



News

of the Iowa Mission District of the North American Lutheran Church

www.iowamissiondistrict.com

January 2023

A Word from the Dean

Joy, Joyful, Rejoice

These are among the words with which we associate Christmas. The anticipation of the weeks leading up to the day builds and builds. Dazzling light displays, festooned trees (real and otherwise), brightly wrapped presents, feasts of favorite foods, and the retelling of the story that never grows old are all things that point us to the joy of the season, in which we should be joyful, and for which we heartily rejoice.

And yet, behind and underneath all the sparkle and dazzle and festivities of the moment can lie a solemn truth. We walk as yet by faith and not by sight. Because if we lived only by what we could see, there would be many, many reasons not to be joyful in this Christmas season. The reasons for this can be very personal, stemming from such things as family discord, the pain of the first (or yet another) Christmas without a loved one taken by death, physical or mental ill health, a wavering faith.

These phenomena are not at all new. In fact, in most of our churches on the first Sunday after Christmas, we will be reading from Matthew's gospel in which Herod realizes that the Magi have tricked him, not returning to him after having visited Bethlehem. As is often the case with those who have complete authority, having heard from them that they were seeking one who was born to be king, Herod sends his goons to Bethlehem to seek out any boy two years and younger so as to eliminate the threat to his throne. It's a truly horrific story, one that seems so out of place on the heels of our singing such beloved songs as "Silent Night" and "Away in a Manger." And yet, that's very much the way that life truly works. Ever since the perfect world that God had made was

wrecked by sin, evil of all sorts has been unleashed.

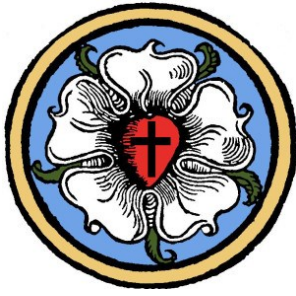
With those who wept for such a tragic shedding of blood, we weep at the pain inflicted by such evil, such violence. And yet, walking as we do by faith, we know that evil and violence do not have the last word. The last word belongs to God. And that Word is the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth. Though evil deals us mortal blows, grace unrelenting flows. I share with you words I wrote to capture the tragedy and promise of the story. If you like, it can be sung to a couple different hymns from the LBW, numbers 396 and 501.

*A birth, it is a glorious thing,
A gift from God, the heavens ring.
But in this world so marred by sin,
A birth can evil stoke within.
So was the birth of Christ our Lord,
Who was by heav'n and earth adored
To one a threat, one to be killed,
No matter all the blood it spilled.*

*But God forewarned the upright man,
'Twas part of His eternal plan.
The baby would to manhood grow,
To save the world from grief and woe.
But on this day we do recall
The little ones who gave their all.
Though evil dealt it's mortal blow,
More unrelenting, grace would flow.*

Merry Christmas.

*Pastor Christopher Staley, Dean,
Iowa Mission District, NALC*



Abiding Faith

Pr. Ken Kimball

Old East Paint Creek, Waterville, IA

Old West Paint Creek, Waukon, IA

Like a diamond, faith has many facets, the most important of which is that faith is God's gracious gift by which we trust in Christ Jesus for salvation, i.e. "*For by grace you have been saved, through faith.*" (Ephesians 2:8) Faith (in Christ) saves. This facet or truth about faith can be described as "saving faith", presented with greatest clarity and priority in St. Paul's letters to the Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, but which is certainly present throughout the whole of the New Testament.

Another facet of faith, that faith abides, can be seen in the context of 1 Corinthians 13:13 "*So faith, hope, love abide, these three.*" The primary meaning of the Greek verb *meno* (*meno* translated here as "abide" by RSV and ESV) is "stand one's ground, stay in place." It was often used to describe a military situation, i.e. "Hold your position! Stay put! Stand firm. No retreat!" It is also used to describe things that remain and last, things that are still intact and in place when everything else changes or disappears.

