

The First Order

St. Stephen's Parish

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DECEMBER 2016

Reflections

"Comfort, comfort ye my people!"

When you read these words, you may think of our wonderful Advent hymn, or you may think of Handel's *Messiah*, or perhaps you think of the passage in Isaiah where these words appear. As we enter into the holiday season, we can take these words to heart, and hope and pray for God's "comfort," meaning something soothing and consoling, as we gather in the sharp weather with those we love.

And yet.... and yet, the word "comfort" holds a surprise for us. Long before it meant something gentle and compassionate, the word meant "to offer strength, to strengthen." See the second half of the word? Yes, it is fort, a stronghold in the midst of conflict. Our older liturgies, right before the Peace, included a few prayers which were known as the "Comfortable Words," which begin with the lovely image from Matthew's gospel: "Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

Ah. "**Refresh**" you. He doesn't say, "I will let you stop and curl up," but rather implies, "When you have been refreshed, you can push on." Comfortable words, to strengthen God's people on their journey. Strengthen the prophets as they foreshadowed the good news. Strengthen Mary and Joseph on their rough trip to Bethlehem. Strengthen Jesus as his life shifted out of his home and community into his universal and eternal work of reconciliation and healing.

Even the beloved words of our 23rd psalm offer us comfort: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me..." In a

sense, God is handing us God's own walking stick when the road gets rough, to give us strength, give us something to lean on in the dark places.

Dear Ones, as we come to these darkest days in the calendar year, rejoice and be glad! For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. He is the Way, the Truth, the Life, and as George Herbert proclaims, He is "my Light, my Feast, my Strength."

May this season of hope and joy strengthen you on your journey, and yes, offer you all rest and refreshment as we welcome the Light of Lights anew into our hearts and lives.

Cricket +

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Christmas and New Year's Service schedule!

THREE services on Christmas Eve, to which all are welcome!

December 24th, Christmas Eve

5:00 p.m. Festival Holy Eucharist, with handbells and carols (music @ 4:45)

7:00 p.m. Zion Lutheran's Festival Eucharist~ all welcome!

10:00 p.m. Festival Holy Eucharist, full choir and carols (music @ 9:30)

December 25th, Christmas Day

10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist and carols!

"Sleepers wake!":: On Christmas morning, you are warmly invited to wear your pj's to church! We will also be collecting NEW children's pajamas, of every size, to donate locally. Bring Christmas morning, or anytime in December.

This Donation Box will be in the glass corner room of the main sanctuary!

December 31st, Saturday, New Year's Eve

no 5 p.m. service

January 1st, New Year's Day

No 8 a.m. service

10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist and special music with "The Replacements" (thanks, Zion!)

December

Happy Birthday:

- 2 Sue Tourigny
- 3 Connie Biegel (a milestone!)
- 4 William Macfarlane
- 6 Lindsay Devitt (9), Pam Hawkins
- 7 Amanda Beaulieu, Grace Garinther (11), Shane Hassan (14), Adrianna Meyette (10), Suzanne White
- 9 Naomi Brown (17)
- 10 Laura Cookis, Shatava Dowdell (7)
- 11 Claire Cox (97 years young!), Tonya Reynolds, Micah Roberts (8)
- 12 Dylan Thomas (8), Nancy Travis
- 13 Sharon Billetter, Frank McHugh
- 15 Jennifer Stetz
- 16 David Donovan (a milestone!), David Oakes (a milestone!), Hank Rudin (a milestone!)
- 17 Mark Miller, George Stetz (5)
- 18 Madge Buerger (93 years young!), Lois Staffin (a milestone!)
- 19 Carol Gendreau, Gunnar Schroder (5)
- 20 Ken Black, Marilyn McAlister, Brian Wells (15)
- 23 Mabel Cheyne
- 24 Gerald (Rory) O'Connor
- 25 Barbara Steele
- 26 Jason Hassan, Kaleb LePage (14)
- 27 Jameail Hand (13), Brody Kaley (12)
- 29 Susan LeBourdais
- 31 Andrew Beaudoin

Happy Anniversary:

- 4 Kristi and Michael La Malfa (2004)



from Joseph

And the season of Advent is now upon us! It's honestly one of my favorite seasons: amazing hymns, the excitement of the coming Christmas holiday, and the opportunity to minister to the deep spiritual longing of the season. For so many, the holidays can be confusing or difficult for a variety of reasons, and it's also a time of year that some of the deeper spiritual questions come bubbling up to the surface for people.

