

DCE Kathryn Schneider and family are visiting Zion. You can meet and greet them Sunday, January 8th!



The Schneider Family



Merry Christmas from Taiwan

The Ferry Family gathered to celebrate our Lord's Nativity today with our brothers and sisters here in our island nation home. The day was a bit more like Christmas since most people had off this year since the day fell on a Sunday. But it was still a high of 70 degrees F. here so there was no White Christmas for us!

We are thankful for your continued love and support that allows us to be living and serving here. We pray the Lord's great peace and joy is yours in abundance, knowing that Jesus, the Word, was made flesh and dwells among us in His Means of Grace. Merry Christmas!





Fulfill Righteousness

In the days of Herod the Great, John the Baptizer appeared in the Judean wilderness with this exhortation: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 3:1). And people responded! “Jerusalem, and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mt. 3:5-6).

“Then Jesus came...” Jesus came “to be baptized by [John]” (Mt. 3:13)! The sinless Son of God came to be baptized by John. Understandably, John tried to deter him: “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (Mt. 3:14). “But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness’” (Mt. 3:15). At this, John consented.

But what does it all mean? How was Jesus’ baptism fitting to fulfill all righteousness? Why does the Church celebrate it? And what difference does it make in our lives? Let’s find out.

Let it be so now...

The “now” is important. It means there’s something significant about the time. Something significant was happening in that “now.” The “now” marked a change in history. But what? John told us: “The kingdom of God is at hand!” This kingdom, ushered in by Jesus, signified a change in times. It marked the beginning of the end, the initiation of the end times. God was getting involved in a significant way. God was coming for His people, to rescue them from their sin. So Jesus was saying, “My baptism has eschatological (end times) significance.”

To fulfill all righteousness

This is an important phrase. Jesus was saying that His baptism was integral in bringing about the Scriptural plan for righteousness. Fleshing out His words even more, Jesus was saying that His baptism

was necessary to enact the Scriptural plan for God’s saving deeds, it was necessary in God’s plan of salvation. So putting the two phrases together, Jesus was saying, “I need to be baptized now because my baptism has end times significance, because it’s integral in bringing about the Scriptural plan for salvation.”

But how?

Remember the point of John’s baptism? Repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John’s baptism was for sinners. So, Jesus is essentially saying, “I need to stand where sinners stand. I need to take the place of sinners. That’s the way God’s Kingdom is coming. That’s the way He’s enacting His salvation.”

This is hugely important in understanding Jesus’ message and mission: It was about standing where sinners stood – from His baptism all the way to His cross. More specifically, it was about taking the place of sinners, about being the substitute for sinners.

Our hymnody beautifully captures this. Consider these verses of “To Jordan’s River Came Our Lord”:

The Savior came to be baptized—
The Son of God in flesh disguised—
To stand beneath the Father’s will
And all His righteousness fulfill.

The Son of God disguised in flesh stood beneath the Father’s will to fulfill God’s righteous deeds of salvation, deeds that started by standing where sinners stood, by identifying Himself as their substitute. So the hymn concludes:

Now rise, faint hearts, be resolute;
This man is Christ, our substitute!
He was baptized in Jordan’s stream,
Proclaimed Redeemer, Lord supreme.

The baptism of Jesus reminds us that the Savior has come in these end times to stand in our place, to be our substitute, to fulfill God’s plan to rescue us from our sin. And that’s something worth celebrating! – Pastor Conner



America's Godless Political Religion

Demographers tell us that an increasing number of Americans, when asked to check their religion, are selecting “none,” thus the rise of the so-called “nones.” But this terminology is misleading. Americans may increasingly be checking the “none” box, but Americans are not becoming less religious.¹ What we’re doing is adopting a religion, a political religion, without God. Joshua Mitchell, author of *American Awakening: Identity Politics and Other Afflictions of Our Time*, writes,

Surveys may indicate that Americans have lost or are losing their religion; however, the fever of identity politics that now sweeps the nation suggests these surveys are looking in the wrong place and asking the wrong questions. Americans have not lost their religion. Americans have relocated their religion to the realm of politics (xx).

And this realm of politics (specifically *identity politics*, sometimes called *social justice*²) is a godless religion. As Mitchell says, “God is nowhere to be found in the identity-politics accounting scheme” (xix). Do not, however, equate *godless* with *non-religious* because at the heart of today’s political obsession is a fixation on the religious concepts of guilt and innocence. Mitchell offers, “Identity politics is concerned with

the invisible economy of transgression and innocence...” (xvi).

This is a critical point to appreciate: modern man is no less religious than those who have come before him. It would, therefore, be more appropriate to speak of the “none of the aboves” (i.e. “none of the above” God-centered religion options on the surveys) rather than of the “nones.” Modern man is increasingly not identifying with religions that have God in the center, but he is every bit as concerned with transgression and innocence as his God-fearing ancestors, just without God.

This also explains why “nones” or “none of the aboves” are less like to attend church. Mitchell explains,

An ever-growing number of ‘nones’ no longer attend church. Why should they, if they can find a seemingly compelling account of transgression and innocence in identity politics? Christianity has not disappeared from America; rather, the Christian categories of transgression and innocence have moved into politics...” (34).

This is proving to be disastrous both for politics and for religion. When Christianity is overrun by politics, it loses the gospel of Jesus. When God is evicted from religion, man becomes a political tyrant. Unsurprisingly, identity politics is a godless, tyrannical religion. Whereas Biblical Christianity sees guilt in the heart of every single person,

¹ This is an important point to appreciate: Man is a religious being. He will make something his ultimate. He will have a god. Rejecting belief in the God of the Bible is not the rejection of religion; it’s the transfer of allegiance from the Creator God to something else. In America it is increasingly being transferred to politics. As this article will make clear, this is largely a religious quest to scapegoat a group who will bear the blame for

society’s ills so that the other groups can assert their innocence.

