



# *The Light of the World*

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**An Advent and Christmas Devotional  
Presented by members of Christians in Action  
December 3, 2023 – January 6, 2024**



**Christians in Action is a partnership of congregations in South Central North Dakota. We support each other in the Body of Christ through shared goals.**

**Atonement Lutheran Church, Jamestown  
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Ellendale  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Gackle  
English Lutheran Church, Medina  
Montpelier Lutheran Church, Montpelier  
St. John's Lutheran Church, Jamestown  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Jamestown  
Zion Lutheran Church, Kulm**

**Additional information and links to each congregation can be found on our common website  
[www.NDChristiansAct.org](http://www.NDChristiansAct.org)**

## Keep Awake! What Are You Watching For?

December 3, 2023

*Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.  
Mark 13:33*

I use my alarm clock (on my phone) just one day a week. That day is Sunday- it would not be an easy story to tell if the pastor slept in on a Sunday and everyone else was waiting at church. Many people need to set an alarm to get up for school or work. Setting an alarm means that you have made a plan, you have calculated how much time you will need to rise, wash, dress, eat, and get out the door. It puts you in control of your morning routine. If it is really important to be up and ready (to catch that early flight at the airport for example) I am not above setting an alarm and also a back-up alarm. When I know what time something will happen, I am really good about being ready.

Unexpected things are a different story. Sometimes things happen that I do not expect and I get caught unprepared. Last year in November, Kristi and I visited my parents in Arizona in early November. We flew out of Bismarck and enjoyed some days in the sun as we pitched in to help them open up the winter home for the season. We did not know that we would return and find over a foot of snow had fallen on the car in long term parking, or that the plow would have raised a huge mound of snow along the row of vehicles next to us. We certainly didn't travel with our winter coats. It was still warm when we left. Fortunately, we had a small shovel in the trunk, but not our regular winter emergency bags. Jesus is speaking to us in Mark's gospel this day as he reminds us that we do not know when the messiah will come again. We can't set an alarm for it or pack the bags and have them in the proper places. All we can do is keep watch. We know that Jesus will return, but we don't know when. Like the watchman at the gate, our task at this time is to keep awake- keep watch- because sleeping on the job will not cut it.

Keep awake! What are you watching for this Advent?

Rev. Erik Weber

St. John's Lutheran Church, Jamestown & English Lutheran Church, Medina

## **Keep Awake! What Are You Watching For?**

December 4, 2023

*When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. Isaiah 64:3*

Throughout my life, daily God's grace has been bestowed upon me. There were times when it was prayed for and many times, when I reflected on the moment, it was unexpected grace. We often do not feel worthy of God's grace and mercy, which makes receiving it all the more magnificent. God is always there for us and performing miracles that we may expect or not expect. I believe Isaiah is reminding God, and us, of the great deeds which he has done. We did not expect some of it or feel worthy, but he blessed us with His grace all the same. We need to "stay awake" and prepare for God's greatest deed, yet to come, with the return of Jesus Christ.

Marella Sebring  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Gackle

## **Keep Awake! What Are You Watching For?**

December 5, 2023

*Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Mark 13:26*

Since my reflection on the Bible verse above is supposed to relate to the question, "What are you watching for?"; my answer would be "Nothing." Jesus will return according to God's plan. Instead of worrying about the when and how, I believe we should concentrate on Jesus's command to love God and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Since all people are our neighbors, there should be plenty of opportunities for each of us to show our love in the ways that best fit our own interests and gifts. That way, whether Jesus comes to us from the clouds; or whether we go to him, he will be able to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Ruth Brubakken  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Jamestown

## **Keep Awake! What Are You Watching For?**

December 6, 2023

*He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. Psalm 121:4*

The first thing I thought of when I read this verse was when I was young at the farm watching the mother hen and her baby chicks in the yard. They would be running all over the yard, if there was any danger at all, the mother would make a certain sound and the chicks would come running and get under the protection of her wings. I'm sure she did this 24/7.

This is how God gives us his full attention. He never slumbers nor sleeps. He does not need sleep and is always at our side. He is with us at all times which is comforting to know. He is never sleeping when we need him. God will watch over us forever and keep us under his arms. He is our protector!

Russ Geiszler  
St. John's Lutheran Church, Jamestown

## **Keep Awake! What Are You Watching For?**

December 7, 2023

*For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.  
Jeremiah 29:11*

You may not know the plans God has for you, but it should give you comfort to know that He has plans, and that you are in them. God's calling isn't dependent on you, but is rooted in Himself, that you would live out all that He has planned for you to become. God has a purpose for you. You need to be ready to let him prepare you for all that He would have you do. You are meant for something more. Listen intently to the Holy Spirit every day. Sometimes it may take an hour to hear a single word. The key is whether you will wait those fifty-nine minutes, trusting He will give you that word. Sometimes you may not know you heard anything, but someone may notice a difference you are making in the lives of others. Be still. Sometimes you may not know you heard anything, but the Holy Spirit nudges you from your comfort place, to contribute to church services. Be Still. You may not know you heard anything, but the Holy Spirit nudges you to accept a Council position. Be Still. You are meant for something more.