But that also means we should be attentive to our own spiritual needs, too. For the 9:00 Sunday forum, we're going to do "Advent Poetry" (no, you don't have to write your own poem! Unless you want to!) - looking at poetry and hymn texts to appreciate the message behind them and to savor the beauty of language. Do you have a favorite poem you think we should talk about? Send it my way - doesn't have to be "religious" in an obvious sense, either.

Youth Group will meet one Sunday in December (the 11th) and we hope will have another event either to serve or have fun (or, this may be crazy, both!) - details aren't ready as of press time but stay tuned!

Do you all know the wonderful ministry of Forward Movement, that organization in the Episcopal Church that produces "Forward Day by Day" the daily devotional? Just this fall they released a series of fantastic new resources, two of which I commend to you. One is "Inwardly Digest: The Prayer Book as Guide to the Spiritual Life" which talks about the spirituality of our prayer book (and has a lot of great information on all the services!) and the other is "The Path: A Journey Through the Bible" which gives a great overview of the story of the entire Bible using the Bible's own language (with some paraphrasing in places) to help us understand what's happening without getting lost in hard-to-understand references. Both are amazing resources, and, who knows, maybe they will be featured in a future class!

Have a wonderful Advent, everyone!

Zion Lutheran's Jazz Vespers @ St Stephen's!

Come December 1st, for their monthly jazz vespers, in our sanctuary!

There's food and music, starting from 5:30 p.m.

All welcome~ bring a friend!

Yule for Fuel: Sunday, December 18, at 3:00 p.m.

This event, a joint effort of Zion Lutheran Church and the Berkshire Concert Choir, is a great holiday gathering, for carol singing and fellowship.

It is a wonderful outreach opportunity, as a free-will offering is gathered up and given to the Pittsfield Area Council of Congregations for the emergency fuel fund.

Warm your hearts, and warm your neighbors, by joining together for terrific Christmas music!



*Let us go to Bethlehem
and see this event
which the Lord has made
known to us*

Advent, Mindfulness, and Children

Craig Reynolds, Church School Director

“Many people lose the small joys in the hope for the big happiness.”

– Pearl Buck

“Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.”

– John Lennon

It’s December. Joy, hope, and anticipation hang in the air. But too often so do stress, sadness, and exhaustion.

Advent – the season of waiting and preparation – whispers to us through all of this intense and often confusing emotion. Its message is simple:

“The waiting and the preparation – these are gifts too.”

We know this is true. We experience it for ourselves all the time. It’s why *making* the cookies together can be more satisfying than eating the cookies.

So how do we hold on to this promise of Advent? One potential answer is mindfulness. Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present in *this* moment, noticing – and accepting – life as it *is*, right here, right now.

Children need to hear Advent’s message as much as adults do. And children can – and do – practice mindfulness quite naturally. But mindfulness can be easier to recommend than to practice. Here are three quick ideas for practicing mindfulness with children during Advent...

1. **Establish a daily family ritual for Advent.** Perhaps it’s lighting your Advent wreath together each morning or evening. Or maybe it’s opening today’s date on the Advent calendar together. A quick, simple prayer can also serve to center us for the day. Rituals help interrupt the “what’s next” cycle by helping us focus on “what’s here.”

2. **Log moments of joy.** Research has shown that people who write down their positive experiences in a daily diary report greater feelings of life satisfaction. But the effect may require only simple awareness of these moments and sharing them with someone else. How long would it take everyone in your family to reveal one positive moment in their day?