² *Social justice* is a slippery term. Its meaning can change depending on who’s using it and how they’re using it. For our purposes, we’re talking about the woke version of social justice that is fixated on unequal outcomes (referred to as *disparities*). For this version of social justice, disparity of outcome = injustice. To ensure justice, then, you must *force* equal outcomes.

regardless of sex, skin color, or sexual orientation, and directs every person to Christ who bears the sins of every single person, granting us release from our sins and making us into new people, identity politics sees guilt in groups, specifically one group, and directs people to blame the members of this group for society's ills.

To be more specific, individuals are assigned a group identity (by which guilt and innocence are gauged) based upon skin color, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity. This group identity is supreme. You do not have an individual identity; you are your group. At its core, this group identity framework is about the religious concepts of transgression and innocence (just without God). As Mitchell explains, "Identity politics is not about who we are as individuals; it is about the stain and purity associated with who we are as members of a group" (xviii).

If this sounds like stereotyping,³ it is, but it's much more than that because, remember, **identity politics / woke social justice is really a religious quest to identify the guilty and the innocent in society.** So this is bigger than stereotyping. This is scapegoating. With God evicted, man must find the solution for evil among his fellow man, but no individual creature among man is big enough to bear the sins of the world. Identity politics / woke social justice, therefore, needs a guilty group to blame for society's ills. It finds it in the white, heterosexual male. Mitchell says,

In the world that identity politics constructs, the white, heterosexual man becomes more than

who he really is. He becomes a member of a scapegoated group that takes away the sins of the world, rather than being a mortal of mixed inheritance, like everyone else, involved in transgression and searching for redemption (xxvi).

This de facto guilt group is scapegoated under the phrase "whiteness," but contrary to what one may initially think, "whiteness" isn't only about skin color; "whiteness" is about privilege and power. This is absolutely critical to understand: **for identity politics / woke social justice, "whiteness" = privilege + power.** Anyone guilty of "whiteness" – and identity politics is fanatical (think Salem Witch Trials on steroids!) about hunting down anything that looks like privilege and power, labeling it "whiteness," and blaming it for society's ills – must repent of their "whiteness" and perform endless penance before the innocence groups.⁴

Because, according to identity politics, the innocence groups lack privilege and power, they cannot be guilty of the sin of "whiteness." So they have the freedom to say and do things that would be wrong for the scapegoated group to say and do. Whereas Christianity applies morality equally to all, indicating that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, identity politics / woke social justice differentiates morality by groups.

This is what drives the "anti-racism" efforts of identity politics / woke social justice. Consider two examples. In 2018 the *New York Times* hired Asian American Sarah Jeong to their editorial board. Sarah, among other things, was well known

³ It is politically incorrect to say, but such stereotyping by group is what used to be understood as *racism*. As we will make clear, however, the definition of *racism* has changed from stereotyping by group (which is what identity politics / woke social justice does) to using privilege and power to establish moral norms.

⁴ Forgiveness is never offered. Forgiveness erases a debt and restores alienated parties. Identity politics / woke social justice is built on the perpetual existence of a guilt group who will forever bear the blame for society's sins. To forgive would destroy its very foundations.

for tweets like these: #WhiteMenAreBull**** and #CancelWhitePeople. To the un-woke reader those sound racist. To the woke, however, these could not be racist because they came from an individual in one of the innocence groups who, despite serving on one of the most powerful communication platforms in the world, purportedly lacked privilege and power. Her group identity secured her innocence.

In 2019, self-proclaimed “anti-racist public theologian” Ekemini Uwan (a black woman) addressed a women’s conference on the evils of whiteness:

Whiteness is wicked. It is wicked. It’s rooted in violence, it’s rooted in theft, it’s rooted in plunder, it’s rooted in power, in privilege.

To the un-woke hearer her words sound exceedingly racist, but to the adherent of the religion of identity politics / woke social justice, they cannot be because she, as a black woman, belongs to a group that lacks power and privilege rendering her perpetually innocent. As we mentioned before, when God is evicted from religion, man becomes a political tyrant.

Do privilege and power exist? Of course. Have people with white skin abused privilege and power. Yes. There is no shortage of sordid examples throughout history and the present day of people with white skin behaving badly toward people who have lacked the same power and privilege. One need look no further than the way whites enslaved blacks in early America or the way they discriminated against them in post-civil war America. This was evil.

But is the abuse of privilege and power rooted only in white skin? Such a thought is absurd and flies in the face of any reasonable evaluation of history and reality. One need only mention names like Idi Amin, Pol Pot, Mao Zedong, Boko Haram,

Genghis Khan, the Khmer Rouge, the Hutus and Tutsis, and the South American cartels. As Thaddeus William, author of *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth*, observes, “None of these plundering, thieving, enslaving, genocidal power-seekers involved in such injustices were white.” Pinning guilt on one scapegoated group is spectacularly naïve at best (and starts to look darkly sinister the closer you get). Christianity, however, insists that the human problem runs much deeper than one scapegoated group.

To acknowledge this, however, would undo the entire foundation of our modern godless religion of identity politics / woke social justice. Adherents need a scapegoat. In Christianity, Christ serves as every individual’s scapegoat. He bears our sins away. He releases us from our sin and our guilt. We find our innocence in Him even as He reorients the way we approach our neighbor, the way we see privilege and power as bringing with them the responsibility to serve, to use whatever privilege and power we might have for the benefit and blessing of others.

In identity politics / woke social justice the “whiteness” group serves as the scapegoat, but they do not bear our sins away, they stand as the perpetual guilty group for the innocence groups. They are not society’s savior; they are society’s punching bag. They cannot make anyone new and they can only make people innocent by a very biased comparison. This modern godless religion cannot and will never unify our world. It’s not designed to. It’s designed to crush its opponents and to fixate adherents’ minds on identifying injustice under every rock (thus the modern fixation with “microaggressions”). It does not seek reconciliation or healing; it seeks power.