Jean Hanson

Atonement Lutheran Church, Jamestown



## Keep Awake! What Are You Watching For?

December 8, 2023

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2*

Children gathered to name the things they are waiting for in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

“making cut out cookies”

“decorations”

“Christmas tree”

“Santa”

“presents”

As adults name the things they are waiting for, the list grows.

“Christmas carols”

“family who will be together”

“Christmas cards bringing news from friends who live far away”

All these things are good and are part of the anticipation the season brings. When we are transformed by the renewing of our minds and we discern the will of God, our list grows deeper. What we wait for during the season of Advent is the coming of Christ. We watch for “Jesus’ birthday celebration” and our invitation to be part of the joy Jesus’ birth brings to the world. Throughout this season of watching and waiting, let us keep awake to what is good and acceptable and perfect. Let us “wait with hope.”

Members of Montpelier Lutheran Church, Montpelier

## Keep Awake! What Are You Watching For?

December 9, 2023

*But as for me, I will look to the LORD, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Micah 7:7*

Wait! Watch! How often we hear these words! We watch for the doctor and wait for test results. We wait for family to come, and watch for the headlights to turn into our driveway. We wait for the potatoes to boil and cookies to bake. We have serious, long waits, and we have daily, routine waiting times—watching the calendar, clock and mail.

The long awaited-for promise was fulfilled in a very unlikely place and manner—a baby born in a stable. It was a LONG wait, a LONG watch.

In Advent we wait for the birth of “the God of my salvation.” Too often, we prepare with buying gifts and decorating our homes and yards. We attend gala events and shop until we drop. However, throughout this season, we need to remember that as we are looking forward to celebrating the birth of the baby Jesus, we need to watch for those who are in need. Their needs include hearing the Good News of Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection. Their physical needs, such as food, warm clothing, and furnace fuel, must be met, too. We watch, knowing that our prayers are heard. God promised in Genesis and throughout the Old Testament that He would send a Savior to us for us. As we mark the days, let us truly wait and watch throughout Advent for God’s guidance. Let us share God’s love in actions and through His word as we wait and watch for the return of “the God of our salvation.”

*Dear heavenly Father,*

*We are waiting for YOU to enter our hearts and homes.*

*Be present in our waiting and watching this Advent. Use each of us as we share the Christmas joy and celebrate the birth of Jesus. Amen.*

Pat Rutschke  
Zion Lutheran Church, Kulm

## Prepare! What are you Preparing For?

December 10, 2023

*A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Isaiah 40:3-4*

In "preparation" for sharing my thoughts on these 2 verses I read what came before them and what came after them to get a better understanding of what they might be saying to us as a member of the family of God. I also consulted my friend "Google" to read what others said and how they felt about this passage. I was pleasantly surprised that my general thoughts coincided with that of others.

As a teacher (now retired music teacher) I spent a great deal of time in concert/program preparation. As the yearly school calendar was prepared I entered the dates for a year of performances. I did however always have a plan "B". Especially when it came to the December programs. Mother Nature was always a factor and I wanted to have alternate dates available. You cannot predict all of what might happen during a performance, but years of experience taught me to be flexible and ready for just about anything.

The verses in today's scripture reminds us not only that are our sins are forgiven through repentance, but we must now prepare our hearts and lives for the day of our LORD'S return. I ask the question. Are we PREPARED?

I receive many catalogs in the mail. Many have all types of Christmas cards to purchase. But in a recent catalog the words on the front of a specific card really spoke to me. They really were the words I needed to see to get me going on this devotional. I would like to share them with you.

Because of love, HE CAME FOR US; Because of grace, HE DIED;  
Because of hope, HE GAVE US LIFE; A LIVING SACRIFICE.

Ardella Rau  
English Lutheran Church, Medina

## Prepare! What are you Preparing For?

December 11, 2023

*I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.  
Exodus 23:20*

Years ago, when I first became a pastor, we told our families that since I needed to be at church on Christmas Eve, we wouldn't be able to come to them for Christmas celebrations. "You will always be welcome to come to us though," we said. This is the time of year when the preparations for our guests begins. In the midst of all that needs to be done I end up with multiple lists; on my phone, over text and email, or scribbled on any piece of paper I can find.

Many of the items on those lists include details about preparing the places where our holiday guests will celebrate, eat, and sleep while they are with us. Every year we dig thru our bins of decorations as a family and make the whole house look festive. We have decorations for every room and by the end the whole house is decorated for Christmas. The final touch is preparing a place for our guests to sleep. With each family member's needs in mind, we set-up our guest rooms so that they will be comfortable and feel welcome and at home.

