

## The Dash between the Dates and the Astonishing Promise of Jesus.



Headstones are sobering. Living next to a cemetery, Rebecca and I often find ourselves considering the names engraved on the stones. After being in Manning for 13 years, I know many of the names and the stories represented by the dash between the dates, but there are many more I do not. The same goes for you. You know certain names and the lives hidden behind the dash, but there are more about which you know nothing but the name, the dates, and the dash.

In a generation or two, fewer and fewer will know the stories that lie behind those dashes. If we had not a loving God, this sobering reality could be incredibly discouraging. Lives lived, love shared, triumph, defeat, celebrations, laments – all reduced to the dash between the dates. The day the mother welcomed her newborn baby, snuggling her close to her chest, feeling her warmth and marveling over her tiny, beautiful, infant body. The elation she experienced in celebrating that baby's first steps. The surge of emotions he experienced when he saw his bride-to-be processing down the aisle, radiating joy and beauty and anticipation. The satisfaction he felt when he finished building the barn. The wave of feelings that overcame him as he walked his daughter down the aisle. The fear that gripped her spirit when her son was late getting home. The laughter that filled her heart as she watched her grandson score a goal for the wrong team.

All reduced to the dash between the dates as time relentlessly erases the memory of the beautiful and meaningful, even ugly and pockmarked, lives of those who came before us. These realities raise sobering questions about our existence. Are our lives reducible to the dash between the dates? Is that what they come down to? Scripture emphatically answers *No!* In fact, not only does God know the life and the story behind the dash between the dates, but He promises to honor it, even to reward it in eternity. It's really quite a staggering promise.

Consider Paul's words from 1 Corinthians:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

In other words, God knows and cares about the lives we live. He knows the crosses we've borne, the sacrifices we've made, the good we've done in His name for the benefit of our neighbor, and He's going to reward it in eternity.<sup>1</sup> He doesn't look at a

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<sup>1</sup> The Lutheran Confessions make this point repeatedly. Here's one example: "For as it is God's will and express command that the faithful should do good

works, which the Holy Spirit effects in the faithful, so God allows these works to please Him for Christ's sake and promises a glorious reward for them in this life and

headstone and see nothing but a dash between the dates; He sees people. He sees their stories. He sees their lives. And He places great value on them. Though we may forget, though our memory and the memories of those who have gone before us may be lost to future generations, they are not lost to God.

I deeply appreciate the way Paul puts it in Colossians 3: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). What powerful words! Paul is describing our life, as the baptized, with God. In baptism we die with Christ and are raised with Him, joined so closely to Him that our lives are hidden with Him in God. And here's what's so amazing: This reality continues beyond the grave so that our lives and our stories are inextricably connected to Christ and bound up in God. So even if the only visible remnant of our lives on earth is the dash between the dates, our full stories are preserved in Christ.

C.S. Lewis masterfully captures this idea in his imaginative novel on Heaven, *The Great Divorce*. In it he imagines souls in Hell being given a daytrip to Heaven. They are met by a spirit being who serves as their tour guide. In the scene below, Lewis describes the protagonist encountering one of the great ones in heaven, someone nearly no one on earth noticed, but someone who lived a beautiful life of service that God noticed and honored in Heaven with great glory. The scene picks up with the protagonist noticing an approaching parade that is clearly in honor of this great person.

"First came bright Spirits, not the Spirits of men, who danced and scattered flowers. Then, on the left and right, at each side of the forest avenue, came youthful shapes, boys upon one hand,

and girls upon the other. If I could remember their singing and write down the notes, no man who read that score would ever grow sick or old. Between them went musicians: and after these a lady in whose honour all this was being done.

"I cannot now remember whether she was naked or clothed. If she were naked, then it must have been the almost visible penumbra of her courtesy and joy which produces in my memory the illusion of a great and shining train that followed her across the happy grass. If she were clothed, then the illusion of nakedness is doubtless due to the clarity with which her inmost spirit shone through the clothes. For clothes in that country are not a disguise: the spiritual body lives along each thread and turns them into living organs. A robe or a crown is there as much one of the wearer's features as a lip or an eye.

"But I have forgotten. And only partly do I remember the unbearable beauty of her face."

"Is it?...is it?" I whispered to my guide.

"Not at all," said he. "It's someone ye'll never have heard of. Her name on earth was Sarah Smith and she lived at Golders Green."

"She seems to be...well, a person of particular importance?"

"Aye. She is one of the great ones. Ye have heard that fame in this country and fame on Earth are two quite different things."

"And who are these gigantic people...look! They're like emeralds...who are dancing and throwing flowers before her?"

"Haven't ye read your Milton? A thousand liveried angels lackey her."<sup>2</sup>

"And who are all these young men and women on each side?"

"They are her sons and daughters."

"She must have had a very large family, Sir."

"Every young man or boy that met her became her son – even if it was only the boy that brought the meat to her back door. Every girl that met her was her daughter."

"Isn't that a bit hard on their own parents?"

"No. There are those that steal other people's children. But her motherhood was of a different kind. Those on whom it fell went back to their natural parents loving them more. Few men looked on her without becoming, in a certain fashion, her lovers. But it was the kind of love that made them not less true, but truer, to their own wives."

"And how...but hullo! What are all these animals? A cat-two cats-dozens of cats. And all those dogs...why, I can't count them. And the birds. And the horses."

"They are her beasts."

"Did she keep a sort of zoo? I mean, this is a bit too much."

"Every beast and bird that came near her had its place in her love. In her they became themselves. And now the abundance of life she has in Christ from the Father flows over into them."