What then is that ground that abiding faith stands upon or holds against opposition, upon which it remains and by which it lasts? Jesus tells us it is Himself in John 15:1-8. The same Greek verb *meno*, "abide", from 1 Corinthians 13:13 appears 8 times in this passage. Jesus calls us to abide in Him, to take our stand upon Him, to remain connected to Him, and He promises that He will stand with and in us, His words abiding in us.

Implied in the verb "abide" is that there will be opposition. Sometimes it

comes in the form of threat and persecution, and through the last twenty centuries Christians have endured arrest, imprisonment, and even death, choosing to abide and stand their ground with and upon Jesus, trusting it is better to suffer and die with and in Christ than to forsake Him.

More common, is the tactic by opponents of the Christian faith to ridicule and depict it as an irrational rejection of reality or as one absurd choice among many. Mark Twain, a noted atheist, wrote, "Faith is believing something you know isn't true." The Red Queen in *Alice through the Looking Glass* said, "Sometimes I believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast." W.C. Field said, "Everybody's got to believe in something. I believe I'll have another beer."

As a former unbeliever, I would once have found these quotes a humorous means by which to disparage and dismiss the Christian faith as wish fulfillment or a concoction of impossibilities. I learned (quite unwillingly) that my unbelief could be dismissed for the same reasons, and that while truthful evidence is not the same as a perfect proof, (we walk by faith, not by sight), the evidence remains (abides!) that something incredible truly happened: the Creator became creature—true God, Son of the Father from eternity became Incarnate as Mary's boy, suffered, died, and was buried and rose from the dead—all in order to save us lost and condemned persons, freeing us from sin, death, and the power of the devil, that He might make us His own to abide forever with Him.

This and That From Around the Iowa Mission District

Shown here (to the right) are several ladies from Bethany Lutheran, Laurens, Iowa, who spent the afternoon at the Episcopal mission home in Spencer, Iowa. The group listened to Pastor Beth explain how she started the mission. It is called The Way Station and has its own website if anyone would like to learn about the opportunities available. Here is the link to their web site:

<https://thewaystationspencer.com/>



Mission-District Secretary, Pastor Solveig Zamzow, shares the following: *St. John's Lutheran Church, Western Douglas (Plainfield) presented a wonderful Christmas program for the currently vacant parish. The congregation is blessed with a Sunday School of well over sixty students who attend with great regularity and make sure that every Supply Preacher remains on his/her toes during the children's sermon. This is a vibrant, faithful and forward-looking community that is eager to receive a new servant-leader. If you are in the area, stop by for worship – you might have to search for a pew!*

Bethlehem Revisited at St. John Lutheran, LeMars, Iowa

Pastor Chris Meier, instructing young people at Bethlehem Revisited, as a Jewish Rabbi might have instructed the young in first century Bethlehem. Pastor Dan Hart sent this picture with the comment that he and his wife, Bev, visited Bethlehem on Sunday, December 11th, and were very impressed with the event. Bethlehem Revisited is an authentic reenactment of the town of Bethlehem as it was 2,000 years ago—with music, food and live animals. A collage of the event can be found on the next page, thanks to Becky DeRuyter from St. John's.



Bethlehem Revisited 2022





Abiding in Christ Vine and Branches

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:1-5)

In our "hurry up" world of the 21st century, the word "abide" is seldom heard, and many people may not even know what it means. We live in a time of "instant" everything—food, information, transportation. Patience is rare. And one thing that is lost in this kind of mad race to get to the next moment, the next experience, the next relationship, is the ability to sit still. As people who know me well are likely thinking, I'm probably the last person to be talking about patience and sitting still. I saw a shirt not long ago that said, "I had my patience tested, and it was negative." This is all to say that I'm not immune to the mad rush to finish the current task or moment and get on to the next one. Perhaps this is why the word "abide" fascinates me. Abiding brings to mind soothing thoughts of being still, waiting with someone, being attached, calming down, relaxing into the moment, and giving myself permission to not take responsibility for all the things around me.