Long ago God promised the people of Israel that an angel would go ahead of them to guard and guide them to the land that God had prepared for them. Like a good host God prepared for the people. In the days to come, God promises us that a place will also be prepared in God's Kingdom for each of us. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the one who brings God's Kingdom to earth, I wonder; What spaces and places are you preparing in this season? How do your preparations connect you to God, who is the original and ultimate host?

Rev. Susan Haukaas  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Jamestown

## Prepare! What are you Preparing For?

December 12, 2023

*Prepare your work outside, get everything ready for you in the field; and after that build your house. Proverbs 24:27*

Christmases of my childhood were different from the Christmases that I experience now with my extended family. In this world of so much extravagance and materialism it seems difficult for anyone to cherish any one thing. The use of the word “awesome” is so common that it has lost its meaning. “This toy truck is awesome.” “This chocolate cake is awesome.” NOT.

The virgin birth is awesome. Joseph heeded the angels, thus the fact that Joseph continued to support Mary in spite of her condition of being pregnant before marriage was awesome because in that era, a woman caught in adultery could have been stoned. Imagine the fear and trembling of the shepherds, the lowest people on the popularity scale, as the multitude of angels appeared to them and sang, “Glory to God in the highest.” Angels singing to shepherds is awesome.

Can you imagine God appearing to Moses and saying, “Put off your shoes, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” No wonder Moses was afraid to look at God. What would it be like actually to see God? Seeing God, or Jesus, would certainly be cause for being afraid. What was the first thing that Jesus said to someone to whom he appeared? Yes, “Do not be afraid.”

Recently we were blessed with a display of Northern Lights. It doesn't take such a dramatic display for us to be in awe of God's creation. Just going for a walk on a country road and being aware of our surroundings can make us appreciate all that God has created. When I think of the vastness of the universe and all the wonders and beauty that God created, I stand in reverence as I am overwhelmed with the immensity of the power of God. Thanks be to God for revealing himself to us in myriad ways as we go about our daily routines.

Elaine Babcock  
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Ellendale

## Prepare! What are you Preparing For?

December 13, 2023

*Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. Matthew 25:1b-4*

The five foolish bridesmaids were not prepared for unexpected circumstances. They did not consider their meeting with the bridegroom could be delayed. This is similar to scenarios in daily life. It is easy to prepare for running out of milk because we can see the milk jug in the refrigerator is near empty so we buy more before it too late. Similarly with the gas gauge in our cars, we are warned or alerted of the near empty tank so we fill up before that happens. But in this parable, we are told to expect the unexpected, to be prepared always. Such as always having an umbrella in the car because you never know when an unforecasted rain shower can pop up. I enjoy hiking and have done so in the Grand Canyon, southeastern Minnesota, Oahu, and the Phoenix area. More often than not the hikes take longer than I anticipate and therefore it's important for me to bring additional water bottles and nourishment. I need to be prepared for unexpected circumstances and ensure I have plenty of hydration.

I believe the main point of this parable is, our readiness for Jesus' return is determined by our stewardship of the resources He has given us. We who follow Him must live in a state of readiness for His return.

He has warned us that He will arrive with no notice, interrupting the daily activities of all of us who expect life to simply go on as it always has. Jesus urges His followers to be prepared and watch for His return.

Jeanne Rosemore  
St. John's Lutheran Church, Jamestown

## Prepare! What are you Preparing For?

December 14, 2023

*And God said to Noah, ... Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. Genesis 6:13-14*

As Christmas comes closer and closer, my to-do list gets a little longer...shopping for gifts...baking goodies...putting up the tree and decorating...wrapping gifts. Sometimes getting everything prepared for Christmas can be overwhelming and exhausting!

I wonder if Noah felt overwhelmed and exhausted when God told him to get prepared for the flood...to build the ark...to make rooms for all the animals and his family...to have food for everyone to eat for one hundred fifty days!

Just the thought of the food is staggering! Elephants in the wild eat 700 pounds of vegetation daily, although I am told that elephants in zoos can get by with only 150 pounds. An adult male lion in the wild eats 150 pounds of meat a week. What do snails eat? What do turtles eat? What about earthworms? Alligators? Hippopotami? Rattlesnakes? Gila monsters? Llamas?

How did Noah gather the food and keep it from spoiling? How did Noah move it aboard the ark; and then distribute it to the animals? How did he keep the animals from gorging today and starving tomorrow? How did Noah keep them from eating each other? There is one simple answer to all those questions - "With God's help!"

With God's help, Noah prepared and did everything that God told him to do. As we prepare for Christmas this year, let's remember to listen to what God is telling us to prepare for...let's remember to prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the best Christmas gift ever!

