

Life Together

Olsburg-Walsburg Lutheran Parish

inside...

page 2

*Reflections from
Pastor Keith (con't)
Thank you!*

page 3

*December birthdays
and anniversaries,
joys and sorrows
Members in service*

page 4

*'Tis the Season...To
Give!
Joy To The World
Walsburg Sunday
School Program
Walsburg Christmas
Cookie Walk*

page 5

*Christmas at Camp
Office News*

*Next newsletter items and
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Reflections by Pastor Keith

Christmas is coming! But will it make any difference? In your life? In your home? In your neighborhood? In the world? Will Christmas make any difference?

But first, what is Christmas? In Japan only 2% of the population is Christian, yet Christmas is becoming one of the most popular holidays in Japan. A reporter interviewed a Japanese woman dressed up as an elf who was selling cellular phones. When asked why she was dressed that way, she said, "We're trying to create the right mood so people will buy more things." The reporter went on to say that in Japan everyone knows that Christmas is not about religion but about retail sales.

Well, that's Japan, but what about this country? It seems to me that many people in this country think of Christmas as a time to enjoy oneself. A Christmas is good if you get into the Christmas spirit and everyone is happy. A Christmas is good if you get to spend time with loved ones and everyone likes the gifts you give. But surely there is more to Christmas than feeling good.

And there is! We know Christmas is about the birth of Jesus. It is about Mary and Joseph and the Baby who was born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger. It is about

the shepherds who were in the fields keeping watch over their flocks and the angels who told them about the birth of the Messiah and sang, "Glory to God in the highest." We know that Christmas is a time to join the angels in worshiping God for sending a Savior. It is a time to go to church. It is a time to sing carols. It is a time to pray and give praise to God.

But there is more! As good as it is to worship God at Christmas time, there is something more to Christmas. Listen to these words from the New Testament book of Titus. *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds."*

The reading was part of a letter which the Apostle Paul wrote to Titus, one of his co-workers. He said, *"For the grace of God has appeared."* That happened when Jesus was born. God's grace

(continued on the next page)

appeared in human form. *“For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all.”* Christmas is not just about a sweet little baby being born in a barn. It is about salvation. It is about rescuing people from their sin, from all the trouble they get themselves into. It is hard work. It is work which took Jesus all the way from Bethlehem’s barn to Calvary’s cross. It is work which led to his suffering and death. Christmas is nothing without the hard work of Jesus Christ - work which has resulted in salvation for you and me!

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly.” God intends to change us. That’s why we have Christmas. That’s why Jesus was born of Mary and laid in a manger. God wants us to change us - the way we think, the way we talk, the way we act, the way we work together for the good of our community and our nation. God wants us to live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly. And then, to emphasize what he is saying, the Apostle Paul went on to say, *“Jesus gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.”*

Christmas is about changed lives. Christmas is about becoming more godly. Christmas is about living a holy life. Christmas is about becoming zealous to do good deeds. And this brings us back to the question I raised earlier. Will Christmas make a difference this year? Will Christmas change you? Will Christmas change us? Will Christmas change the way we live? Will Christmas lead us to a new birth and raise us to a new life? I pray that it will.

This Christmas, give yourself to God. This Christmas, as you discover in ever more profound ways the depth of God’s love for you, resolve to live your life for God. This Christmas, as the Spirit of God warms your

soul through the light of the candles, the carols, the prayers, the bread, the wine, the Word of God, pray to God and commit yourself to become a more holy and godly person.

Let Christmas change you! That is, after all, why we have Christmas. That is why, when the time was right, God sent forth his Son, to be born of Mary. A child was born to redeem you and make you a person who is zealous for good deeds. It all happened for you - to make a difference in your life, in your home, in your community, in the whole world.

Let the miracle of Christmas happen this year!

Keep the faith. Love God. Love others. Be the people of God!

The peace of Christ be with you,
Pastor Keith

Thank You!

Many, many thanks to all who expressed appreciation during October’s Pastor Appreciation Month (and many other times as well)! Your words, your cards, your gifts brought smiles to our faces and thanksgiving in our hearts. All of you are a great joy to us. We thank God for you!
Pastor Keith and Carol

And speaking of giving thanks, we are thankful for the privilege of serving the congregations of Olsburg and Walsburg. We are thankful for the rich opportunity of working with you in the Kingdom God!

We are thankful for your faithfulness to Christ and his mission. We are thankful for your welcoming spirit. We are thankful that you strive to be a caring community of Christians. We are thankful for your passion for children and youth ministry. We are thankful for the ways you reach out and serve the community, especially those in

December birthdays, anniversaries, joys and sorrows

If you know of a member whose birthday is not listed, please contact the church office.

December Birthdays

3 Willa Erickson (O)
Blake Fronce (O)
10 Carla Hageman (W)
11 Beverly Sundgren (W)
Rita Nelson (W)
Alyssa Kulp (W)
12 Tanya Hillocks (O)
15 Loree Allen (W)
17 Vern Bulk (W)
LaRae Kraemer (W)
18 Kylie Grater (W)
20 Brian Monser (O)
Garrett Olson (W)
22 Tom Nelson (O)
Brandon Rogge (W)
23 Anita Hinkle (W)
26 Heather Nelson (O)
Jeremy Hinkle (W)
28 Rick Johnson (O)
Kent Nelson (O)
29 Jerome Flohr (W)

December Anniversaries:

3 James and Janice Nelson (W)
22 Michael and Ann Ingham (W)
23 Valerie & Andy Hoehner (W)
25 Rich and Darnell Vargo (O)
30 Steve and Julie Strauss (W)

January 1-8 Birthdays

3 Darnell Vargo (O)
5 Gavin Hargrave (W)
6 Gary Holt (O)
7 Kenneth Neilson (W)
8 Julie Strauss (W)

Members in service

Olsburg

Thank you to these members for their service to the parish during December.