No doubt her tombstone stood on earth with a dash between the dates. And perhaps for a season some remembered the life represented by that dash, but seasons come and go and they slowly diminish memories. But time doesn't diminish God's memory! He knows. He sees. He cares. And He honors lives lived in faithfulness to Him. In fact, His honor glorifies our lives and makes them bigger and more than they ever were on earth. Or, maybe we should say, His honor reveals what our lives were to Him.

This takes us back to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3 where he spoke about lives and works of wood, hay, and straw or gold, silver, and precious stones. Heaven (as in the New Earth) reveals the true nature of the lives we've lived in Christ. Lives lived in honor of Christ and in love of neighbor will be revealed as the gold, silver, and precious stones that they are. So back to that dash on our headstones: It's merely a place marker until Jesus reveals the life behind it – even more, until He honors and glorifies it. That's the astonishing promise of Jesus.

– Pastor Conner

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<sup>2</sup> This is a reference to a work by John Milton published in 1637 entitled *Comus*. A full exploration of Milton's work lies beyond the reach of this article, but in his book Milton describes the virtues of chastity, personified throughout as a lady. The text quoted comes from this line:

So dear to heaven is saintly Chastity,  
That when a soul is found sincerely so,  
A thousand liveried angels lackey her.

The idea is that smartly uniformed (liveried) angels accompany and surround (lackey) Chastity, not only protecting her from sin and temptation, but aiding her in her transformation from the inside out. So as her internal character is transformed, the resultant beauty begins to shine through and beyond her. This is what the protagonist in Lewis' novel is witnessing as he sees Sarah Smith parading through heaven, a woman transformed by the love of Christ that is now radiating through and out of her.

## When Eternity Breaks into Identity: Reverent Wonderment before the Weight of Mankind's Glory



I'm struggling to give words to the idea that has taken up residence in my mind. It's one of these ideas that has the power to remake us, to dramatically change the way we move through life, the way we see and treat each other, the way we govern, the way we argue, the way we neighbor. It's related to identity, but it's bigger than that. It gets at the heart of our being as humans. The big word for being is *ontology*, but that word isn't common enough to resonate with most people.

A strange image from an old movie I saw decades ago starts to get at my idea. I remember very little about the movie other than the scene where some of the main characters took their skin off. This wasn't a grotesque thing; they were actually aliens (no, this is not an article about aliens, although I do have one on Zion's blog if you want to read about what the Bible and reality have to say about them). These alien characters were wearing a human disguise. Under their skin was a beautiful, light radiating creature. This, as you can imagine, was a great revelation to the non-alien characters who were astonished to discover the true identity of their companions. I remember them standing transfixed by the surprise revelation.

It's that transfixed astonishment that has taken up residence in my mind because I believe, if we actually paused to reflect upon the opening chapter of Scripture, specifically what it says about mankind, we would have the same jaw-dropping experience as the astonished characters in the movie. Even more, beyond jaw-dropping, I believe we would discover reverent wonderment.

Consider what Scripture says:

So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them  
(Genesis 1:27).

Because of our cultural moment and its fixation on gender, we are quick to notice the binary creation of male and female. This is well and good (and of critical importance!), but the reverent wonderment begins in the image. Mankind bears the image of God! And of critical importance to note, this image is an enfleshed image. In other words, we're not suggesting, as with the movie reference, that the skin must be peeled off to see the divine image on the inside. Scripture is insisting that the divine image is imprinted on the whole person, body and soul. This image on the whole person calls for a reverent wonderment.

C.S. Lewis perceived this reverent wonderment and termed it *the weight of glory* (You can find and read his essay by that name online or buy the book). He wrote, "Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses."

Wonder at his words: *the holiest object presented to your senses*. So, after the Lord's Supper, the clerk ringing up your household necessities is the holiest object presented to your senses. The sweaty boys or girls on the opposing team who

you are trying to block out or rebound over are the holiest objects presented to your senses. The elderly woman obstructing your hurried attempts to get your groceries in your cart is the holiest object presented to your senses. The obnoxious sibling who seems set on annoying you is the holiest object presented to your senses. They bear God's image. There's something more to their being than the surface-level things upon which our vision usually stops, and Scripture teaches us, fits our eyes, to see it.

Yes, they are fallen and sinful and this is a part of the story, but we are too quick to skip over the significance of where the story begins (and, subsequently, where the story is headed in the renewed creation where we will stand in our eternal glory reigning with Christ! More on this below.). Mankind bears God's image! We are, if you will, princes and princesses on earth. Royalty. Our Father, the King, has dignified us with a dominion over His creation. Tell yourself, "I am royalty" and see if it doesn't make you stand straighter and adopt a more dignified perception of yourself and your life.

This gravity of glory brings a holy dignity with it, a sacred sobriety, a hallowed weightiness. This is true for us and true for our neighbor. This is what Lewis is driving after in *The Weight of Glory*. He wants us to appreciate the weightiness of mankind's identity as image bearers of God. He writes,

There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

No ordinary people. They all bear the image. They are princes and princesses weighted with God's image. No other creature in heaven or on earth is weighted with such dignity and consequence. Lewis stands in reverent wonderment at the thought. *These people are not ordinary, not commonplace and therefore overlookable. They bear God's image and they will either be reduced to immortal horrors in hell or exalted to everlasting splendors in the resurrection and renewal of all things.* Thoughts of such magnitude must surely make us marvel and tremble.