*Good and gracious God, Your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us. And we thank you and praise you for your unconditional love and amazing grace in this Advent Season. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

Mary Jo Kinzler, Synod Lay Minister  
Zion Lutheran Church, Kulm

## Prepare! What are you Preparing For?

December 15, 2023

*And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' Luke 12:19-20*

Now redemption, long-expected,  
comes in solemn splendor near;  
all the saints this world rejected  
thrill the trumpet sound to hear:  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!  
See the day of God appear!

Yea, amen, let all adore thee,  
high on thine eternal throne;  
Savior, take the pow'r and glory,  
claim the kingdom as thine own.  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!  
Thou shalt reign, and thou alone!

**Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending ELW 435 verses 2 & 3\***

\*Text: Charles Wesley, 1707-1788, alt. Public Domain



## Prepare! What are you Preparing For?

December 16, 2023

*Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:8-9*

The Apostle Peter reminds his audience that what God has created, God can and will take away, and we do not know when this will happen. Therefore, we are encouraged to repent of our wrongdoings and live "holy and godly lives", because God wishes the best for creation and God's people. We know that with the birth of our indwelling savior Jesus, God is keeping God's promises to never leave or forsake us, so we patiently await his coming during this Advent season.

*God of all time and space, we know you hear us when we cry out to you. Thank you for loving us and keeping your promises. Amen*

Rev. Stephanie Gossett

St. John's Lutheran Church, Jamestown & English Lutheran Church, Medina

## **Do Not Be Afraid! What Do You Need to Stop Fearing?**

December 17, 2023

*The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

*Luke 1:30-33*

I remember many years ago singing in a Christmas cantata the song "Be Not Afraid". The lyrics reflected this bible verse. "Be not afraid, be not afraid I have some good news that's filled with joy...For unto you a child is born." As I look back over my life, how often have I heard that little voice say to me, "Be not afraid"? and yet we don't want to listen or put our trust in Him. It doesn't matter if it's lack of moisture and crop failure, family crisis, or illness...we need to "Be not afraid" and remember that it is not OUR plan, but HIS. He has promised to never leave us or forsake us, or to give us more than we can handle.

With God on our side and in our hearts, we truly should live each day with "Be not Afraid" in our hearts and our souls. To you, fellow Christians, my most sincere Christmas wish is that even in times of trouble you may be able to summon the courage and faith to "Be Not Afraid". Blessings to all

Warren Zenker  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Gackle

## Do Not Be Afraid! What Do You Need to Stop Fearing?

December 18, 2023

*After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." Genesis 15:1*

The Lutheran Youth Encounter Convention was held in Minneapolis over Christmas vacation of my junior year in high school. I attended with a group of teens and adult leaders from my small-town home church in southern Minnesota.

After 40-some years, many details of the Convention have become blurred but some memories remain very clear. I remember riding the city bus and meeting at a huge auditorium where daily devotions and singing took place. There were hundreds of people there. The songs were all new to me. It was unlike anything I had heard in my church back home. All of this was exciting but a bit scary to me.

One evening while riding the city bus back to our hotel, we began to sing some of the new songs we had learned. We created interest for other passengers and when we had finished, these strangers applauded. As we continued the bus ride, our group began to sing Christmas carols and other passengers started to sing with us. Somehow my experience in the big city did not seem so scary anymore.

Since that event, music has played a very special part of my personal worship experience. Whether I attend a traditional church service, or an alternative worship service, and when I play handbells, the music soothes my soul.

*Be Not Afraid by Bob Dufford\**  
*Be not afraid. I go before you always.*  
*Come, follow me, and I will give you rest.*

Jody Larson  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Jamestown

\*Text based on Is 43:2-3; Lk 6:20 ff. Text and music © 1975, 1978, Robert J. Dufford, SJ and OCP. All rights reserved. Used by permission One License #A-717748

## **Do Not Be Afraid! What Do You Need to Stop Fearing?**

December 19, 2023

*But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. Exodus 14:13*

Do not be afraid. That phrase stands out for me. I am so good at “worrying” or “fearing”. Trust in God. God stands with me and fights for me.

*Stand firm.* I am reminded to have faith. Faith that God is with me. God is standing by me. Fear can immobilize you. You may have a reason to fear, but faith in God is a great reason to not fear. “God’s got this!” is something I like to remind myself when I am feeling buried and unsure of the results. My faith is what keeps me moving forward, even when unsure of the outcome.

If someone else can take on my thoughts and worries and fears, I should let him, right?! Easier said than done, but I am getting better at this. At the end of the day, as I clean up my kitchen or fold the laundry that is still sitting in the basket or just brushing my teeth, I take a moment to thank God for all that I have and ask for peace as I sleep and strength to push the worries of tomorrow to tomorrow. I ask for God’s help to rest my mind and take on my worries. I close my eyes and take a deep breath and look forward to a new day.