This is what’s behind terms like *LGBTQ Community*, *intersectionality*, *heteronormativity*, and *cisgender*. The word *community* is attached to

LGBTQ to suggest that those who claim such identities belong to a unified group, an underprivileged, innocence group that is to be distinguished from members of the guilty scapegoated heterosexual group. Notice how the letter *H* (for *heterosexual*) is not and never will be included with the *LGBTQ*.⁵ *H* is the problem. It forever belongs to the scapegoated group.

This group is guilty of perpetuating *heteronormativity* (treating heterosexuality as normative, as the normal expression of sexual behavior) and *cisgender* thinking (seeing identity as connected to biology, i.e. seeing gender identity as connected to biological sex). This, according to identity politics / woke social justice is the evil exercising of privilege and power. The *LGBTQ Community*, according to identity politics, belongs to the innocence group. Why? Because, they claim, they lack privilege and power.⁶

Intersectionality is a way of measuring overlapping innocence groups. The more innocence group classifications a person can claim (i.e. being black and identifying as trans or being a woman who identifies as lesbian), the more innocent he or she is. Remember, the entire quest is about identifying who the transgressors are and who the innocents are. This is done through group identities.

The point for our purposes is to see the underlying religious nature of the quest. It's about placing society's sins on the shoulders of a perpetually scapegoated group. This political religion places

man on a never-ending witch hunt (on a far more massive scale than anything ever witnessed in the Salem Witch Trials!) as he sniffs out and punishes "whiteness." It turns neighbor against neighbor and trains us to be perpetually skeptical and untrusting of one another as it encourages us to interpret everything through the lens of power and privilege. Truly, it is exceedingly damaging for people's emotional and mental wellbeing. It is a tyrannical religion.

What we need is a full-throated Christianity that locates guilt in every human heart, a full-bodied Christianity that identifies the willing scapegoat, Jesus Christ, who bears our sins away and establishes the innocence of every individual who trusts in Him and reorients us in a loving disposition toward our neighbor in which we are not eager to find blame, but ready to offer forgiveness and love. It is no exaggeration to say that politics needs religion (specifically Christianity) to save it from its Godless and tyrannical religious obsession. This is no time to shy away from Christianity's message of the guilt of the individual before God and of the forgiveness purchased by Christ for every individual, no matter his or her sex, skin color, or ethnicity. This is a time to step into it with gusto, for the sake of our neighbor, for the sake of our world. – Pastor Conner

⁵ This lies beyond the scope of this article, but Scripture does not classify people by their sexual orientation or gender identity. Scripture classifies people first by their creational designation: male or female. We may then speak of the various desires we, as individuals, experience. Therefore, we would not classify a person as *homosexual* or *heterosexual*. We would, instead, identify a person as a male or female with same-sex desires or hetero-sex desires. The creational identity is

primary. The desires, then, can be evaluated against what God has called good.

⁶ Whether this is, in fact, true given the great power this group exercises in academia, the corporate world, congress, the legal world, and on and on, is debatable. Our point for now is to see the underlying religious nature of the quest.

4% ONE-YEAR FIXED-RATE TERM NOTE

Lutherans Helping Lutherans

Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) has served as the financial extension of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) since 1978, offering funding and resources in support of the church. Our investors make it possible for us to provide customized loans and support services to new and growing ministries as well as loans for Rostered Church Workers who dedicate their lives to sharing the Gospel.

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Discipling Event 1.18.23

@ Zion

6:00 (Meal for Confirmation Families)
6:30-7:30 p.m. (All invited)

Real Questions. Real Responses.



Poetry, Prayer, & the Psalms Lent 2023

- 2.22: Psalm 13
- 3.1: Psalm 16
- 3.8: Psalm 19
- 3.15: Psalm 29
- 3.22: Psalm 32
- 3.29: Psalm 82





To say it is early to think about the Ascension of Jesus would be an understatement. The Ascension took place 40 days after Jesus's Resurrection (it's not even Lent yet).

As we exit the Christmas season, however, it is too bad that we don't regard the Ascension as highly as we do Christmas. I'm not saying that we should bake Ascension cookies, attend Ascension parties, or decorate Ascension trees...or maybe I am.

The clearest description of the Ascension appears at the beginning of Acts (Acts 1:3, 6-11). The Disciples want to know when the world will end. Jesus redirects their attention from that to the upcoming arrival of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Jesus ascends upward. The Disciples gape at Jesus. "Two men" – presumably angels – remind the Disciples that Jesus will return. That's the Ascension in a nutshell.

Those are the events, but what do those events mean? Why should we be people of the Ascension? That's what I would like to explore in two parts: 1) What does the Ascension mean for Jesus? 2) What does the Ascension mean for us?

What does the Ascension mean for Jesus?

As Jesus Ascended, God Vindicated Jesus

St. Paul writes that the "Father of glory" has "seated [Christ] at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named...."

One of the pivotal moments in Advent occurred when John the Baptist, Jesus's own cousin, questioned the ministry of Jesus. John's question, I think (I hope) is fair, because he asked it from a prison cell. John had simply called evil, *evil*, but

the recipient of John's message threw him in prison. Gazing through prison bars, John simply wanted to know if he had hitched himself to the right horse.

The Ascension serves as vindication. God validates Jesus by literally elevating Him. You might remember playing the game King of the Hill on a large mound of snow. You become the King by ascending to the top and preventing others from dethroning you. The same principle applies to the Ascension. God lifted Jesus to the top, and nothing or nobody can or will dethrone Him. To John's question, "Yes, Jesus is the one you should follow." The Ascension serves as the proof.

Because of the Ascension, Jesus Rules

St. Peter writes: "[Jesus] who has gone into heaven and is at the **right hand of God**, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him" (1 Peter 3:22). King David sings, "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my **right hand**, until I make your enemies your footstool'" (Ps. 110:1).

God's *right hand* is a word picture. It conveys power, authority, and reigning. You fight with your hands. You gesture armies forward with your hand. You execute judgment by pointing. A king makes peace by extending his hand. The ancients paired kingship to hands.

