

Inspired By Christ, it is our mission
to share God's Word and Love in care
and in service to all.

THE GRACE MESSENGER



December 2006 - January 2007

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church

1326 South 26th Street
Omaha, NE 68105-2380

Return Service Requested

Phone: (402) 341-7730

Email: graceluth@graceluth.com

Web Site: www.graceluth.com

REGULAR SUNDAY EVENTS

9:00 A.M. Christian Education

10:30 A.M. Worship Service

Pastor - Rev. Dr. Damon D. Laaker

Editor/Church Secretary – Pam Reents

Sudanese Ministries - John Ivo Mounto

Youth Ministries - Brenda Spahr

Organist - Cody Talarico

Sexton - Ambros Lado

Interfaith Health Ministries - Virginia McGill

Faith in Action - Julie Chytil

Non-Profit Org.

U.S. Postage

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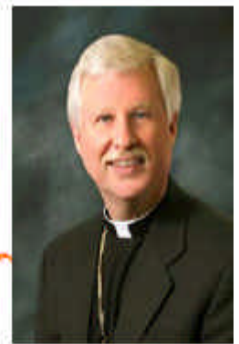
Omaha NE

Permit No. 39



a child of God considers ...

from Bishop deFreese



A PARABLE

"See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God." Hebrews 12:15

"A man went out for a pleasant afternoon drive. The weather was beautiful, the sun was shining, and the sky was one of God's best. As the road began to curve, a car approached from the opposite direction with a young woman half-hanging out of the window. She swerved ever so slightly as she passed him and, at that moment, yelled at him, "PIG!"

Stunned by this epithet from a total stranger, the fellow roared on around the curve. Then, as he started to fume and fuss over such outrageous behavior, the unexpected happened. His car ran into the largest pig he had ever seen." (Royal Yount, Jr., "Voices of Congregational Life" Volume 10 #3, Summer 1998)

Fascinating how we do not hear warnings and the encouragement to change...but rather, we are so readily offended...even if it is for our own good!

Each Sabbath, my Assistants and I worship with different congregations within our Nebraska Synod. These experiences are truly joyful as we get to know and partner with these communities of faith who make up Christ's Church. We are thankful and genuinely benefit from these opportunities.

However...we also lament, far too often, that the hospitality experienced, the welcoming of the stranger into the community, was lacking. Too often, our congregations do not receive outsiders with the warmth and embrace that enables the Gospel message to be felt as good news. Sensitivity to the visitor does not express itself as a priority within the congregation.

Just as the young woman alerted the driver for his own good: "PIG"...hear me clearly advocate: **WE ALL NEED TO WORK HARDER AT HOSPITALITY!**

We need our congregations to be gatherings that exhibit the gracious acceptance and hopeful welcome of our Savior. Our parishes must be places where people experience Jesus with outstretched arms that enfold them into this embrace. Christ's words of love take root deeply when a person has felt received and cared for. We are to be about the work of welcoming.

Let me offer a few areas I ask that your Congregational Councils address:

COMPLACENCY...Most, if not all of our congregations perceive themselves as warm, welcoming communities. This is probably true...for insiders, the members. We need to overcome our own self-satisfaction and re-focus on how we can welcome visitors better. How can we offer a more hospitable atmosphere to those who are coming for the first or second time? Is this an honest priority within your parish? If you expect no visitors, it will be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

WORK...It takes effort and hard work to set up systems that enable hospitality to be felt. Please work at creating an environment that seeks the outsider and includes and involves them. Do you train greeters to be more than "hand-shakers" and ushers to do more than pass out bulletins? Do you have folks assigned to host visitors at the coffee or fellowship time? Do you have a system that recognizes visitors without embarrassing or overwhelming them? What are your follow-up efforts after they have worshipped with you the first time? Are you wisely using the spiritual gifts of members to enhance these hospitality efforts?

SENSITIVITY...Some thing has brought that visitor to worship this first time...Some thing in their life or thinking. Paul Tillich said, "The first law of love is to listen." Visitors walk in our doors awaiting news on biopsies, hoping for help with family traumas or searching for purpose. A myriad of reasons cause people to "try" for spiritual help. Do we sensitize our congregations to listen and respond? Do we offer devotional and spiritual resources? Do we offer to pray with visitors?

Behind all these areas of focus is our continual question: "What does it mean to be the Church?" Do we understand Christ's calling to be His Body and to exist for others?