And surely this must change the way we see each other, the way we treat each other, the way we speak to each other. Surely this must change the way we make contracts or engage in business or provide health care or provide service. Surely the reality of my neighbor's nature as a prince or princess of God must weigh on me. It must press on me the great dignity I owe him or her. Lewis reflects:

The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.

This is what I mean by my title – "When Eternity Breaks into Identity: Reverent Wonderment before the Weight of Mankind's Glory" – I'm trying to capture the weighty truth and significance of the image you and I bear. I want you to see yourself

differently in the mirror. I want you to see your neighbors differently. I want you to see the image they bear. It is a heavy thing, a sacred burden, this divine image that we must bear up under.

And I want us to understand that seeing the sacred burden of this divine image exposes our culture's obsession with race and gender and sexual identity as too small, these skin-deep identity markers that our culture elevates to the level of ontology, to the level of a person's being. They are making small things big things, culturally temporal things eternal things, secondary things primary things. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not suggesting the questions our culture is asking are unimportant; I'm asserting that they're mis-ordered in priority and that mis-ordering matters eternally. Race, gender, and sexuality are important, but these things come after the image of God and it gives clarity to them.

There's no way rightly to answer the questions of race if we miss the divine image borne by the entirety of mankind, by every tribe, language, nation, and tongue. There's no way rightly to appreciate sexuality if we overlook the divine image and so miss the inherent call in that image to holy sexuality that reverences the source of our image. There's no way to understand justice if we neglect the image and so miss the inherent divine dignity borne by every image bearer (born and unborn). If we cannot rightly define the human person, i.e. discern his true nature, we will never be able to answer the questions that plague him.

We must begin with the weight of glory in the divine image. We have been supremely blessed with a sacred burden in the divine image we bear, a sacred burden that we are called to bear with dignity and solemnity – we are princes and princesses! – and a sacred burden that places a

moral imperative on our relating to our image-bearing neighbors.

This is what Scripture would have us see. And the goal of this, the telos of this, is what Scripture would have us long for in the resurrection. The Apostle Paul, reflecting on the reality of suffering in this present age, points us to the telos of mankind's divine image,

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Paul sees what God has in store for His image bearers: an eternal weight of glory, an eternal standing as princes and princesses on the New Earth. We will rule with Christ! We will see the majestic glory that we now so regularly miss. This is what God has in store for every believing image-bearer. This is why Lewis wrote of such believing image-bearers as “everlasting splendours.”

That's the idea that has taken residence in my mind. If I have not described it well, it's because I lack the competency to put it in to words. I feel as if I need to surround each person with a stirring soundtrack and a radiant glow, something to help us see and hear and sense what Scripture reveals. Perhaps you can imagine such a thing. We would all do well if we could. My prayer for you is that you would be visited by my idea. In fact, my prayer is that you would welcome it as a permanent resident. How greatly the world would change if we stood together in reverent wonderment before the weight of mankind's God-given glory!

– Pastor Conner

## Truth. Goodness. Beauty. And growing in Christian Virtue.



*And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. – Philippians 4:8 NLT*

Have you ever had those moments where it seems no matter what you do everything is centralized around one thought, or one thing? When I first got into my office back in March, I wrote on my whiteboard a Bible verse I wanted to focus on, and it sat on my wall for months. I only recently erased it, yet the sentiment of that Bible verse, Philippians 4:8, has been following me around. I hear it echoed in novels I read, in movies and shows I've been watching, and in podcasts I've been listening to. This thought of 'you are what you feast on, so be careful the things you consume as they will consume you.' Or Romans 2:12 "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by

the renewing of your mind." Basically, growing in Christian virtue and choosing to actively think on what is right, what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful. Thus, I have been pondering the last few months what it would mean to fill my home, my life & my children's lives with beauty, with truth and with goodness.

In our world we are inundated with the exact opposite because the algorithms that try to run our lives are driven by click bait, shock/fear factor and it appears at times everything that is exactly opposite of truth, goodness and beauty. So as Christians how can we fight against this tide and choose to fix our thoughts on something else? Here are just a few ways I have been slowly adding in truth, goodness and beauty into my life.

Nature- Okay, y'all FALL!! This Iowa native has forgotten the wonder and beauty that is fall. One of the many blessings of becoming a parent is getting to see the world through your child's eyes. Getting to see what standing in awe of God's creation truly means. And this fall I feel like my son Leonard, whose state of awe brings pure joy to my heart. He gasps from the depths of his toes. His eyes widen and sparkle with pure delight and he looks at you as if to say "Are you seeing this?" That has been me again this fall as I see the vibrant reds, oranges, and yellows. I have truly been loving it! In my effort to view what is beautiful, I find myself lingering longer outside breathing in the crisp fall air. Taking more walks, playing just a little longer outside in the evening with my family. I stand in awe at the beauty of God's creation. And I let that beauty find its way into our home, with collected leaves and pinecones from little hands. To pumpkins bought in stores, to the smell of fresh baked apple pie as I seek to learn to bake and add beauty to our home through nourishment and fun traditions.

Now, with that said winter terrifies me! When I lived in Iowa the first time, I suffered from S.A.D. and I've been actively seeking to help stave this off. So, I've spent my time and some money at bringing nature indoors. At buying plants for our home and my office. On filling our home with fall colors and beauty. To give us all ample fresh air, and the chance to learn to be good stewards of God's creation while also the chance to be in awe at his design and beauty in the middle of winter. It's been a fun challenge for me to see how to bring the beauty of nature in doors.