When Jesus ascended, He didn't exit to a vacation spot, waiting it out until His return; He moved to begin ruling. Jesus the Christ is at the right hand of God, which is to say He is ruling at this very moment.

Because of the Ascension, Jesus Reigns EVERYWHERE

St. Paul writes: "He...ascended far above all the heavens, that he might **fill all things**" (Ephesians 4:10). Jesus and His power are like a tornado siren. A radio can warn those in close proximity of

an impending storm. A tornado siren, elevated on a pole, however, has the power and presence to warn an entire city that a storm is approaching.

The Ascension enables Jesus to rule over and invade every crevice of this world. An example would be Holy Communion. He enters every Sanctuary practicing the Eucharist (whether they want His *real* presence or not). How? In a word, Ascension. His height allows Him to see and enter all parts of this world.

Because of the Ascension, Jesus Will Return

The angels warned the Disciples upon Jesus' Ascension, "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Another way of translating the angels' message might go – what goes up, must come down. The Ascension serves as a guarantee that Jesus will return.

What does the Ascension mean for us?

Since Jesus Ascended, I Can Be Less Anxious

There are plenty of things to worry about: war in Ukraine (and the financial ramifications); inflation; Alzheimer's Disease among friends; children; politics – just to list a few things. It is all too easy to think that God is distant from those things that concern us. Like a pastor backing away from a difficult biblical text, so it seems as if God moves away from our broken world and our breaking hearts.

The Ascension, however, was not a moment where Christ retreated. He ascended, rather, to His throne. He rules and manages – present tense – over this world; again, Paul affirms that Jesus *fills all things* because He ascended. That may mean we don't like *how* Jesus rules, but that does not mean He is not ruling.

As people of the Ascension, we can lift our heads high when this life looks bleak in order to see

Jesus as supreme. From His vantage point, He sees our problems and the necessary solutions; and, from His perspective He can probably see solutions far better than we can.

Cutting to the chase, we can melt into anxiety, or we can strengthen ourselves with truth: Jesus has ascended; Jesus reigns! Or as the song goes, "He's got the whole wide world in His hands."

Jesus Has Elevated Us

In a curious little passage Paul writes that we have resurrected from sin: "even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ..." (Ephesians 2:5). In a sense we have had our own little Easter experience in that God made us alive when our sins had killed us. But then in the next verse, we mirror not just Christ's Resurrection but also His Ascension: "and [God] **raised us up** with him and seated us with him **in the heavenly places** in Christ Jesus..." Why did God do that? "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (2:7).

A pastor preached that when Jesus died for us, He not only died, but we received the honor of His faithfulness. It's as if we received the medal of honor even though Christ did all the sacrificing. That undeserved honor comes to light here in Ephesians.

We are seated next to Jesus. We've already established that Jesus isn't just *anybody*; His name is above *every* name. We've been placed in the royalty box; we have backstage passes; however you want to put it, we have an "in" with Jesus.

That can make you confident. When you become perplexed by a particular sin – past or present – you can tell yourself truthfully, "I have ascended with Christ. My sin would convince me that I'm a nobody, but Christ's Ascension says otherwise."

You feel lonely? You've been raised up next to Jesus, the ultimate friend. Afraid of dying? You're in the company of the One who defeated and will definitively defeat death, or as the Ascension hymn goes, "On Christ's ascension I now build / The hope of **mine** ascension" (LSB 492).

+++

Ascension always falls on a Thursday since it is always 40 days after Easter (which is always a Sunday). This year Ascension is May 18. If you were thinking about putting up an Ascension tree this year, you've got plenty of time! In the meantime, however, the Ascension of Jesus has power to transform our anxiety and magnify our confidence among other things. – Pastor Johnson



With the arrival of a new year comes the opportunity to begin or restart habits. One habit that might be welcome is reading or listening to the Bible.

One resource that I use on a regular basis is www.biblegateway.com. I offer it to you as a resource if you're looking to start an organized Bible reading plan. To the lefthand side of the website you'll find a tab that reads "Read the Bible". Click on it and then click on "Reading Plans", and then you will be exposed to multiple ways of structurally reading the Bible. Here are just some of the reading plans biblegateway offers:

- **Chronological:** read the Bible in the chronological order in which its stories and events occurred.
- **Beginning:** read the Bible from start to finish, from Genesis to Revelation.

- **Bible in 90 Days:** an intensive Bible reading plan that walks through the entire Bible in 90 days.
- **The Daily Audio Bible:** if listening is more your style.
- **Read the New Testament in 24 Weeks:** a reading plan that walks through the entire New Testament in 24 weeks of daily readings.
- **M'Cheyne Bible Reading Plan:** the classic M'Cheyne plan – read the Old Testament, New Testament, and Psalms or Gospels every day.
- **Proverbs Monthly:** Read through the book of Proverbs every month of the year.
- **Biographical Bible Reading Plan (121 Days):** Want to read Bible highlights from Adam to Zechariah? The advantages of this approach include ease in seeing the story of the Bible and becoming acquainted with the entire *Who's Who of the Bible*.

This is not an exhaustive list of the plans available on biblegateway. I also don't want to limit you to just biblegateway.com.

Your *Today's Light* and/or *Lutheran Study Bible* Bibles both provide reading plans.

BibleProject, a series of videos used at both Zion and Trinity, offers an App that guides you through the Bible. The Zion App also links you to the Bible. All that said, we hope that you know that you are more than capable of reading or listening to the Bible. You have the skills and the aptitude to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's holy Word. And when you have questions, you have fellow Christians and Pastors and a Deaconess to whom you can ask your questions. So maybe 2023 is the year that you make reading the Bible a priority? – Pastor Johnson

1.15.22

Celebrate the Generations of Zion!

For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.
Psalm 100:5



Zion Family & Friends Bowling

January 22
1:00-3:00



Shoes and one game free!