While this concentration on hospitality may not seem to be Advent and Christmas like...it most certainly is! As we anticipate and celebrate the One who came...we also sadly recognize the fact "that there was no room in the inn." The innkeeper probably was not a bad person...maybe simply complacent, did not want to work harder, or was insensitive. We dare not be any of these.

Be the people of God...the very Body of Christ. Be a community of gracious hospitality, of warm embrace. Welcome the stranger.

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

Hebrews 13:2

Blessings! David L. deFreese, a child of God and bishop



Praise God for Christmas.

Praise Him for the incarnation,
for the word made flesh.

I will not sing of shepherds
watching flocks on frosty nights,
or angel choristers.

I will not sing of a stable bare in Bethlehem,
or lowing oxen,
wise men trailing star with gold,
frankincense, and myrrh.

Tonight I will sing praise to the Father
who stood on heaven's threshold
and said farewell to his Son
as he stepped across the stars
to Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

And I will sing praise to the infinite, eternal Son,
who became most finite, a baby
who would one day be executed for my crime.
Praise him in the heavens,
Praise him in the stable,
Praise him in my heart.

Joseph Bayly

Dear Friends and Members of Grace,

The author invites us to praise God. God has stepped into our life and has become one like us in Jesus, our Christ. We are invited to open our heart.

I invite you to take time and come. Come and praise God for this gift given. Come and experience the rich blessing of God. God offers each of us a gift full of hope and strength.

My family and I are blessed by your love and care. We cherish your prayers. You bring rich blessings to our hearts. We thank you for being such a rich part of our lives.

We invite you to join us in celebration of the birth of our Christ.

December 24, 10:30 a.m. Fourth Sunday Advent Worship
December 24, 11:00 p.m. Carols Communion, and Candle lighting

May we praise God for Christ Jesus! Merry Christmas!

Pastor and Mary Laaker



**Next Grace Lutheran
Men in Mission Breakfast
Saturday,
January 20, 2007
8:00 a.m.**



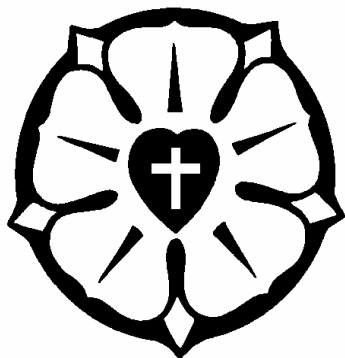
**W/ELCA Board
Meeting
January 8th
at the church.
1:00 p.m.**

W/ELCA Circle Meeting

January 16
1:00 p.m.

Hostess :

“On Being Lutheran” Study



“Reflections on Church, Theology, and Faith”

Understanding the words of Martin Luther and applying them today.

Selected Tuesday Evenings 7:00 p.m. in the Upper Fellowship Hall
Come to one session or all of them! **Drop-in's Welcome!**

Session Topics:

January 16, 2007 - “The Restless Word”

What is the ELCA's specific view on the authority of Scripture?

February 6, 2007- “Yardstick of Faith”

Helping us to remember what we believe through the
Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.

Our Mitten tree is filling up thanks to the generosity of our church family. Many hand made items have been donated as well as lovely store-bought items. The tree will continue to stand until at least the end of December/early January when the items will be divided among several organizations. Look for more details in the February Newsletter.

If you see a great buy on warm winter accessories after the mitten tree program is over, don't forget our Sudanese friends. Drop off any winter items at the church office and we will see that a needy family gets them. We have been able to give many of them gloves and hats but there is always a need for more.



Rejoice Glory

IN THE
OF CHRISTMAS



Candle Light Services
11:00 p.m.

Adult Choir
Candles
Carols
Readings
Scripture

O Come,
Let Us Adore Him!

"There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified.

The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:

Glory to God in the heavenly heights,
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.

As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherders talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.

Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child.

All who heard the shepherders were impressed.