LeAnn Fuchs  
Atonement Lutheran Church, Jamestown

## **Do Not Be Afraid! What Do You Need to Stop Fearing?**

December 20, 2023

*Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." 1 Kings 17:13-14*

I like milk on my cereal for breakfast. In the years when our then teenaged sons lived at home, I developed a well-grounded fear of running out of milk. I could look into the refrigerator before going to bed at 10 o'clock and see a half gallon of milk ready for me to have more than plenty in the morning. By 7:30 am after our sons had left for school, I would pour myself a bowl of cereal, open the refrigerator, and discover NO milk. Not a drop. Shortly after that happened a second time, I instituted the "black Sharpie rule." I drew a thick black line four inches above the bottom of the milk bottle. The line encircled the whole bottle so it could be seen from any direction. You may not drink milk below the line made by the black Sharpie marker on the side of the milk bottle unless you can see another unopened container of milk already in the refrigerator.

Elijah speaks to the widow of Zarephath during a time of severe drought. She is about to use the last of her flour (meal) and oil to make the last food for her son and herself before they have no more to eat. Elijah's request for food is extreme. She barely has enough for her son and herself. There is no extra to share. But God has a promise. Their flour and oil will not run out until after the rains end the drought.

Advent brings a message, Do Not Be Afraid! God will provide all you need. Let go of your fear of cereal without milk. Let go of your fear that there will not be enough potatoes or Christmas cookies or whatever special ingredient you cannot find this year. Your fear will not stop God's promise from coming to you. Christ is coming. Christ is coming soon. When Christ comes, you will have all you need.

Rev. Kristi Weber  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Jamestown

## **Do Not Be Afraid! What Do You Need to Stop Fearing?**

December 21, 2023

*Do not fear, for I am with you,  
do not be afraid, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. Isaiah 41:10*

My sister and I used to babysit for some dear family friends when their kids were little. When they would come over to our house, two of the girls would not go downstairs into our basement. For the longest time, we couldn't figure out why. But then one day, one of the girls told us that it was because of the deer head. My dad had a mounted deer head that was just lying on a shelf in one of our storage rooms. The girls were afraid of the deer head. What fear are you handing over to God this Advent season? Our Isaiah text reminds us that we should not be afraid. In fact, it is speculated that the words "Do not be afraid" appear 365 times in Scripture: one for every day of the year. The truth is that God is with us in all our doubts and fears and promises to never leave us or forsake us. God promises to strengthen us and uphold us with his victorious right hand.

*Good and Gracious God, help us to remember that you are with us every single day of the year and that we should not fear. You promise to uphold and strengthen us with your victorious right hand. Amen!*

Deacon Tara Ulrich  
Director of Children, Youth, and Family Ministries  
Christians in Action Partnership

## **Do Not Be Afraid! What Do You Need to Stop Fearing?**

December 22, 2023

*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. Matthew 10:29-31*

Sometimes we find ourselves in a SCARY situation we never dreamed could happen to us. Not in a small town in North Dakota anyway. One Sunday after spending the afternoon after church, with Wayne's family; we got a call that my brother and his new fiancé were stopping at our house on their way back from New Rockford to Dickinson; so we left and went home. As I started making supper, I noticed some strange vehicles pull into our driveway. When guys got out of the vehicles with semi-automatic rifles, our lives changed forever. "Do Not Be Afraid"! Words we have heard many times, but when bullets are flying all around your house with you and your family inside, it is not so easy to do. You are more afraid than you have ever been in your life! So, you pray harder than you have ever prayed before. You pray that God will keep all of you safe. And he answers your prayers. Everyone is ok physically but the mental stress and anguish are a part of your life forever. You survive testifying at a murder trial and not being able to sleep in your own home for months afterwards. Yet you hold on to your faith, knowing that God will always be with you.

In Matthew 10:29-31 we are told that we are so much more valuable to God than many sparrows. And we don't have to worry because nothing can happen to us apart from His will. So: What Do we need to stop fearing? We need to trust that God loves us and will never leave us. He will always take care of us. "Trust in Him".

God will carry you through every storm in your life. And give you strength to make it through.

Sue Reardon  
English Lutheran Church, Medina

(note: this is in reference to the 1983 shootout in Medina)

## **Do Not Be Afraid! What Do You Need to Stop Fearing?**

December 23, 2023

*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.  
Luke 2:10-11*

The shepherds feared and trembled  
when, lo, above the earth  
rang out the angel chorus  
that hailed our Savior's birth.

Go tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and ev'rywhere;  
go tell it on the mountain  
that Jesus Christ is born!

**Go Tell It on the Mountain** ELW 290 verse 2 and refrain\*

\*Text: African American spiritual, refrain;  
John W. Work Jr., 1872-1925, stanzas, alt. Public Domain



**My Soul Magnifies the Lord!  
What Are You Praising God For?**

December 24, 2023

*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. Luke 2:20*

Dear Lord, God, Heavenly Father, as we are now in the new church year, we pray for a wonderful year of worshiping you. Now in this the Advent season, we wait for the birth of Jesus, preparing for when Christmas comes, when we will celebrate the birth of baby Jesus.