Sponsored by Zion's Board
of Education



It's Not the Stress; It's What You're Telling Yourself about the Stress

How do you handle stress? You open your credit card bill and it's much higher than you thought. What happens inside you? Your daughter isn't happy in her marriage. What happens in your spirit? Your husband's health is slowly but steadily deteriorating and you're not sure how much longer you can care for him in your home. How do you handle it? Your vision is blurring and narrowing so that you're not sure you should keep driving. What thoughts loop through your brain? You thought you could trust your friend, but someone shared what she posted online and now you know your friend has been lying to you. Where do you go mentally?

All of the above scenarios are stressful, but not all of them affect people the same way. Some people spiral into a pit of despair. Some panic and fret. Some abandon hope and give themselves over to destructive behaviors. Some turn bitter and caustic. And some walk through stressful scenarios in peace. How?

Remember this truth: ***It's not the stress; it's what you're telling yourself about the stress.*** It's not the fact that something stressful is happening in your life – *everyone experiences stressful things in their life* – it's what you're choosing to tell yourself about the stress that makes the difference.

We've covered this before in previous newsletters as we have emphasized ***what you think affects what you feel affects what you do.*** So, what you believe to be true, the narrative you tell yourself about life and reality, affects the way you feel and this, in turn, directs what you do.

The battle with stress is won or lost at the level of your beliefs about reality. In other words, what you tell yourself is true about reality, about the way the world is, dramatically impacts how you handle stress. If you get reality wrong, if you tell yourself untrue things about the way the world is, you'll be ill-equipped to handle stress. If you get reality right, you won't eliminate stress from your life – stress is a part of the way things are (for now) – but you will enable yourself to walk through stress in a healthy way, in a wise way, in a peace-filled way.

This, then, is a key to mental health: accept reality as it is. This is not fatalism. It's not an empty "What will be will be." This is about acknowledging that reality is a certain way and then coming to terms with it. The question then becomes, *Where and how is reality defined?* Appreciate the importance and nature of the question. We're looking for an authoritative source to define reality and we're trying to get to the foundation of reality, to the fixed edges of the way things are. What kind of world do we live in? We find the answers to these questions in God's Word.

The book of Ecclesiastes specializes in describing reality as it is. The Preacher offers,

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

As we've discussed before in these pages, the Preacher isn't asserting that life is meaningless. The Hebrew word (translated *vanity*) is *hevel* and it means *vapor* or *breath*. Here's the idea: go outside on a cold day (plenty to choose from lately!) and exhale. Watch your breath swirl and turn. Now grab it. Hold it. Keep it. When you open your hand what will you find? Nothing! Why? Because you can't hold breath!

That is the nature of life “under the sun,” to use the Preacher’s phrase that he repeats throughout Ecclesiastes. The things “under the sun” are vaporous. To return to the Preacher’s Hebrew word (*hevel*), our health is *hevel*. Our jobs are *hevel*. Our vehicles and machinery are *hevel*. Our relationships are *hevel*. If we try to close our hands around them we will find ourselves empty-handed.

The Preacher calls it “a striving after wind.” Imagine trying to collect the wind with a butterfly net and you will see the mental image the Preacher is painting. Reality is characterized by *hevel*. The things of our lives can no more be captured and kept than the wind can be captured and kept in a butterfly net. So the Preacher directs us first, to accept reality as it is and then, second, to move through life with open hands, enjoying what God places there for a time and accepting that it will only be ours for a time until it passes through our fingers (or blows through our butterfly net) and is gone.

We may not like that reality is this way,⁷ that reality (for now) is characterized by *hevel*, but wisdom and mental wellbeing (and peace) can only be found when we accept that **we don’t get to define reality**. The creature doesn’t get to define reality. We must tell ourselves this truth over and over and over again. Our call is to accept reality and to live in line with it.

This is a part of what Scripture calls “the fear of the Lord.” Proverbs famously intones, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge... (Proverbs 1:7). The author of Ecclesiastes (who introduces the Preacher) concludes the book with these words:

⁷ This discomfort with the vaporous nature of reality should drive us to ask if there is anything that isn’t characterized by *hevel*, anything we can ultimately hold into eternity. The permanency we yearn for isn’t found in anything *under the sun*; it is found *in the Son*, in Jesus Christ. That’s where

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Fearing the Lord means that the Lord gets to define reality. It also means accepting that we aren’t the Lord. So the Lord has revealed that reality is characterized by *hevel*. If we are to move through life in wisdom and peace, we must accept this characteristic of reality.

The Preacher further describes reality with these words:

Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

He’s saying that **we live in a time-and-chance world**. No one is exempt. No one. This is the way reality is. People get sick. Sometimes even the healthy get sick. Sometimes the healthy die. People have accidents. Sometimes even the strong have accidents. People make money and lose money. They get jobs and lose jobs. They make relationships and destroy relationships. And if they live long enough, they get old and frail and unsteady. Sometimes they get forgetful and confused. This is life under the sun. No one is exempt.

Accepting reality as it is doesn’t make experiencing unpleasant events under the sun enjoyable. They still cause stress. This is key to understand: We’re not talking about eliminating

we find permanency and the promise that all that has passed through our fingers in this life will be amply restored to us in the resurrected life to come.

stress;⁸ we're talking about rightly contextualizing stress. **All people under the sun experience stress.** Again, ALL PEOPLE EXPERIENCE STRESS. If you are experiencing stress, then you are experiencing life under the sun. Acting like something foreign to reality is happening to you is acting built on a false belief about reality. And this will make you mentally unwell.

Accepting the nature of life under the sun doesn't change life under the sun; it changes the narrative we tell ourselves about stress under the sun. And this makes all the difference in the world because **it's not the stress that does us in; it's the untrue things we tell ourselves about stress that do us in.** Again, it's not stress that makes people unwell – everybody in this time/chance world experiences stress – it's what we tell ourselves about stress that either makes us unwell or helps us to move forward in a healthy, peace-filled way.