The Message, Luke 2:8-12

Prayer Concerns
from
Family and Friends



- ◆ Thelma Harrahill - Recovery at home from on-going illness. (member)
- ◆ Andrew Edwards - Doing dialysis a couple times a week until a kidney can be found. (member)
- ◆ Rex Olson - for healing as he deals with cancer. (Don and Norma Olson)
- ◆ Rose Hamilton - Healing for her cancer. (Aunt of members, Andrew and Christi Edwards)
- ◆ Frances Campsey - Health concerns. (member)
- ◆ Linda Whitney - Struggling with on-going cancer. (Friend of LaVonne Moss)
- ◆ Dan Reents - In remission, Pray for continued healing. (Brother-in-law Pam Reents)
- ◆ Ernie Olson - On-going therapy after his stroke. (member)
- ◆ Alice Friedlander - Healing for a back injury. (member)
- ◆ Darlene Spahr - COPD, hospitalized and very sick. (member, Brenda Spahr's mother-in-law.)
- ◆ Evelyn Reimer - Recovery after her lower leg had to be amputated. (member)
- ◆ Harlan Morter - Recovering at home after being hospitalized. (member)
- ◆ Betty Coniglio - Recovery at home after being hospitalized. (member)
- ◆ Ron Andersen - Tests being done for tremors. (member)
- ◆ Mae Lane - Recovering at Lutheran Home after being hospitalized. (member)
- ◆ Ana Lopez - Teen with long term medical needs. (Family involved in ESL food basket project)
- ◆ Ambros Lado - Long term rehab ahead for recovery from a stroke. (member)
- ◆ Seth Goodman - Guidance and strength to overcome his addiction in rehab.
(Nephew of Pam Reents, Church Secretary.)

Pray for strength and spiritual wisdom for the leaders in the local church and the Nebraska Synod:

Pastor Laaker, Grace Lutheran Church

Bishop David deFreese, Nebraska Synod

Bishop Mark Hanson, ELCA Bishop, United States

Pray for wisdom for your Church Council and the NCD Team as they lead Grace Church.

Sudanese Church Requests

- ◆ Ivo Munto - Praise God! Ivo left for Southern Sudan on November 15th. At the time of this newsletter, the church is awaiting word on when Ivo will be back in the States. He was scheduled to
- ◆ Ambros Lado and family - In mid November, Ambros suffered a severe stroke. Ambros has been a blessing to the people of Grace Church and has acted as the church custodian. Ambros faces a long rehabilitation. Praise God for the faithfulness of His people. The fundraiser soup supper was a huge success. People from Grace Church, the Latino community, the Synod community and churches throughout the metro gave generously.
- ◆ Pray for Elizabeth Lado, Ambros' wife. Because Ambros is unable to work to support his wife and five children, Elizabeth is trying to find a job. Elizabeth was a nurse in Sudan but because of the differences in licensing requirements cannot get a job in the field without extensive language and medical education. Pray the right employment can be found to help this family with their daily living expenses.



JOIN US AFTER SCHOOL

**4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Monday thru Thursday**

**Games, Crafts, and Fun
Geared for Elementary Kids!**

Free!

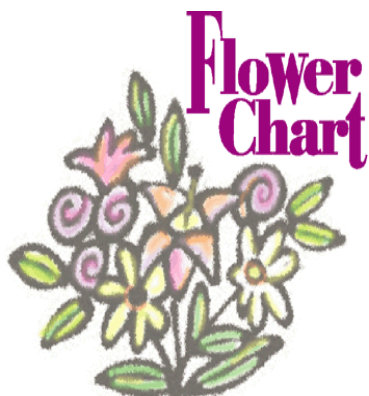
Director, Brenda Spahr
Assistant, Frances Campsey

There will be no After School Program during winter break.
The program will resume on January 8



Quilting on Mondays! at 9:00 a.m.

If you have the morning free, drop by and help cut squares and tie quilt tops on to the backs. Coffee break is at 10:00 a.m. The quilts go to Lutheran World Relief.



Flower Chart

**The 2007 Flower Chart has been posted on
the bulletin board outside the church office.**

The Flower Chart sign-up is your opportunity to sponsor flowers for a special Sunday in honor of an important event in your family's life or in memory of someone dear to you. The cost to sponsor flowers for a Sunday is \$12.00.

Operation SOS (SAVE OUR SECRETARY)

(from being frazzled, pressured, grumpy and generally anxious!)

Annual Report Time!

All chairpersons from each committee and organization should have their annual report summary in by the first week of January. The treasurer's reports will be due the second week of January. Please try to meet these deadlines so that our report can be put together for distribution on Sunday, January 21. The Annual Meeting and Potluck is scheduled for January 28th.

Please turn your reports in on time!