3. **Be curious about your emotions – and encourage this curiosity in your children.** Being mindful of your emotions means paying attention to *all* your feelings – even ones that may make us uncomfortable. Next time you notice a strong reaction, move closer to it rather than pushing it away. Notice where in your body you feel it the most. Are your shoulders tense? Is your breath tight? Do your belly and face hurt from laughing? Maybe make a space for the feeling to exist and just allow it to be. Notice as it naturally fades on its own.

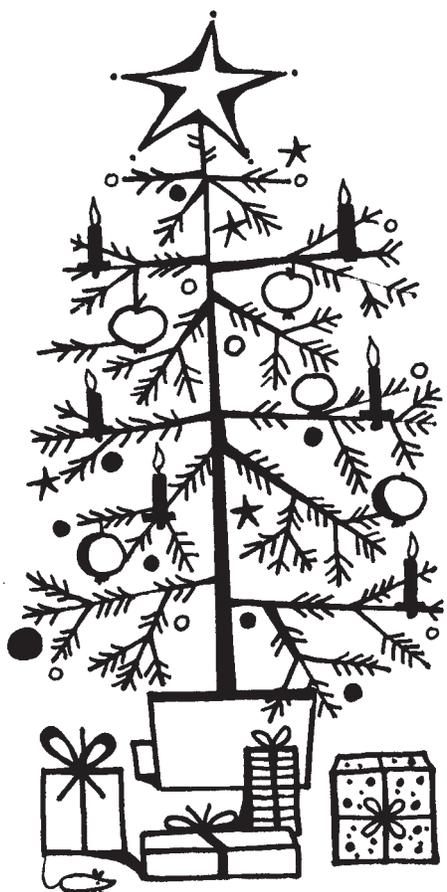
What if, as author Tim Kreider has suggested, so many of the parts of life we rush through to get to the “Good Parts” are, in fact, the Good Parts? Mindfulness – paying careful attention moment by moment – may be one way to ensure we don’t miss the gifts of the season, wherever we may stumble upon them.

Did You Know?

That **Grady Pedersen**, along with 3 other students, worked with the school art teacher (Colleen Quinn) and carpentry teacher (Tom Renton) to help construct a Thomas the Train costume for Elliott Zuker, 2, who uses a wheelchair due to the effect of spina bifida. The costume fit over the wheelchair. How great!

Christmas Envelope

Included with this copy of the *First Order* is a special Christmas offering envelope. Please use it with your usual generous spirit. Thank you!



Beer and Carols – is this a “Thing”?

*Come, meet and mingle with
members of Zion Lutheran Church!*

**Wednesday, December 21st,
at 7:00 p.m.**

Love to sing carols? Enjoy sharing a beer – **or equally attractive non-alcoholic beverage** – with others? Want a chance to meet some of our Lutheran neighbors and visitors while they join us for the next few months?

Step away from your home-holiday madness and come enjoy some holiday cheer here, with us! And sing your favorite carols!

Jesse Tree Gift Tags to be available on Advent I, November 27th

Gifts this year will assist parishioners who would like some help with holiday gifts and clothing, and will also benefit the Berkshire Immigrant Center.

In addition there is an ongoing pajama drive, for new children’s pajamas, which will be donated locally during Christmas week (recipient TBA!)

St. Nick will join us at the 10:00 a.m. service on December 11th and will take our gifts to the North Pole before they are distributed, so get your gift tags early!

St. Stephen's Parish

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Warm Heads, Warm Hearts Update

Weekly distribution is underway and supplies are doing well except for men's hats. If you have any extras, please consider donating them to those in need. It's getting cold now and the need will increase.

All handmade items or gently used hats, gloves and scarves are greatly appreciated; sweaters and jackets are accepted as well. We continue to need items for adult men and women, though children's hats and gloves of any size are also welcome. Any children's items will go to the Redfield House, who are very appreciative of your kindness.

I thank you for all you have done and ask that you stay safe and warm.

Connie Bullard, cgbooks30@verizon.net