This is why it's SO IMPORTANT to hear and to rehearse the truth about reality, truth that we find in God's Word and echoed in God's Church. Sometimes we mentally reduce the Bible and God's Church to salvation, they're just about "getting us saved." It's true that salvation is the Gospel news announced in Scripture and celebrated in the Church, but it's not true that we have nothing more to gain from Scripture and the Church. Scripture and the Church are about reality, about rightly situating us in reality (as it is) so that we can live beautiful, wise, and peace-filled lives under the sun. Hearing the Word – especially

hearing it in community with the Church – reveals reality to us and equips us to live in reality as it is.

Hearing the Word in community with the Church also brings us into regular contact with the promises of God, promises that we call to mind in the midst of our stressful experiences. Paul writes,

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).

And

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

King David writes,

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me... (Psalm 23:4).

The author of Hebrews, citing Psalm 118, writes,

The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
what can man do to me (Hebrews 13:6)?

Accepting reality as it is and calling to mind the strong promises of God equip us to handle stress in a healthy way. Want to visit more about this? Come talk to me. – Pastor Conner

⁸ There are many things we can do to reduce stress in our lives. Without writing another article, these come down to habits. Healthy habits wire the brain into healthy thinking. To put it another way, we habit our way into new thinking. Habits have the ability to rewire our brains and to create new ways of thinking and

processing the world. If you want to read more on this (and you should!), check out *Atomic Habits* by James Clear and *You Are What You Love* by James Smith. Both communicate wisdom that can and will greatly improve your life.

Fellowship Club Update

The group will gather again on Monday, January 9, at 1:30 p.m. The focus on “life” will continue with a Bible study on Apostle John’s life emphasis in his epistles and Revelation. Fellowship Club presentations and activities are open to all ages and stages. Guests are always welcome



From **January 22-29** another Orphan Grain Train clothing collection will take place. Good, clean, used clothing items (all ages, sizes, and seasons; new items also—especially underwear and socks) can be brought to the Fellowship Hall quilting/storage room. The items will be delivered to the Ida Grove warehouse. Many OGT shipments continue to go to European countries providing support to Ukrainian refugees. Did you get new clothing for Christmas and making some closet transitions? Are you looking for a “home” for clothing items as you assist others in home and life transitions? Share this special opportunity with community friends and neighbors. Fellowship Club volunteers delivered medical items donated by the local VFW to the Ida Grove warehouse, and the items were delivered to Ukrainian refugees. We thank our local veterans for the support.

Wanda Pritzel, director of counseling for Lutheran Family Service, was the guest presenter in December. Lutheran Family Service not only serves families and professional church workers in all of Iowa, but also provides services to areas of Nebraska, Illinois, and South Dakota. The Fellowship Club provided a financial gift to LFS and invites you to join them in supporting this important ministry. In addition the Fellowship Club made year-end gifts to Orphan Grain Train and Molly U's outreach to Muslims in India.



Trinity's Servants

Chairman - Jason Ferry
Head Elder - Mike Lorenzen
Elders - Scott Lingle, Jerry Brus, Marty Bornhoft
Treasurer - Bricy Lorenzen
Trustee - Rob Lueth
Priscilla Guild Chairwoman - Cathie Segebart
Weavers Chairwoman - Dara Jorgensen



Ohde Funeral Home Presentation

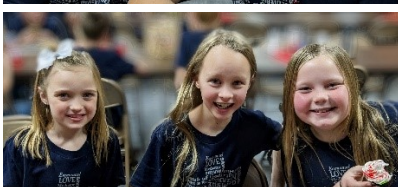
PLANNING A
FUNERAL & LEGAL
CONSIDERATIONS

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 2023
10:30AM @ TRINITY-MANILLA
FREE EVENT

Christmas Programs 2022



A big thank you to all our adult and youth volunteers for investing in children and equipping them to share the good news of Jesus' birth!



Preschool Praises for December

December was a busy and fun month learning about and celebrating the Holiday! We enjoyed some fun centers and activities throughout the month including but not limited to: North Pole Cookie Bakery, fake snow in the sensory bin, making our very own fluffy snow slime and gingerbread play dough, and Christmas tree and snowman crafts! We also spent a long time practicing our songs to share with the congregation during the Advent Services on Wednesday, December 14th. The kids did such a great job!



We discussed a lot about the true reason for the season...JESUS! We talked about the angel coming to tell Mary the good news, the traveling to Bethlehem and the Innkeeper bringing them to a stable where they were blessed with baby Jesus, and how Jesus was the greatest Christmas gift! When first asked who was born on Christmas, a lot knew it was Jesus, but it was comical to hear a few other answers including...the Grinch? :) Kids enjoyed setting up the Nativity Scene in our classroom and if you saw the bulletin board, some had fun setting up their own scene!

We heard more about the meaning of Christmas when we met with Pastor Conner during our Chapel time. Pastor told us about the angel telling Mary the good news and how Jesus was God's gift to us. He even showed us some Chrismons on the big Christmas tree. Pastor explained to us how each Chrismon is a Christian symbol that points to Jesus. It was fun to learn about what some of them meant.

We continue learning new letters, reviewing our shapes, colors, and counting, and spent time this month learning about all 5 senses. There were different activities for each sense but the kids really enjoyed I spy (see), guessing the sound (hear), making snow slime and playing with it (touch/feel), mixing up gingerbread play dough using cinnamon and ginger (smell), and of course eating some delicious gingerbread cookies (taste). We also received a visit from Library Linda for the morning class and are excited to have her come read to our classroom once a month. We will be welcoming De Langel starting next month to read to our afternoon class. We are very blessed to have them donate their time to come read to our classes!