Lord God, during Advent, we light 4 candles. One for hope, a second for peace, a third for joy, and a fourth for love. On Christmas Eve, we light the Christ candle. Thank you, Lord, for creating this planet earth, where we pray for hope, peace, joy, and love.

In Jesus name we pray,  
Amen.

Justin Terjesen  
Zion Lutheran Church, Kulm

**My Soul Magnifies the Lord!  
What Are You Praising God For?**

December 25, 2023

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: you, the Almighty, have done great things for me and holy is your name. Luke 1:46b-49*

Silent night, holy night!  
All is calm, all is bright  
round yon virgin mother and child.  
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,  
sleep in heavenly peace,  
sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night!  
Son of God, love's pure light  
radiant beams from your holy face,  
with the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at your birth,  
Jesus, Lord, at your birth.

**Silent Night, Holy Night!** ELW 281 verses 1 and 3

**My Soul Magnifies the Lord!  
What Are You Praising God For?**

December 26, 2023

*The LORD is my strength and my might,  
and he has become my salvation;  
this is my God, and I will praise him,  
my father's God, and I will exalt him. Exodus 15:2*

I had heard many times in my "growing up" years that the Lord is my strength and might. He is also my salvation. I always thought "hmmm maybe" but I had never noticed anything in my life that supported this. I'm not sure what I was expecting. Or maybe I was too young to understand. When my precious father died, I seemed to find strength and might and a quiet calmness. I still didn't associate this to be from the Lord. Our Lord giving me Strength and Might to help me accept my loss. Now, now I understand. Thank God for blessing us more than we deserve.

Sheila Harr  
Atonement Lutheran Church, Jamestown

## **My Soul Magnifies the Lord! What Are You Praising God For?**

December 27, 2023

*So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. Matthew 6:34*

In the passage from Matthew 6:34 it is mentioned that we should not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. This verse hits home for me. I thought I was the only one who is in a constant state of worry. Yet as a 51-year-old woman, one would think I know better. I have spent most of my life in a perpetual state of worry. Somehow thinking that if I worry about everything, that will somehow make a situation better. That clearly doesn't work.

As a child I worried about making good grades, making the basketball team, worrying about making my parents proud. As a young adult I worried about choosing the right college, the right major, making the right career decision. Now I find myself worrying about retirement, about taking care of an aging parent etc. There are always plenty of things to worry about.

Worry must be an inherited gene. My dad used to say he found himself worried when he couldn't think of things to worry about. Like this was going to somehow fix a problem or situation. Clearly worry has done nothing more than to take up time and space that could be used to actually deal with a situation or just be present in the moment. We are reminded that God wants us to be present in the here and now, knowing that He will take care of our future. Read that again. Be present! Worry accomplishes nothing but to take up valuable space in our mind. In a time where society is pulling at us constantly to be on social media, to pay attention to the 100 news outlets, etc.

We need to be deliberate about being present in the situation. Tomorrow is not guaranteed. See today for what it is, an incredible gift. A chance to make a difference in our own lives and in others. Be mindful of what is in front of us right now. Put the phone down, make eye contact with the people we are lucky enough to spend another day with. Be present in the current situation. For worrying about something that may or may not happen tomorrow is a waste of the precious gift of time.

Not worrying about things that are out of my control takes real effort and a gut check now and then. When I feel that worry physically, I know it's time to take a deep breath, and get in the right frame of mind and refocus to be present in the moment. Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Jodi Bruns  
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Ellendale

## **My Soul Magnifies the Lord! What Are You Praising God For?**

December 28, 2023

*Simeon took the infant Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." Luke 2:28-32*

It is easy as a farmer to complain about the weather from time to time. Alright, if I'm being honest with each of you probably even day to day the complaints of weather happen. One could say now as I write this in the beginning of November, "God why did you bring the snow so early?... We just weren't ready yet." As you can imagine, we always know white stuff is coming; we usually are optimistic it's coming later than sooner hopefully.

So that brings me to this past spring...the weather was dryer than average where I live and we couldn't complain about having good weather to get the crops in....we just got more urgent asking God for rain when the cracks in the ground got bigger and bigger. We prayed and prayed for the rain to come and chances diminished every time. Finally, the last weekend in June prayers were answered. God truly prepared and blessed us and all of his people that weekend with a slower, but long needed weekend rain for much of the region.

Early this fall as harvest started it was obvious the wait was well worth it. The yields were significantly better than the past few years. Yet another reminder of how God works on his time and we must trust him. He delivered his salvation for the harvest to be a success! Amen

Derek Hust  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Gackle

**My Soul Magnifies the Lord!  
What Are You Praising God For?**

December 29, 2023

*The crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel. Matthew 15:31*

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;  
to his feet your tribute bring.  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
evermore his praises sing.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Praise the everlasting King!