"Helping Hands"

Working Together in God's service



Project Hope
4205 Boyd St
Omaha, NE 68111

Project Hope The Theme for January is **Baking Supplies**



Flour, Sugar, Brown Sugar,
Cooking Oil, Baking Powder,
Baking Soda, Shortening, Bisquick

Project Hope always needs boxes of zip lock bags in quart or gallon size, soup, peanut butter, macaroni, pasta, rice, diapers, bathroom tissue and Toiletries, feminine hygiene items, soap and paper products.



Our youth will hold soup pots at church doors on Souper Bowl Sunday, February 4, 2007. They will join young people in churches all across the country to collect money for those who are hungry and hurting.

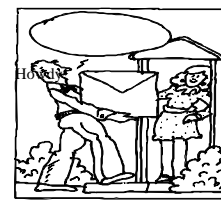
In 2006, youth groups in all 50 states and outside the United States participated in the Souper Bowl of Caring generating \$5,010,510.66. All of the money collected is donated to a charity selected by the participant. None of the money is sent to Souper Bowl headquarters.

Organizers only ask that each participant report their collection so national totals can be determined and announced. Our church will donate the Souper Bowl collection to the Lutheran Pantry. Since the Souper Bowl of Caring became a national grassroots event in 1993, more than \$29 million has gone to help those in need. Please support the youth of our church in this effort to "love our neighbors" by dropping your dollar in the soup pot on February 4, 2007.

"He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker,
but whoever is kind to the needy honors God."

Proverbs 14:31

Community News



Columbus Park Neighborhood Association

Next Meeting - January 18, 2007 7:00 p.m.
Grace Lutheran Church - 1326 S 26 St.

**Membership dues are only
\$5.00 a year per household!**

CPNA
1326 S 26 Street
Omaha, NE 68105

Call 341-7730 for more information.



*Make every effort
to keep the unity of
the Spirit through
the bond of peace.*

E p h e s i a n s 4 : 3

Joint Worship Service Scheduled for January 21, 2007

Several churches of different denominations have scheduled a joint worship service at Wheeler Memorial Presbyterian Church for Sunday, January 21, 2007. Wheeler Presbyterian Church is located at 23rd and J Street in South Omaha. The service will begin at 10:30 a.m.

Grace Lutheran Church will not have services here at the church on that Sunday. However, Sunday School classes will still meet at 9:00 a.m. at the church. Look for more information in the bulletin in the coming weeks.



Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Martin Luther King Unity Services Scheduled

- ♦ Sunday, January 14, 2007 at 7:00 p.m. at Holy Name Catholic Church, 2901 Fontenelle Blvd. Omaha, NE. The Speaker will be Reverend C.L. Bachus, Senior Pastor of the Mt. Zion Baptist in Kansas City, Kansas.
- ♦ Monday, January 15, 2007 - City Wide Celebration at the Holland Performing Arts Center at 7:00 p.m. Presented by the City of Omaha Human Rights & Relations Department.

"I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land! I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land."

Martin Luther King, Jr

From an address given in Memphis the night before his assassination, April 3, 1968

News from the Families of Grace Lutheran Church

- ◆ Congratulations to David Hufford for winning honorable mention in the poetry completion of the "Writer's Digest," a national publication. David's entry placed in the top 100 out of almost 19,000 entries. If you would like to read David's entry, a copy of the poem will be posted on the bulletin board. Well done, David! Additionally, David Hufford was featured in the Nebraska Lutheran Newspaper this month for his missions work in Slovakia and China. A copy of that article will also be posted on the bulletin board.
- ◆ Thanks to the many people from the congregation and the community for their generous gifts of food and money for the Sudanese Christmas Food Baskets. We were able to fill 15 baskets with canned goods, pasta, rice, food staples, paper supplies, cleaning products and a \$20.00 gift certificate for produce and meat at a local grocery store. One of our congregations members provided little bags of candy and stocking stuffers to be included in the gift baskets. Three people from the Service Learning Community of UNO and the ESL teachers participated in assembling the gift baskets. Thanks again to all who generously gave.
- ◆ Thanks to all the folks who came out for the Soup Supper fund-raising event for our Sudanese brother, Ambros Lado. Because of your faithfulness, over \$4,000.00 was raised to help the family with living expenses and medical expenses. Look at the great time we had!



People from Grace & all over the Metro joined us!



Our youth & young adults pitched in.



Ambros' co-workers from the Marriott attended.



