinity Family Bowling**
1:00 – 3:00 p.m.
Zion's Board of Education pays for one game, shoes, and a soda.
Enjoy an afternoon of fellowship and fun at L & M Bowl in Manning with your church family!

February 3 **Strengthening Marriages (at Zion)**

December Birthdays and Anniversaries @ Zion & Trinity

Birthdays (T = Trinity)

1. Robert Ewoldt
Debra Janssen
2. Renee Grimm
Kamryn Ketcham
Stephen Muhlbauer
Emma Schwieso
Melodie Boell (T)
3. Berniece Segebart (T)
4. Darlene Asmus
Janet Gruhn
Tracie Kurth
Rozora Schroeder
5. Tiffani Beck
Jase Hull
Ross Kusel
Brian Lage
6. Melissa Lesle
JoAnn Petersen
Eryn Ramsey
7. Mike Heaton
Robert Saunders (T)
8. Annette Hilsabeck
Brian Stoberl
9. Piper Doyel
Wade Ranniger
Deb Birks (T)
10. Athena Bess
Breyton Johnson
Heather Kusel
Keaton Otto
Elizabeth Trost
Sara Boell (T)
11. Jaxen Vollstedt
Michell Lile (T)
12. Mike Bruch
Zoey Heaton
Pam Sebring (T)
13. Tricia Beck
Courtney Grabill
Arlene Jahn (T)
14. Rachel Hofbauer
Neeka Jacobsen
15. Cheral Buhr
Sam Hansen
Sheryl Zinke
Miranda Lingle (T)
Ricky Sloth (T)
16. Mabel Langel
17. Derrick Janssen
Taylor Roe
Lonnie Jahn (T)
18. Zane Diersen
Jay Miller
Amanda Rosener
20. Kourtney Grimm
21. Leslee Gore
22. Kathy Vollstedt
23. Joyce Schroeder
Gary Witt
Shane Boeck (T)
24. Robert Christensen
Brittany Page
Heather Riessen (T)
25. Ben Booth
Chris Greving
26. Brody Chapman
Larry Mahnke
Laurene Meeves
27. Eric Ramsey
28. Blake Diersen
Elissa Riesberg
Billy Weitl
29. Caden Muhlbauer
Jade Sellner
Jim Zimmerman (T)
30. Cody Eischeid
Erica Lohrmann
Ginger Wardrip
31. Larry Ahrendsen
Amber Ehlers
Austin Frank
Ellie Ranniger

Anniversaries

3. Gene & Colene Lohrmann
4. Karl & Angela Albertsen
Dennis & Margaret Backhaus
Rodney & Charlene Hickman
5. Steve & Nancy Muhlbauer
10. Wyatt & Sylvia Bandow (T)
12. Robert & Linnet Nissen
13. Greg & Amber Neumann
14. Bruce & Mary Grimm
23. Carl & Carol French
29. Glen & Shirley Ahrendsen
Kent & Karen Vollstedt

If we missed or misspelled your name, please inform the church office.

Official Acts

Maddox Evan Weitl, Son of Jesse and Katie Weitl; November 18, 2017; Pastor Jonathan Conner

In Our Prayers

Walt Noelck, Dave Grundmeier, Heather Kusel, Sherri Steffes, Jim Deevers, Gabriel Albers (Pastor and Rebecca's nephew), Athena Bess, JoAnn Wittrock, Inez Mahnke, Diane Henkleman, Pastor Johnson, Ron Claussen (Laurene Meeves' brother), Rick Spack, Arlene Mohr, Kathy Vollstedt, Ray Christensen