Traditions & Habits- As we started our family John and I often talked about what traditions we wanted as a couple and wanted our kids to have growing up. Particularly, around the holidays but also did we want to be a family who camped, hiked, had weekly pizza and movie nights, read together, prayed together, had family meals together? What values and virtues were important to us? So, we've added Christmas Alfredo to our Christmas menu because it is good! Maybe not good for you, but man it's tasty. We've added singing the Benediction with mama in a fun repeatable song before bed, followed by praying with dada. If you want to learn the song just ask Henry, or myself. We'd love to teach you. It's been fun trying to find new ways over the years to add added truth, goodness, and beauty in our traditions around advent, lent, bedtime & meal time.

Time in the Word & Prayer - Over the years, I've added daily time in prayer and Bible reading. I've tried out multiple devotionals, Bible reading plans, pray journals, and prayer prompts/techniques. I've found what works best for me in that season and for that time, and I've given myself the grace to allow my time with God to look differently in each season, to meet my day and my lifestyle.

One new habit I'm trying to start happened just this week as a result of the Jr. High Youth Gathering.

This past weekend Zion had 24 kids and chaperones attend the Iowa District West Jr High Youth Gathering on prayer. While there we learned about prayer, but one of the things that has stuck with me was the challenge of starting your day with saying the Lord's Prayer and ending your day with saying the Lord's Prayer. I have never thought of doing that, they also suggested praying the Lord's Prayer with a specific person in mind. Also, something I have never thought of doing. I know in times of trouble, in times of tragedy, in times of extreme fear, in some of my darkest nights of the soul moments the Lord's Prayer has just sprung from my lips almost on its own fruition as if the Holy Spirit knew I needed prayer and God himself was interceding by bringing His prayer to my lips. Yet on mundane days, on ordinary times I haven't had the thought of filling my days with the Lord's Prayer. So, the last few days since getting home from the gathering I've been waking up and pushing back the rush of the day that lays ahead and praying the Lord's Prayer.

This brings to mind C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity:

That is why the real problem of Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in letting the other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.

We can only do it for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system; because now we are letting Him work at the right part of us. It is the difference between paint, which is merely

laid on the surface, and a dye or stain which soaks right through. He never talked vague, idealistic gas. When he said, 'Be perfect,' He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment.

So, my question and challenge for you, dear reader, is how can you renew that child-like faith of awe at the beauty around you this season? What beauty can you curate, can you look on, can you view that not only will bless your life but maybe bring you back to seeing the goodness of God? What habits, traditions, books, podcasts, music, etc. can you cultivate in your life to help you grow in Christian virtue; in what is true, what is good, what is beautiful? In keeping with what Pastor asks us each Sunday... *What's your one thing?* Maybe this Advent it's lighting your own Advent wreath. Or reading an Advent devotion (I have a suggestion for one below!). Maybe it's taking time to turn off the terrifying news and to turn your mind to something good, true and beautiful. Maybe it's praying the Lord's Prayer first thing in the morning before your feet hit the floor and last thing at night before sleep overtakes you. Try it for just one week and see how God transforms and renews your mind and week in Christ Jesus.

Why should we focus on what is true, good and beautiful? Because, our world is full of darkness, and we are never more aware of that as the days shorten, and as every news headline of the day purports that WWII will start any day. But maybe, today, maybe in this fall advent season, just maybe God is calling us to turn our eyes upon Jesus. To look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim. In the light of his goodness and grace. May God richly bless you, and may His light, the light of Christ Jesus shine more brightly in your life today, and everyday! God's richest blessings to you! –DCE Kathryn Schneider



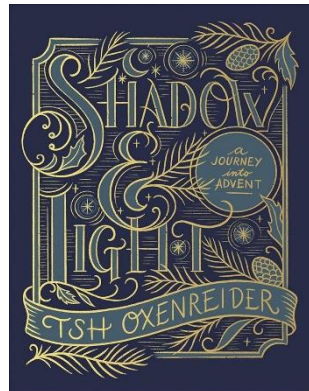
## Fellowship Club, November 2023

While Thanksgiving may have been designated a national holiday in recent history, God's people have gathered to give thanks throughout Biblical history and today. This year's Fellowship Club focus on "history" will review the history of Thanksgiving. Join us **Monday, November 13, at 1:30 p.m.** for our monthly gathering. Guests always welcome!

Thank you for the clothing donations to Orphan Grain Train. The donated items were delivered to the Ida Grove warehouse on October 31. Orphan Grain Train continues to make shipments to impoverished countries and areas affected by natural disasters. Visit [www.ogt.org](http://www.ogt.org) for updates on Orphan Grain Train responses.

## Shadow & Light- by Tsh Oxenreider

Quite a few years ago while I was still single, I wanted to start making Advent more than just a midweek “church thing in my life.” So, I purchased my first Advent wreath for my apartment and would light it while I ate my dinner alone with my dog. I’d keep it lit while I enjoyed sappy hallmark movies and wrapped presents and truly enjoyed the warm light it cast within my tiny home. As I’ve sought to add more truth, beauty and goodness into my life and build rhythms and traditions once John and I married, I found a beautiful Advent calendar on Etsy that had tiny little boxes you could put small pieces of candy in, or notes with fun activities from date ideas, to just a simple song to listen to that day. I didn’t want to bog us down with yet one more activity or task in our already hectic holiday season, but I sought to bring more joy and anticipation for the coming of Christ.