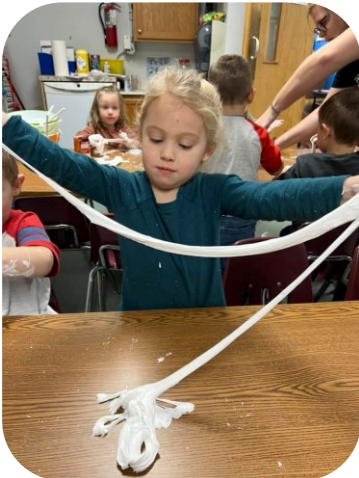
This season can be tricky with that unknown weather and that showed the last week of classes. We were able to get our party in for the morning class but the afternoon class will get to celebrate when they come back January 4th! The morning class was able to celebrate Jesus' Birthday by singing happy birthday, decorating cookies (and eating them of course), enjoying a scavenger hunt to find our gingerbread man, and ending it by opening gifts. Each child had the opportunity to open up a gift for the classroom so that we can all enjoy it. We even got to come to class in our pajamas!

We want to thank you all again for the ongoing support for our Preschool. The generous donations, whether monetary or supplies, are greatly appreciated. The kids lit up when opening the gifts and are very excited to get back to the classroom to enjoy them! We were blessed with a donation allowing us to upgrade our classroom with a smart board! We have that hung up and have rearranged the classroom and can't wait for the kids to come back to see the changes!

Hoping all had a blessed Holiday season with loved ones!
-Ms Amy & Ms Melanie



Praise God for the
privilege of sharing
Jesus with children!



The Winter Blues and You

During the winter months, some people start to feel down. They miss the sun, the warmth, the outdoors, and all of the activities that come with the summer months. In some cases, this can lead to depression symptoms, which is also called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD – pretty appropriate acronym) or also called the Winter Blues.



The Winter Blues generally happens during the colder days when the sun is not out as long, while general depression can happen any time of the year. Recognizing the symptoms may be the first sign for people to get help before the symptoms become severe. Some warning signs may include:

- * Feeling depressed most of the day, nearly every day
- * Losing interest in activities you once enjoyed
- * Having low energy
- * Having problems with sleeping
- * Loss of appetite or eating more than usual
- * Feeling sluggish or agitated
- * Having difficulty concentrating
- * Feeling hopeless, worthless, or guilty
- * Having frequent thoughts of death or suicide

Anyone can be affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder. It is estimated that approximately 25% of the population may be affected by the Winter Blues. There may be certain populations that are at higher risk. Those include people who have a family history of mental illness, those who have major depression or bipolar disorder, and women, although men can be affected as well.

If you know that you are affected by the colder and darker days, there are things you can do to stay ahead of the symptoms. One thing to do is to spend as much time in the sun as possible, before the sun becomes less visible in the winter months. This will help your body absorb the necessary vitamin D naturally. Movement is a great way to battle depression, any time of the year. The movement can mean to walk or gently stretching. It is important to find ways to bring the light inside your home, if possible. This can be done by opening your drapes to let in natural light and to use a bright light bulb to light up the room. Last, but not least, keep in touch with your friends and family. Checking on each other is a great way to lift your spirits.

If you feel that you may have the Winter Blues and it is affecting your day to day activities, you may need to make an appointment with your primary care provider or seek professional mental health. If you or someone you know may benefit from Senior Life Solutions, please feel free to call us at 712-655-8262.

Janet Brus, RN
Psychiatric Medical Care
Manning Regional Healthcare Center
Program Director – Senior Life Solutions





Amigos en Cristo

News from **La Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Amigos en Cristo:**
Friends in Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church
Pastor Pedro Lopez, Denison, Iowa

January 2023

Peace and joy to you and yours this Christmas season. I am happy to share once more the great events happening with Hispanic Ministry in Iowa District West. First, I say “gracias” to the amazing volunteers from the St. Paul congregation in Hartley and Amigos en Cristo in Denison. We finished the first English as a Second Language (ESL) class in the Hartley area. For the first time, an ESL class has been offered by our churches. We had several students who came from the area to learn English. They also learned about the Lord’s love and grace. We thank God for this since some of the students are currently attending English worship services. December 13, 2022 was our ESL closing day in Hartley. It was great having most of the volunteers and students present, even though the weather was not the greatest in the area.

The congregation is ready to continue the efforts to meet new Hispanic families and their needs. Please continue to pray for God’s blessings upon all the new friends we made during this class. Our plan is to offer them Bible Study and also a worship service in Spanish in the near future.

In Denison and Storm Lake Hispanic Ministries, we have been celebrating the Christmas season. As we gear up for the great day of Jesus’ birth remembrance, we have been gathering every Friday at different homes as the families host our Hispanic Christmas Posadas, a very special time of fellowship with our families and friends in the community. It is also a time to make new friends and invite them to our churches!

At Storm Lake, we had a bilingual service of Christmas celebration on Sunday, Dec. 18 followed by a potluck meal. On Wednesday, Dec. 21, we had a Posada followed with refreshments.

At Amigos en Cristo in Denison, we met on Sunday, December 18 to celebrate the fourth Posada with a potluck meal. Our last day of ESL here was on Monday, December 19. We celebrated Christmas and the last day of class with a potluck.



We thank you all so much and ask you to continue with your prayers and support as we plan for the new year. Our efforts to meet new brothers and sisters from the Hispanic community goes on and we continue to prepare new leaders to help us expand the outreach and open new sites around the district.

Rev. Pedro Lopez, Asst. to the President
Missionary at Large, pedro@iowadistrictwest.org,
571-606-7600

Gracias and bendiciones, Pastor Lopez

Zion's Servants

Council

Chair: Jeff Hargens
Vice-chair: Bary Kienast
Secretary: Casie Eischeid
Treasurer: Shannon Walters
Financial Sec: Jean Hargens
CFO: Andrew Puck

Elders

Paul Christensen (Head Elder)
Dan Stribe
Nate Blackford
Ben Booth
Bob Genzen
Mike Gore
Eric Ramsey

Trustees

Kyle Arp (Head Trustee)
Tyler Bruch
Isaac Grabill
Ben Lorenzen
Nate Jensen

Deacons

John Lorenzen (Head Deacon)
Martin Wanniger
Richard Zinke
Jason Kienast
Jason Opperman
Jim Karsten