Walsburg

Greeters and Ushers: Roger & Kathy Sundgren; Jerome Flohr; Mary Kay Henry

Communion Ushers: Don Campbell & Jeremy Hinkle

***Acolytes:** Today: Ryker Befort; 12/12 Brody Willimon; 12/19 William Sullivan; 12/25; 12/26 Macy Berry

***Lay Assistants:** Today: Becky Nelson; 12/12 Lynn Hargrave; 12/19 Gracie Scofield; 12/25; 12/26 Rita Nelson

Altar Committee: Alicia Scofield and Lynne Berry

***If you are unable to be present for your assignment, please find a replacement and contact the church office so the correct name will appear in the bulletin.**

Ushers: Jim Nelson; Nick Cooper; Gregg Gibson; Bill Monser

***Communion Assistants:** Today: Karl Kasselman; 12/19 David Gibson; 12/24 Kristi Fronce

***Lay Readers:** Today: Karl Kasselman; 12/12 Deb Lowry; 12/19 Coleen Esping; 12/24 Greg Gibson; 12/26 Kylea Ricketts

***Acolytes:** Today: Jarin Brenner; 12/12 Kaden Gutsch; 12/19 Landry Zoeller; 12/24 Ida Kasselman; 12/26 Addison Gutsch

December Altar Committee: Coleen Esping

need. We are thankful that you want to make difference in the lives of people.

We are thankful you are a people of hope. We are thankful that you look to the future with confidence. We are thankful that when the challenge is great, you give extra to meet the challenge. Yes, thanks be to God!

Tis the Season ... to Give!

Many good things have happened in our two congregations this year! Through you and your gifts we have been able to carry out a vigorous ministry, reaching many with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we come to the final days of 2021 it is important to remember that extra financial contributions given between now and December 31 help us finish the year strong and begin the new year with a solid foundation.

At Christmas time we are keenly aware of God's gift to us. At great cost, God has given us the Savior we need. God spared nothing in order to give us the best! May such giving inspire us to give our very best. In this season of giving, please remember your church and the ministry we do together with an extra gift.

Joy To The World

In the days of Isaac Watts, the author of "Joy to the World," there was in England extreme prejudice against newly-composed hymns. Congregations were strictly devoted to singing the Psalms in worship. So Watts reworked certain Psalms in freer and most spontaneous versions.

"Joy to the World" is based on Psalm 98, which tells of the Messiah's coming and kingdom. The reader may be able to see Watt's first stanza in Psalm 98:2-3 - and the arrival of a victorious king. The second stanza is drawn from verses 4-8 -

through the praise of all creation. The fourth stanza is seen in verse 9 - God's righteous and loving reign.

Watts strayed a little from Psalm 98 when he wrote the third stanza to this hymn. "No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground." This seems to be a direct command from the divine King himself. Then Watts returns to the psalm, imitating the last sentence in verse 3 - "He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found."

Set to a tune by the greatest of all English composers, George Friedrich Handel, "Joy to the World" can powerfully fill the heart with the joy of Christ's coming, especially when singing with a congregation on Christmas Eve!

Walsburg Sunday School Program

The children of Walsburg Sunday School will hold their annual Christmas program during the church service on Sunday, December 12. Please invite friends and family to hear about "The Ornaments of Christmas" and to celebrate the reason for the season through the eyes of our Sunday School children. Immediately following the Sunday School Christmas program, the Walsburg Sunday School families and church members will provide a soup lunch for all worshippers to attend. Freewill offering will benefit the Sunday School.



Walsburg Christmas Cookie Walk

The "Christmas Cookie Walk" will be held on Saturday morning, December 4 from 9-12 at Walsburg Lutheran Church. Cookies will

be sold for \$5 pound along with other sacks of special goodies. Free coffee, hot chocolate and cookie samples will be available, so come check it out and let your friends and family know about this outreach ministry to the community and welcome them to join us.

On Friday, December 3 at 1pm please join us for an afternoon of fun and fellowship as we decorate dozens of sugar cookies for the sale as well as Memorial Hall.

Christmas at Camp (Open House)

Looking for a fun way to kick off the Christmas season? Join your Camp Tomah Shinga family and 2 special guests, December 11th for our first annual Christmas Open House. The fun starts at 10:00am and goes till 2:00pm. There will be cookie decorating, ornament making, and of course a chance to take a picture with Santa on the hayrack. Snacks and supplies will be provided all you need to bring is yourself and some Christmas spirit. Come in your comfy holiday pajamas or bring out that fantastic Christmas sweater you've been waiting to wear!

Office News

Yearbook items are due Dec. 6 to Shelly for Olsburg and Dec. 7 to Rita for Walsburg. If we receive the information needed by the deadlines, yearbooks will be available at both churches at the end of December.

If you notice that you or your family members are not included on the birthday and anniversary list, or are not correct, or there are members listed that shouldn't be, there are membership forms located in the narthexes of each church. Please take a membership form, fill it out and put the completed form in Shelly's box at the church. If you would rather, you can hand the completed form to Shelly at Olsburg or

hand the form to Pastor and he will give it to her. Pastor and Shelly are working together along with council members to get all information updated. Thank you for your help and patience.