Not to long after that my sister recommended the Advent devotional book by Tsh Oxenreider! The author introduced the book as her journey of learning about liturgy, the church calendar and learning to journey though and love Advent. Each day’s devotional starts with telling you which candle to light on your advent wreath (if you have one), a few small paragraphs to read, a scripture passage to pray which always ends with “The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.” And then gives one simple question to ask, one song to listen to (which if you have Spotify she has on a beautifully curated Shadow & Light playlist you can add to your favorites), and a piece of artwork to reflect on. You can find the artwork by a simple Google search or by going to her website: <https://www.tshoxenreider.com/advent/>. At this website she also links to her playlist on Spotify. Below I have included one of the art pieces she has you reflect on Day 2 of the first week. I will say I’ve never been a big art person, or understood it much. But I have enjoyed looking at the pieces she chooses and am sharing with you my favorite and why it has stuck with me. It is entitled *Jesus Hears Mary’s Song* (2018), by Mike Moyers.

It’s in beautiful red and orange hues, but the image has really stuck with me in the past few years in an astoundingly new way. Particularly, as I read this devotional December of 2019 while I was pregnant with Henry. That Christmas Eve my sister accompanied me while I sang “Breath of Heaven.” Mary sang over Jesus, as I sang now over my own tiny child. It was a precious moment in time that I will truly cherish remembering each Christmas season. Fast forward, to Christmas Eve 2021, and I was pregnant with Leonard while reading from the lectern at our Christmas Eve service the passage from Luke that includes, “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb.” At which point Leonard kicked me hard! And I smiled getting this small deeper connection to the Christmas story in my own silent way. I cannot image the gravity of being the mother of God, but I relate to the gentle sweetness that this artwork evokes of a mother lovingly singing over her unborn child and that child being able to hear those notes from the womb. Of child-like faith, of faith in the womb of John. And while I may not be a huge art person, or painting enthusiast this piece truly speaks to me and I love looking at it each Advent year.

I’ve enjoyed getting to walk through this book anew every Advent and pray if you get it, that it helps you and your family as we enter the Advent season. – DCE Kathryn Schneider







Don't speak of "coincidences," but of "God-incidences."

Always run to God  
never away.

God is always with us, even through  
the tragedies and hardships.

No one can out  
give God.

I will try to attend  
church more regularly.

What Christ has done for me is greater  
than what has been done to me.

When you have problems, talk  
to people.

I will spend more time in the  
Word and in prayer.

I want to do  
more of these.

God is real.

No matter what happens, stay  
with God because He will  
always stay with you.

I will listen to God's messages  
in church and in mid-week. I  
will also pray more often.

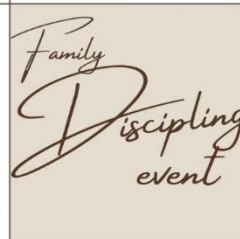
No matter what happens, bad  
or good, I will never turn my  
back on God. He loves me and  
I love Him.

Never forget we serve a God  
who knows the number of  
hairs on your head and knows  
the number of your days.

Our suffering is really small  
compared to all the suffering  
Jesus went through for us.

On Wednesday, October 25, over 100 Zion and Trinity members gathered for our Discipling Event as we welcomed five amazing men and women of the faith who spoke about confessing Christ through the good times and the hard times. This page reflects some of the feedback from the event.

Amazing Guests: Gary & Joyce S., Carlys S., Zane D., and Rex S.





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Rev. Jonathan Conner

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Rev. Dr. Jim Lamb

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November 15 @ 1:00 (central)

Upcoming!



**Lutheran  
Family Service**

*For Nothing is Impossible with God*

**CONTACT US**

**515-573-3138**

[www.lutheranfamilyservice.org](http://www.lutheranfamilyservice.org)

## Preschool Praises for October

October was stuffed full of fun activities and events for Zion Preschool!

We had a few visitors at Preschool this month! Kelly from the Nature Center brought in all sorts of different animal teeth and taught us all sorts of fun facts about them. For fire safety week, the Manning Fire & Rescue volunteers came into our classroom to teach the students all about fire safety and even gave them a ride around town in their fire truck. We really appreciated them spending some time with us! The kids even got to check out a tractor out in the parking lot during our farming theme thanks to Kevin Boyle!



Pastor Conner talked to the kids about Adam & Eve and how they brought sin into the world by disobeying God. Pastor also spoke about Noah and the Ark and God's love for us. The kids have really been paying attention and can retell the stories down in the classroom very well!

In the classroom we have enjoyed fun themes and been focusing on our shapes, counting, fine motor skills, and starting to work on writing our names.

We thank the Bruck and Kasperbauer family for donating many pumpkins for us to enjoy. We decorated some with silly faces, painted some, and even were able to have some in our dramatic play area for a "Farmer's Market". We will end our month with a Fall Party where we will play some games, enjoy a special treat, and carve some pumpkins!

On October 25<sup>th</sup> Cassey N. came to read to the class with Bliss for spina bifida awareness day. The kids were able to learn more about spina bifida and we thank her for coming in to share that with us.

A huge thanks to all those that supported the preschool during the Pancake Breakfast this past month. It was a huge success and it was fun listening to the kids sing their songs for everyone. Thank you to the Preschool parents and the Preschool Board for their volunteer work that day, you made everything go so smoothly and were essential to the success!

Miss Amy & Miss Melanie





Thank you, Zion, for enabling us to share Jesus with children and families!