People stayed to do the cleanup! Thanks, folks!

- ◆ Thanks to the Rejoice Lutheran Church Choir for sharing their advent cantata with Grace Lutheran Church on Sunday, December 10th. The choir, under the direction of Ray Swartz, performed during the 10:30 worship service. A cookie reception followed the worship service.



- ◆ Grace Lutheran enjoyed the Sunday School Christmas Program during morning worship on Sunday, December 17th. A special thanks to Grace Traynor for her organization. Thanks to Brenda Spahr, Norma Olson Julia Traynor and Samantha Trejo for their behind the scenes support.



Cast members, Alicia Adrian, Angelina Adrian, Alexandra Everitt, Angela Everitt, Shaban Lado, Shedu Lado, Sonia Lado, Sherif Lado, Omaina Lado, Telly Mounto, Andrea Spahr, Samantha Trejo and Julia Traynor.



Cousins, Sonia Lado (left) and Telly Mounto (right)
Mugging for the camera!

Christmas Greetings



Dear family and friends,

It's been an amazing year of change for me with mom's death followed by a new call and move to Colorado. I'm finally over altitude sickness. Now that I have my "mountain legs" I'm out hiking the mountain trails and loving the gorgeous views. I also love the constant sunshine. It's always sunny, even after a snowstorm. Last summer, I visited Mt. Vernon with my son, Tim. It was great to George and Martha Washington's home after reading so much about them. We also toured the Walton museum (a favorite TV. show.) I was blessed to spend Thanksgiving with my son, Aaron and visit some friends nearby.

I am so thankful for all God has done in my life this year. May God bless you and your family with much love this Christmas.

Sandra Templeton

Sandra was our Associate In Ministry for Outreach a few years ago.

Merry Christmas to our friends in Christ from Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of New Orleans!

This year marks our first Christmas back at our Grace Lutheran Church building following Hurricane Katrina. Last year, we celebrated Jesus' birth in the funeral chapel we used for worship from October to Easter. We are truly thankful to be back home! We joyfully celebrate this blessed season with you, our new friends in Christ.

Since August 29, 2005, you have given us your prayers, time, talents and gifts, answering Jesus' call to "love that neighbor as thyself." Volunteer worker (angels!) have come from northern Wisconsin to southern Florida, from the State of Washington to North Carolina, and just about everywhere in between. It is now our turn to share our blessing and resources to further the rebirth. Our rebuilding efforts include plans for housing future volunteer groups and youth groups, as so much work remains to be done in the New Orleans area. With you love and help, Grace Lutheran Churchy has become an oasis in the midst of devastation, both literally and figuratively. We are providing hope to the residents of the surrounding area that together, we can "make all things new."

You are in our hearts and prayers this Christmas as we celebrate Christ's birth at Grace Lutheran Church. To quote the ELCA presiding Bishop, Reverend Mark Hanson, "We hear the angel say 'Do not be Afraid.' With that message of courage, we realize as believers that we are never alone. We have been claimed by God and made a part of the household of faith."

If you plan to visit New Orleans, please join us in worship. We would love to show you how you made it possible for us to continue to serve our Lord!

The Congregation of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Orleans
5800 Canal Boulevard, New Orleans, LA 70124

More info and pictures are posted on the web at www.gracenola.com

Grace Lutheran of Omaha and other churches around the country named Grace Lutheran banded together to raise money for Grace Lutheran Church of New Orleans to aid in restoration after the Katrina Hurricane.





Virginia McGill, Director
Gabriella Ortiz, Assistant
Gema Wolde, Assistant
Douglas County Health Department
Se habla español .

I have been gone on maternity leave for three action-packed months and instead of reporting on Interfaith activities, I wanted to say thank you to all the Interfaith congregation members and pastors who have supported me and my husband in our parenting journey.

We are the ever-doting parents of Jack Pablo, who just turned three. In August, we were blessed to welcome Nicolas William into our family.

Many of you have met Jack, a shy but social and smiley chap who loves to "borrow" Tonka cars and trucks from Grace, St. Luke's, Wheeler and Cristo Rey. Jack is timid initially, but opens up to others after a warming up period.

Nicolas is more of an extroverted child. Little seems to inhibit him and he is ALWAYS on the move. He was born at a mere 5 pounds, so he is still catching up to his peers in weight. What he lacks in size he makes up for with his big personality and equally big hair. Nicolas smiles with his eyes and has a penchant for mischief. He enjoys books and being read to and adores his brother, Jack. We are doubly blessed.