Board of Education

Joni Kienast (Chair)
Shelly Gruhn (SS super.)
Robin Heaton (SS Asst. sup.)
Kathy Vollstedt
Holly Borkowski
Jessie Blackford

Altar Guild

Monica Christensen (Chair)
Connie Ahrendsen
Laurene Meeves
Audrey Roe
Nancy Opperman
Sheryl Zinke
Jessie Blackford
Sonia Nulle
Joelle Puck
Dean Hoffman
Barb Page
Nancy Muhlbauer

Ladies Guild

Becki Ehlers (Chair)

Mission Board

Jean Hargens (Chair)
Bev Grundmeier
Gary Schroeder
Lynn Kruse
Warren Puck
Casie Eischeid
Rev. Vogel
Paula Vogel
Barb Page

Safety and Security

Jen Morris (Chair)
Kyle Arp
Shelly Gruhn
Gary Witt
Chris Greving

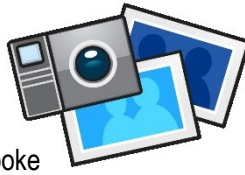
Choir / Praise Team

Dr. Tom Ulrickson (Director)

Preschool Board

Bary Kienast - financial
Chelsey Jensen - chair
Kari Ranniger
Courtney Grabill
Rachel Stoberl
Cassey Neumann
Nate Blackford
Janet Smith - Thrivent





Snapshots of Zion



Emily A., Brooke B., and Aubrey A. serve as youth volunteers for a Midweek Advent Meal.

Missionary Gary comes to Zion to share news from the mission field.



Pastor Johnson tells the Christmas story to confirmation students.



Josiah C. eagerly climbs a ladder to adjust a spot light.

Zion preschoolers share their songs in our Midweek Advent service.



Zion ladies gather for a festive potluck.



Zion voters vote to elect officers and to extend a Divine Call to Mrs. Kathryn Schneider to serve as our DCE.



Please Note! All times and events are subject to change



**Sunday
Morning**

**Zion Family Bible Class (after worship)
Sunday School at Trinity**



January 6-8

DCE Kathryn Schneider and family visit Zion



January 8

Installation of Elected Officers



January 15

Celebration of Generations Sunday

**DISCIPLING
EVENT**

January 18

**Discipling Event
6:00 p.m. Meal for Confirmation Families
6:30 p.m. Session, all invited**



January 19

Thursday afternoon Communion Service at Zion (1:30 p.m.)



January 22

Zion Family & Friends Bowling @ L&M (1:00-3:00)



February 22

**Ash Wednesday
Zion Midweek Lenten Series: Poetry, Prayer, & the Psalms**

January Birthdays and Anniversaries @ Zion & Trinity

Birthdays (T = Trinity)

1. Nancy Kremin (T)
Greg Neumann
2. Jennifer Morris
Joel Musfeldt
Alex Ranniger
Ryan Riesberg
Rachel Winter
3. Violet Schroeder (T)
4. Alexis Dawson
Cobie Jahn (T)
Karen Kienast
Caitlin Lahr (T)
6. Sylvia Badow (T)
Jeanette Ferry (T)
Dawn Ketchum
Bennett Stribe
7. Sandy Hanson (T)
Cheryl Lahr (T)
8. Leo Ertz (T)
Amy Hansen
Easton Hass
9. Lori Asmus
Bode England
11. Amy Benton
Bev Woebke (T)
12. Daniel Grove
Ben Lingle (T)
Riley Miller
Jacki Nusbaum
John Opperman
Terry Segebart (T)
13. Bliss Neumann
15. Kenneth Eischeid
Jaclyn Garrison
Colene Lohrmann
16. Chase Alexander
Mike Kuchel
Jenna Soll
Payton Vonnahme
Shona Weitl
17. Kevin Grimm
Harper Potthoff
Jack Sanford
18. Paul Christensen
Sarah Gruhn
Brian Lamp
Sonia Nulle
19. David Bohlmann
Joe Karsten
Cynthia Ranniger
Jessa Wiig
20. Johnathan Lueth (T)
22. Crystal Dreher
Gary Schroeder
Zadey Schumann (T)
23. Eris Christensen
Charley Lueth (T)
25. Lucas Borkowski
Robin Heaton
27. Marshall Hansen
Deb Knueven
28. Riley Adams
Kelly Ceminski
Karen Joens
Eugene Mahnke
Kemper Nelson
29. Mary Greving
Stacie Nelson
Robert Riggert
30. Robert Riesselman
31. Grant Behrens

Anniversaries

1. Kyle & Jill Arp
Stanley & Lori Musfeldt
6. Mike & Judy Jacobsen
8. Rodney & Kristin Backhaus
9. Curits & Nancy Grimm

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

Official Acts

Funerals:

Sandra Hanson (nee: Gehlsen); Died December 2, 2022;
Funeral December 8, 2022; Pastor Jonathan Conner (Trinity)

Bill Joens; Died December 7, 2022; Funeral December 10,
2022; Pastor Jonathan Conner (Trinity)

Virgene Madelyn (nee: Kruse) Kroeger; Died December 16,
2022; Funeral December 20, 2022; Pastor Jonathan Conner
& Pastor Robert Riggert

Cheral A. Buhr; Died December 15, 2022; Funeral December
21, 2022; Pastor Jonathan Conner

Baptisms:

12/18 Natalie Vazquez daughter of Eddie & Robbie Vazquez
(Trinity)

12/18 Matteo Vazquez son of Eddie & Robbie Vazquez
(Trinity)

12/31 Nash Hansen son of KaLee Hansen (Trinity)

In Our Prayers

24. Lyle Mundt, Pastor Johnson, Paxton Bierl, Stan
Baack, Tawnya Jacobsen (Kristin Backhaus' sister),
Rhonda Sandison (Laurene Meeves' daughter), John
Bexten (father of Beth Alexander and Amy Blackwell),
Rhonda Mohr, Jim Deevers, Rick Spack, Justeen
Schwieso, Nancy Grimm, Sherri Steffes