# Amigos en Cristo

News from **La Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Amigos en Cristo:**

*Friends in Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church*

**Pastor Pedro Lopez**, Denison, Iowa

November 2023

Blessings to you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am sharing the latest events and blessings happening around the Hispanic Ministry in our District. But before anything else, “gracias” for your continued support and prayers. We finished our first ESL (English as a Second Language) program at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Fort Dodge on September 21. It was a great experience for our volunteers and all who participated. We met several people during the program, we made some friends, whom we will try to keep in touch with so that we can grow our relationships and see the possibilities to start a Bible study in the near future.

We began our third ESL session at St. Paul-Hartley. We have been blessed in bringing new people to worship at St. Paul, even as they learn English. We had a bilingual worship service on October 8. It was a great opportunity to share about the Hispanic Ministry, challenges, and culture. At the first class, we were asked about baptism. We are working with a Hispanic family for a double baptism at the end of our ESL program. We will keep you informed.



At St. Paul-Carroll, we started our second ESL program on Tuesday, October 10. We have a great opportunity to teach people the English language and also teach about God as we incorporate Christian hymns and Bible readings in our classes. We are also preparing several new members to be baptized and confirmed in our church.



There have been over 20 people attending our Bible study and prayer group. We had a group of them (those who were not working) come and be part of the St. Paul float at the high school band parade.



Rev. Pedro Lopez, Asst. to the President  
Missionary at Large,  
[pedro@iowadistrictwest.org](mailto:pedro@iowadistrictwest.org),  
571-606-7600

The ministries in Denison and Storm Lake continue with the same schedule. As we have mentioned already, we lost several families that moved out of the country and state but continue to outreach to new friends in these two areas. In late September, I had the privilege to lead chapel time at Unity Ridge Lutheran School, so I took the opportunity to make it a bilingual one. The kids enjoy this every time! Our immigration workshop was very successful. Many families were informed on how to continue their efforts to become legal residents and become future USA citizens and were also given referrals to lawyers and other agencies. We continue to look for opportunities to meet the needs of our community and make new friends. During our District conference I was able to share a lot of what I am sharing with you here. More opportunities are opening up so that we can go to new areas of the district and develop more Hispanic ministries. Please keep all of these places in your prayers and don't forget to support your Hispanic Ministry.

Gracias and Bendiciones to all, hasta pronto,  
Pastor Lopez



Mark and Megan Mantey  
Serving in Kenya

Mark: Associate Regional Business Manager  
Megan: Regional Coordinator of Care and Development



Dear Pr. Conner and the saints of Zion,

Greetings in Christ from Nairobi. Megan and I continue to keep all of you in our prayers and hope everyone is well. Thank you for your continued prayer and support of the Lord's work here. Your partnership allows us to serve the Lord in Africa as we walk alongside church bodies.

Recently, Bishop Kendie who serves in the Democratic Republic of Congo shared his gratitude for working with the LCMS to source materials and provide training to continue the spread of God's word. He was able to provide Bibles in his native language to the evangelists that he's training. They finished a class on the Small Catechism and are now studying Genesis. Each week his class continues to grow and more are able to hear the saving message of Jesus Christ. We're thankful that the Bishop is able to share the Gospel and train more men to do the same.

Please keep Bishop Kendie in your prayers as he serves the people in his community. Thank you, again, for your prayers and support.

Peace in Christ,  
Mark and Megan

*Bishop Kendie with some of his students. →*



Members of Zion,

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly this past Sunday (Oct. 22). There is a vibrancy in your congregation that can be seen. The Holy Spirit is at work among you. His fruits are evident in the way you received me, in how you treat one another, and your zeal to spread the Gospel. And I thank you again for your support of Lutheran Family Service through your gifts and prayers. Together we walk beside hurting folks, helping them with their problems and pointing them to the healing and hope we all have in Jesus. The Lord be with you all as you continue to serve Christ, one another, and your neighbor.

Rev. Jim Lamb, Life Advocate for Lutheran Family Service.

## Zion Ladies Guild—October 11, 2023

DCE Kathryn Schneider led an opening devotion based on 1 Chronicles 16:8 and ff. President Ehlers called the business meeting to order in the name of the Triune God followed by the recitation of the League Pledge.

Announcements were made of birthdays, which included Richard Zinke, Bonnie Witt, and Cynthia Genzen in the month of October. Howard and Audrey Roe and Dale and Karen Reinke will celebrate anniversaries. Roll call was answered by 13 members with a favorite thing about fall. The secretary's report was read and approved. Correspondence included an invitation from Lutheran Family Service that needed to be responded to by October 27<sup>th</sup> and two thank you notes to Zion ladies for hosting the Iowa District West Administrative Assistance Conference on September 19<sup>th</sup> at Manning.



Treasurer Karen Reinke's report showed a present balance of \$998.30. Also reported was the noisy offering on LWML Sunday in the amount of \$540.47. This will be sent to support LWML mission projects. The mite box was passed and a prayer was offered.

Human Care chairman Audrey Roe has received a request from New Hope of Carroll for a donation of a quilt for their auction to be held in April of 2024. Circle #2 will serve the funeral of Bob Christensen on October 14<sup>th</sup>. Circle #1 will serve fellowship after church on November 5<sup>th</sup>.

New business: Election for secretary and for treasurer will be held at the November meeting. Nominating committee is Audrey Roe and Connie Ahrendsen.

It was decided that an Advent by Candlelight concert by the Praise Band will be held on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. Bars and cookies will be served after the concert and free will offering will be gathered. Audrey Roe and Darlene Vollstedt volunteered to organize the event.

The next meeting is on November 8<sup>th</sup>. Hostesses will be Margaret Kuchel and JoAnn Thomas. The meeting was adjourned with the table prayer and the Lord's Prayer.