All this anxiety so many of us feel about the current moment seems to engulf us and bleeds into every area of life. There is a sense in which we are in charge of ourselves and our environment. Whether it is fixing something in the house, "finding" ourselves, or figuring out who God is and what He wants, we have a tendency to "do it ourselves". "How to" books are available for every area of life. And when we have a problem most people seem to jump in with a new program, solution, or technique, rarely stopping to sit still and bring it to the Lord—and wait patiently for His directions. I read once that a theologian was giving a talk to a group of high-tech folks, presumably Christian, who when asked if they would pray about a computer problem answered that Jesus lived 2,000 years ago and wouldn't know anything about computers....

Our culture is also one in which there is a sense of entitlement—a tendency to put ourselves first. Even though we celebrate the freedoms we have in the "new world"—freedom of speech, freedom of religion,

freedom to do many things that were forbidden in the 1600s in Europe and are probably still forbidden in many places—these freedoms have not always been lived out in the ways our forebears may have envisioned. The ideas of "me first", MY freedom to do or be whatever I want, and "if it feels good, do it", have become accepted values in our society. I was a teenager in the 1960s and the whole idea of "me first" was really strong then. In retrospect, however, some of the attitudes that were so shocking nearly 60 years ago are pretty mild compared to much of what we see and hear on social media now. When we consider all this in light of the teachings of Christ, we see a large gulf. Some folks understand these changes to mean that we're more enlightened now, and that the traditional Christian faith is out of date. However, if we read the Old Testament prophets, we find something quite different. As the Preacher said in Ecclesiastes 1, *"All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, 'See, this is new'? It has been already, in the ages before us."* (verses 8-10) If we read the Old Testament prophets, we also find a deep resonance with the current rebellion against God and His authority over us. While the technology is far more advanced now than in the past, the human heart has not changed. And all this emphasis on ourselves is rooted in human sin. Like the rats following the Pied Piper of Hamelin, we are mesmerized by the "magic flute" of a me-first culture that validates our desires and lures us away from the rock-solid teachings of the Lord God into danger and death.

In Psalm 46, the psalmist calls us back to the Lord in this way-- *"Be still, and know that I am God. I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth!"* (verse 10) It is in stillness that we come to know God. It is in abiding in and with Christ that our hearts and minds can slow down and begin to listen to the still, small voice that comes from our Creator and Redeemer. What does it mean to be attached to the Vine of Christ? What does it mean to be still and to abide? What does it mean to trust that God is in control? In the coming months I propose to spend some time pondering these questions and seeking God's answers through the written and incarnate Word of God.

Pastor Barbara M. Wills

Announcements

Upcoming Events

June 12-13, 2023—Pastors'/Lay Ministers' Retreat - Best Western, Waterloo, Iowa

July 16-22, 2023—NEXUS Institute - Grand View University, Des Moines, Iowa (for high school aged young people)

August 7-11, 2023—NALC Luther Week (convocation) - Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

September 16, 2023 Iowa Mission District Convocation—Faith Lutheran Church, Monona, Iowa

Please Pray for:

Pastor James Puotyal who is awaiting a kidney transplant.

Pastor James Glesne who is undergoing treatments for Multiple Myeloma.

Amy Cooper and her family as she continues to deal with cancer.

Pastor Andrew Loomis who has been diagnosed with an autoimmune system illness. Please pray that he will be healed from his chronic pain.

When sending **correspondence** to the NALC please use the following address:

NALC Office
2655 Innsbruck Drive, Suite A
New Brighton, MN 55112-9304

Please send **donations** to this address:

North American Lutheran Church
PO Box 860565
Minneapolis, MN 55486-0565

Donations to NALS, Disaster Relief, Great Commission Society, etc. are to be made out to the NALC with the specific fund written on the memo line of your check.