Tenderly he shields and spares us;  
well our feeble frame he knows.  
In his hands he gently bears us,  
rescues us from all our foes.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Widely as his mercy flows.

**Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven ELW 865 verses 1 and 3\***

\*Text: Henry F. Lyte, 1793-1847. Public Domain

## **My Soul Magnifies the Lord! What Are You Praising God For?**

December 30, 2023

*And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, and all who fear him, small and great."*

*Revelation 19:5*

I'm praising God for saving me. Literally saving me. Instead of drowning I was saved. I was underwater for 18 minutes and when I came out I had no water in my lungs but had a gash in my head. I spent almost 20 minutes talking to God and I was saying that if you save me, I will praise you all of my life. It took me a while to start. I thought that after 5 or 6 years I made a promise, so I better start. This all happened when I was in Korea during the war. We were crossing a dike when the 3/4 Ton rolled. The sergeant jumped out and landed in the grass and the Korean national jumped out and landed in the water, but I was in the middle and couldn't move fast enough when we started to go over. I did see the white light when I was underwater and I kicked toward it. After I broke the surface, they pulled me out. I kept talking to the Doctor about Jesus and he just asked me how hard I hit my head. They sent me to a specialist to see if I was fibbing. Then they sent me back to my unit.

This Bible verse fits right in to my experience. I didn't hear a voice under the water just the urge to Go to the light. I always did have faith, so it really didn't make it any stronger. I am one of God's servants and I will keep praising God.

Delbert Bossingham  
Come to the Table Volunteer

## Rejoice! What Are You Hopeful For?

December 31, 2023

*This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24*

Beautiful sunrises that fill the whole sky, warm weather with just the right amount of heat and breeze, my children all waking up happy, I get out the door without any fighting or forgetting things, or simply me feeling good in my soul.

When I experience these things or any other things that bring me joy, it's easy to shout this bible verse from the rooftops or repetitively sing the song we all learned in Sunday school.

What about the stormy days? What about the bone chilling days? What about the "I am never enough" days? When I am sinking in the mire, I am not rejoicing or being glad for the day God made. I'm thinking more along the lines, "Thanks God, this is JUST what I needed."

How do I rejoice in that or find any hope?

I need to remember God will never leave me or forsake me. Joy is never dependent upon my circumstances. Choosing joy during my struggles takes intention and effort. I must have a conscious connection with God. When I have that connection, hope fills the void I am feeling. I am saved by God's Grace. God wakes me in the morning and gives me breath for the day. Jesus gives me hope and freedom.

*Dear Father,*

*Thank you for creating my days. I pray that I always remember that if I don't feel like there is anything to be rejoicing about, I remember your grace and be glad in that. Amen.*

Sherri Pesek  
Zion Lutheran Church, Kulm



## Rejoice! What Are You Hopeful For?

January 1, 2024

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Philippians 4:4*

What a great verse with which to start the new year! Is there a better way to start the year than with the thought of rejoicing with God all the time? We know that he is always with us. What a comforting feeling to know that no matter what we are doing, God is always with us.

I remember a plaque our daughter had in her kitchen after she got married. It read, "When you go to bed, give your troubles to God. He'll be up all night anyway!" I can remember a few nights during my working years when I had trouble sleeping. I always had something about which to worry, whether it was personal or professional. I would like to say that if I thought of that verse I could go right to sleep. At times I did and it would help, but I can't say I always remembered. Maybe if I had I would have been more aware in my office the next day!!

We can't always be at our best. That's just the way life is. The best we can do is try to be better. Either way, we have to remember that God is always with us. I remember reading about a soldier who was ready to head to the beaches of Normandy. He prayed, "God, if I should happen to forget you today, please don't forget me." We know that won't happen. God is with us, always. Amen

Robert B. Toso  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Jamestown

## Rejoice! What Are You Hopeful For?

January 2, 2024

*Simeon said, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples. Luke 2:29-31*

One thing I think everyone looks forward to every year is the break of the winter snowfall to a warmer spring sun. The feeling of finally seeing the green grass, or the feeling of the warm sun as you see the snow melt away is something I never forget about every year. I think that's why I love spring and fall so much. They are those times of transition between two different extremes. And just like the beginning of spring many start to be more active and awake from the cold slumber. I think the break of that spring time is exactly what this passage means to me. That beginning of a new year, the showing of a new rebirth of both plants and animals. Freed from the chains of the cold; we see the salvation of the rising sun of a new day. And just like the sun it warms everything it touches, it doesn't have a bias nor a reason to keep us warm. The sun will always burn just like God's salvation. So, when asked what Luke 2:29-31 means to me I think it means the salvation of spring coming back to us and being hopeful for a new year and new opportunities. Now Rejoice, And find what you are hopeful for.