## Friendship and Mental Health

What does it mean to have a friend? What does a friend look like to you? Can you call them up at 2 am and talk about something that is bothering you?



Friendship is a crucial element in protecting our mental health. Our friends can keep us grounded, help us get things in perspective, and help us manage life's problems. If we are experiencing a problem, whether mental, physical, or financial, we may tend to hide away and avoid our friends. But friendships can play a key role in helping us live with or recover from a mental health problem and overcome the isolation that often comes with it. We can end up with the strongest relationships with the people who have supported us through hard times.

Friends can help us improve our self-confidence. A true friend will know just how to react to our negative comments by challenging our thoughts, hopefully in a positive way. If I tell my friend that I don't like how I look in my clothes, she will advise me on what changes to make to my wardrobe and maybe go shopping with me to help pick out some clothes that would look appropriate for my figure.

Friendships will also help you cope with grief and stress in your life. Relying on strong support system is one of the most effective methods of overcoming a difficult time. Although they may not have gone through the same experience, they can be there to listen and offer support. The most valuable support you can provide is just being there to talk and listen. Making time to call, text, visit, or invite someone over can make a big difference.

It is important to know which friends to connect with when you have a situation that requires a particular need. For instance, a certain friend is great to call when you want to hang out and relax after a stressful week at work. However, there are other friends that you may want to connect with when you have lost a special person in your life. Whatever the situation, it is important to know that the friend should encourage a healthy behavior. Maintaining positive relationships with people who make healthy choices can motivate you to make similar choices.

Some people reach the point where they feel they have become more of a caregiver than a friend. You may feel responsible for your friend and worry about what would happen if you were not around. You may need to take a break to take time for yourself. It is important to set clear boundaries, which does not mean to reject the person, it just means you are being realistic about what you can and cannot do. It may be time to help your friend find professional support at this time and that is okay. You will be a better friend for doing so. Whether with chosen friends or family, quality matters over quantity when it comes to relationships. Know who those friends are when you need them.

## Trinity News

### Thanks at Trinity

Trinity, Manilla is honored to host the annual Thanksgiving Eve joint service for Zion, Trinity, and the community. "We Gather Together" will be the theme of the 7 p.m. service. Service leadership will also be "joint" with Pastor Riggert as service leader and DCE Kathryn Schneider as music leader. Begin your family celebration with worship on Thanksgiving Eve. Invite your friends and neighbors.



The Priscilla Guild and Weavers say "thanks" to the many volunteers who assisted with the chicken dinner and to all of the approximately 450 attendees.

### Worship at Trinity

The early November transition from Daylight Savings Time also brings a change in **worship time**. Beginning Saturday, November 4, and continuing through March, worship time will be 4 p.m. (with Bible class at 3 p.m.) Come earlier and often!

### Christian Education at Trinity

Approximately a dozen Manilla community children gather each Sunday morning at 9 a.m. for Sunday school. Thanks to leaders Stephany and LeAnn and breakfast hosts. If you can serve as an occasional substitute, please share your availability with our leaders.

Word on Wednesday will meet November 1, 8, and 15 at 10 a.m. We have been blessed to journey into the Promised Land with Joshua. Another midweek Bible study opportunity will be offered early in January, 2024.

### Transitions at Trinity

Serving as Trinity's Call Committee, the Board of Elders have recommended that Trinity pursue the calling of a pastoral candidate from our seminaries at the spring placement. Many details will need to be completed as part of the process: determining budget and salary, completing call paperwork in cooperation with Iowa District West and the placement offices, and preparation of the parsonage. Trinity is excited about continuing the partnership with Zion. As the process continues: PRAY for the Spirit's direction; ATTEND worship and Bible study; VOLUNTEER to assist with the parsonage or other needed preparations; CONTRIBUTE generously so the financial resources are available to support this decision.



## Priscilla Guild

The meeting was opened in the name of the Triune God by President Cathie Segebart with 9 members present. Pastor Riggert began a devotion on Esther. Pastor reminded us of the Voters meeting October 28 after church. Our church will begin at 4:00 starting in November. He also gave us the schedule for Thanksgiving and Christmas services. The minutes from the previous meeting were read and corrected and approved as corrected. The treasurer's report was given and it was moved and seconded that the report be accepted. The motion carried. We had a report from Cathie Segebart about the Mission Central event.



There were 115 present. We also discussed the Staley's chicken supper that was held. There will be a wrap-up meeting by the weavers next Tuesday evening. We also discussed upcoming Advent and Christmas services, menus, and Christmas sacks for the children. We also discussed upcoming election of officers. Bonnie gave Christian Life on Matthew 5:16. She compared us to jack-o'-lanterns with our not just shining through the holes but also through our word and deeds. She also read the poem "Ten Little Christians". The next meeting is November 21 at 2 p.m.

Susan Mahnke, Secretary

Dear fellow Trinity Lutheran and Zion Lutheran members,

Trinity is currently in the process of preparing the parsonage for the new pastor. As we all are aware there are expenses that come along with updating and preparing of the parsonage.

There have been many Thrivent Action Teams that have been applied for this project and we have been abundantly blessed with them. However, if you desire to use one of your Action Teams to help with the updating and repairing of Trinity's parsonage it would be greatly appreciated.



Please contact Diane Vetter @ 712-269-2511 if you are interested in applying for an Action Team for this cause and she can assist you with what needs to be applied for. Thank you in advance for your consideration and for your continued support.