Pastors available for pulpit supply:

Pastor Natacha Kemp—(507) 358-7741
Pastor James Glesne—563-380-8110
Pastor Andrew Loomis—712-298-6587
Pastor Jack Miller—507-798-2408
Pastor Paul Weeg- -641-381-0675
Pastor Mike Wikstrom—480-203-1556 (LCMC)
Pastor Solveig Zamzow—641-903-9416

Pastor Tim Nappe is also available for pulpit supply. His primary focus is his ministry with “Reaching the Unreached”, and he will share information about this mission work whenever he does pulpit supply for a congregation. Contact information: 712-331-4245. Or email at pastortim.milford@gmail.com



Donations and Correspondence

Checks sent to the Mission District for support should be made out to the ***Iowa Mission District, NALC***, and mailed to Pastor Gary Burkhalter at **312 E Mission St, Strawberry Point, IA 52076**.

Correspondence for Pastor Solveig Zamzow, Mission District Secretary, should be sent to **619 Elm Avenue, #309, Story City, IA 50248**

Items for the Mission District newsletter (pictures, news, etc.) are best sent via e-mail to Pastor Barbara Wills at barbaramwills@gmail.com.

Mission District Pulpit-Supply Guidelines

Suggested guidelines for supply pastors in the Iowa Mission District is \$200 plus IRS recommended mileage reimbursement.



Congregations of the Iowa Mission District

Ackley: **Our Saviour's**, Pastor David Craig
Avoca: **Trinity**, Pastor Matthew Bahnfleth
Badger: **Badger Lutheran**, Pr. Scott Meier
Boyden: **St. John**, Call Process
Des Moines: **Unity Evangelical Lutheran**,
Pr. Donna Joseph; Pr. Diane Joseph
Dorchester: **Waterloo Ridge**, Call Process
Eagle Grove: **Evangelical Lutheran**, Pr. Jason Cooper
Eagle Grove: **Samuel Lutheran**, Call Process
Ellsworth: **Trinity**, Pastor Jon Rollefson
Emmons, MN: **Emmons**, Pastor Ryan Henkel
Gilmore City: **First**, Tracy Nerem, Lay Minister
Grafton: **Emmanuel**, Call Process
Greene: **St. John (Vilmar)**, Call Process
Gunder: **Marion**, Pr. Marshall Hahn
Harlan: **Bethlehem**, Pr. Ronald Rasmussen
+Huxley: **Shepherd of the Prairie**,
Scott Licht, Lay Minister
Irwin: **St. Paul**, Pr. Ronald Rasmussen
Laurens: **Bethany**, Pr. David Klappenbach
LeMars: **St. John**, Pr. Chris Meier
Manchester: **First**, Pr. Tony D. Ede
+Monona, **Faith**: Pr. Mel Harris
Northwood: **Peace**, Pr. Barbara Wills
Palmer: **St. John's Lizard Township**,
Marlene Nimke, Lay Minister
Plainfield: **St. John**, Call Process
Readlyn: **St. Matthew**, Pr. Jean Rabary
Readlyn: **Zion**, Pr. Jean Rabary
Robins: **Servants of Christ**, Pr. Ronald Voss
+Rochester, MN: **Emmanuel**—Call Process
Ruthven: **Zion**, Eric Patten, Lay Minister
St. Ansgar: **First**, Pr. Christopher Staley
+St. Charles, MN: **Trinity**, Pr. Douglas Hedman
St. Olaf: **Norway**, Pr. Marshall Hahn
Sheldon: **St. Paul**, Pr. Dan Baker
Spencer: **Trinity**, Pr. Renae Behrends
Strawberry Pt.: **Mission in Christ**, Pr. Gary Burkhalter
Thor: **Ullensvang**, Pr. Darryl Landsverk
Waterville: **Old East Paint Creek**, Pr. Ken Kimball
Waukon: **Old West Paint Creek**, Pr. Ken Kimball

+ indicates mission congregation

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*The Iowa Mission District
has 38 congregations.*

The Iowa Mission District website may be found at: www.iowamissiondistrict.com. If your congregation has a web site, and you would like to have the web address linked to your church name on the Mission District web site, please send the web address to me, Pastor Barbara Wills, at barbaramwills@gmail.com.