Connor Ede  
St. John's Lutheran Church, Jamestown

## Rejoice! What Are You Hopeful For?

January 3, 2024

*See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Luke 10:19-20*

The television industry has been working overtime showing holiday movies. We've seen new productions, reruns, and old classics; and not just through Advent and the season of Christmas but well before Halloween on some channels. Most of these movies show the perfect Christmas! Everything turns out exactly as one hopes for. The homes are beautifully decorated, the turkey is perfectly browned, the cookies look too good to eat and, of course, there's always the happy ending with the kiss that happens as a soft snow falls in the background. However, as many of us know, real life is hardly picture-perfect; it rarely turns out as wonderfully as these holiday movies suggest... for some holidays are accompanied with stinging pain and biting reality. But even in the midst of our messy lives, God has a perfect plan for our redemption. God in Jesus came to earth as a baby in a manger. He came to live among us, to know our struggles and pain, to die on a cross so our relationship with God can be restored. We have hope because of God's unfailing love for us. We have hope because of what Jesus did for us. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, our names are written in heaven. Alleluia! Now that's something to celebrate!

Shar Gumke, Synod Lay Minister  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Gackle  
St. John's Lutheran Church, Jamestown

## Rejoice! What Are You Hopeful For?

January 4, 2024

*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. Romans 5:1-2*

In the Church, the Christmas season has not ended, even though visiting family have probably returned home, we're back to school and work, and it's hard to find Christmas music still playing.

In these last days of the twelve days of Christmas, what we find is reminders of hope.

Hope.

Christ's coming brings us hope.

Hope for peace in the world.

Hope for forgiveness.

Hope for healing.

Hope for new bodies.

Hope, knowing we are going to heaven.

Hope of being reunited with those we love.

We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of Jesus, the door is wide open to God's grace.

Let us rejoice! The hope Christ brings does not get packed away with the tinsel and ornaments. The hope Christ brings gives life to our songs and peace to our hearts. God's grace will carry us through each day of the year ahead and for all that is to come.

Members of Montpelier Lutheran Church

## Rejoice! What Are You Hopeful For?

January 5, 2024

*Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Luke 15:10*

When I saw the first word of the verse assigned to me – Rejoice – I immediately thought of angels and all the songs in our hymnal that connect angels with rejoicing. I don't know how anyone else pictures angels but I have always thought of them as dressed in flowing white with golden hair floating through the air like a feather. I thought that they probably had trumpets to let us know they are around when we need them most. I also believed since childhood that they were there to help us when we were distressed or everything had gone wrong and we needed help because we had followed the wrong path. In one of my Bible references it said that angels might be referred to as neighbors of God, whose joy they witness and share. They are there and interested when one of God's sinners are found after being lost and returned to the fold, the family and the church.

Many of the parables in the 15th chapter of Luke talk about people or things being lost. The prodigal son was lost, representing the sinner who departed from God. The woman who had 10 silver coins, one goes missing and she sweeps every corner until she finds it, symbolic of a sinner who does not know he is lost. The lost sheep that the shepherd leaves the 99 others to search for it until he finds it. This lost sheep represents the sinner that has departed from God.

God does not give up on us, he continues to search until he finds us. I believe when we are found and brought back, God is rejoicing but so are all those angels that are his good neighbors and helpers. They don't lose hope in us even though at times we may lose that hope ourselves. God calls to us as the good shepherd called for the lost sheep and the angels blow their trumpets to let us know where the right path is to follow so that we can return home even though we may have been lost and on the wrong path for a while. We can always find the right path with God's help and the music of angels and there will be much rejoicing when we finally reach home and the neighborhood once again. We are told it takes a community to raise a child. It also takes God and a neighborhood of angels to guide that person throughout their lives until they reach their heavenly home.

Sharron Brady  
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Ellendale

## Rejoice! What Are You Hopeful For?

January 6, 2024

*When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. Matthew 2:10*

What brings you JOY?

My four grandchildren bring me so much joy-- whether it is hearing their voices on the phone, seeing their smiling faces on FaceTime or having them run across the room to give me a great big hug when I first see them in person—this brings such joy to my heart! This joy is God's love made known and revealed to me through these beautiful little ones!

Today, January 6th, is the Day of Epiphany! Epiphany means to reveal or to be made known. On this Day of Epiphany, God acted through the wisemen to reveal his Son, Jesus to all people and all nations. The wisemen traveled far as they followed the bright star and when they saw the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy! Just imagine their joy! The star they had followed stopped at just the right place that Jesus was! The light of the star guided the wisemen to Jesus and revealed God's glory! Upon seeing the child, Jesus, the wiseman knelt down, worshiped and brought him gifts! I can only imagine the joy these wisemen felt in their hearts as they met Jesus in person and saw God's love, hope and peace revealed to them!

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

*Dear Lord, Reveal yourself to us in the ordinary, everyday moments of our lives! Shine your light upon us and fill us with your HOPE, PEACE and JOY in 2024! Amen! Amen! Amen!*

Rev. Linda J. Schauer  
Zion Lutheran Church, Kulm



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