## Snapshots of Zion



Sarah & Lawrence P. enjoy supper at Zion's hayride



Pancakes were flying (see the circle) at Zion Preschool's pancake breakfast!

Robbie G., Gregory C, Rylan S., & Luke D. roast hotdogs at Zion's hayride.

Dr. Jim Lamb (from Lutheran Family Service) encouraged us to affirm life and change lives. See his words of thanks on page 17.



Empowered by pancakes, children broke out in wheelbarrow races!



Garrett B. & Isaiah C. participate in the life chain with The Carroll Area lowans for Life. Carlys S. stands behind them.

Rachel R. & Henry S. enjoy snacks at Zion's hayride.





# ZION & TRINITY

***Please Note! All times and events are subject to change***



**Sept. - May**

**Bible Reading Challenge**



**Sunday Mornings Cold-Case Christianity Bible Study at Zion (after worship)**



**Wednesdays**

**Word on Wednesday at Trinity (10:00 a.m.) (see calendar)**



**November 16**

**Zion Afternoon Communion Service (1:30 p.m.)**



**November 22**

**Joint Thanksgiving Eve Service at Trinity in Manilla (7:00 p.m.)**



**December 3**

**Advent Concert at Zion (7:00 p.m.)**



**December 6, 13, 20**

**Midweek Advent Services (Zion: 5:45 service w/ meal following Trinity: 5:30 meal, 6:30 service – no service Dec. 20 for Trinity)**



**December 10**

**Zion Annual Voters' Meeting (after worship)**



**December 17**

**Children's Christmas Programs**



**December 24**

**Christmas Eve Services (Zion: 3:00 and 7:00) (Trinity: 4:00)**



**December 25**

**Christmas Day Brunch and Hymn Sing (Zion: 10:00 a.m.) (Trinity: 9:00 a.m. Communion Service)**

**SPONSOR**



**Fellowship**

AT ZION

SIGN UP IN THE FELLOWSHIP HALL



**Afternoon Communion Service  
November 16 @ 1:30**

# November Birthdays and Anniversaries @ Zion &

## *Birthdays* (T = Trinity)

- 1 Beth Mundt  
Joy Umland
- 2 Derek Hodne  
Dawn Lorenzen (T)  
Dillon Mohr
- 3 Taylor Beckendorf  
Duane Boell (T)  
Doug Grage (T)  
Wade Janssen
- 4 Caleb Alexander  
Kori Beckendorf  
Mason Benton  
Charles Hickman
- 5 Joe Riesberg
- 6 Nicholas Birks (T)  
Melanie Wardrip
- 7 Samantha Doyel  
Fred Gruhn  
Levi Lapel
- 8 Ken Grimm
- 9 Rick Lohrmann
- 10 Jean Kusel
- 11 Kysen Folk (T)  
Piper Mundt  
Debbie Musfeldt  
Tammy Winter
12. Levi Kirsch (T)  
John Lorenzen  
Akeo Maynard  
Dawson Mundt  
Kyle Vetter (T)
13. Jacob Dreier  
Neil Schumann (T)
14. Corey Gaskill (T)  
Bridget Gore
15. Jesse Johnson
16. James Asmus  
Sam Musfeldt  
Rachel Nulle  
Megan Riesselman  
Paula Vogel
17. Macie Doyel  
Shelly Gruhn  
Sandra Vahl
18. Beverly Grundmeier
19. Martin Bornhoft (T)  
Ryan Doyel  
Mark Kucik  
Vera Vollstedt (T)
20. Becky Eischeid  
Barbara Gore  
Cynthia Leslie
22. Tyler Heaton  
Thomas Walters
24. Garrett Blackford  
Allen Ehlers  
Kelly Page
25. Amber Neumann
26. Nancy Baack  
Nicholas Diersen  
Mark Schroeder (T)
27. Sandy Grage (T)  
Sheila Simonsen (T)  
Ryan Willison
28. Diane Genzen  
Paisley Lorenzen
29. Daniel Behrens

## *Anniversaries*

11. Ken & Rhonda Grimm
14. Elissa & Joe Riesberg
16. Allen & Becky Ehlers
17. John & Kathryn Schneider
19. Katie & Kyle Cornelius  
Brett & Diana Eddy
24. Harold & Marjorie Jurgensen (T)  
John & Nancy Opperman
26. Ken & Becky Eischeid  
Stacie & Nels Nelson  
Lucas & Andrea Schwery
29. David & Kelli Page

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

## *Official Acts*

### Baptisms:

Maverick Myles Theodor Long, son of Matthew & Brooke Long; October 22, 2023; Pastor Jonathan Conner

### Adult Confirmation:

October 8, 2023 By Pastor Jonathan Conner  
Doug & Kara Havick, Joey Eickman

### Funerals:

Robert Ray Christensen; Died October 5, 2023;  
Funeral October 14, 2023; Pastor Jonathan Conner

### Transferred In

Preston Lester from Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, Indianola, IA, October 25, 2023

## *In Our Prayers*

Tawnya Jacobsen (Kristin Backhaus' sister), John Bexten (father of Beth Alexander and Amy Blackwell), Jim Deevers, Rick Spack, Justeen Schwieso, Sherri Steffes, Cory Ahrendsen (Larry & Connie's son), Juanita Kurth, Kristin Webb, Lenus Borkowski, Bruce Rutz, Steve Rutz, Janet Smith, Jamie Osterbuhr (Amy Hull's sister-in-law), Audrey Grinhaug (Howard and Audrey Roe's granddaughter), Denny Backhaus, Larry Mahnke