During maternity leave, I often reflected on the pearls of wisdom shared with me by colleagues and the women who participate in our Interfaith exercise programs. I wrote their quotes in Nick's baby book so that he will have something to ask me about when he is older. I am sharing a handful of those pearls below (and am not quoting folks exactly) because they were such a part of my time away and helped me put our transitions as a family into perspective:

"We all have our issues in parenting. My son won't sleep in his crib until he first falls asleep in his car seat and then we have to transfer him to the crib!" Julie

"Will you raise Nick to be a Possumette Baseball fan?" (Note: my high school team in Arkansas was the Possum Trot Possums. Oh how I wish this were made up, but it is true). Pam and Brenda

"You think you are forgetful with having two kids. Imagine how it feels to have three!!!!" Gaby

"Each child is very different. I've raised enough to know that." Rose Mary

"With the first child you notice everything, every step, every new word, you take pictures of the baby all the time. With the second, as long as he isn't eating lead paint, you let him go." Gloria

"Don't worry about saving money now for his education. Just save for the therapy he will need as a teenager!" Patty

"Do we need to worry that your sons don't have anything more than a Charlie Brown Tree for their Christmas photo?" Pastor Laaker

"Children are a blessing no matter how young they are or how old you feel." Gema

Thanks again for your support during this time away. I look forward to catching up and hearing your updates in the future!

Virginia McGill, Interfaith Director



As we close 2006, I thought I would share some stories from both care receivers and volunteers from a *Faith in Action* program.

I cannot explain how fun it has been to visit my couple! It is the best experience you will ever have. They are so sweet, and I am attached to them. I will continue visiting them as long as I can. You learn so much from them. Every time I walk into their house I feel very welcomed. This has been the most wonderful experience ever! You cannot find a more caring couple than the one I got to meet. I feel very luck to be able to be with them. We have wonderful conversations... I found out you learn a lot from visiting others. They also get to learn a lot because they cannot always get out of the house. They always tell me how much they enjoy my company. I got to visit them before prom and take pictures.

-Whitney, volunteer

She (Whitney) is a wonderful, sincere girl, and very happy. We're lucky to have her.

-Mary Jane, care-partner

I have already gained so much from being a volunteer in Interfaith Caregivers. Many times one lady I visit has repeated how much she loves me there and how much she enjoys hearing stories. And since she is legally blind, we read the newspaper and cut things out to paste into her scrapbook. We occasionally take walks outside... I also visit (along with a friend) Wes & Gladys. They are amazing and have taught me to go and make my life worthwhile with all of their adventures and traveling stories.

-Emilie, volunteer

We enjoy having Katie & Emily visit. The company is very important to us.

-Wes & Gladys, care-partners

(Stories shared from the article: "Bridges Program Enriches Lives"
By Virginia Haase, Program Director, Interfaith Caregivers *Faith in Action*)

You can be part of the *Faith in Action* program, too. We are always in need of volunteers who want to make a difference in the life of someone in our community. In addition, if you know anyone who can benefit from the services that *Faith in Action* provides, please let our office know.

Merry Christmas and Best Wishes for a Healthy and Happy New Year!

Julie Chytil, *Faith in Action* of Interfaith Health Service
660-2652

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith your God.”

Isaiah 40:1



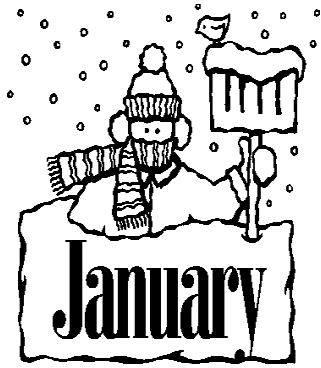
This past week, my husband and I went to see the movie “The Nativity” for our Christmas night with our friends Rick and Marilee. As I watched the Christmas story portrayed by the actors, I was moved by the difficult life that the people were living under the tyranny of the Roman Empire. Poverty, pain, and desperate conditions marked the lives of the average Jewish family. As the movie unfolded, the longing for the Messiah became stronger and stronger as the corruption and greed of the captors increased. Yet when Mary finally announced her pregnancy, the child conceived by the Holy Spirit, her friends and family didn’t want to believe her. As weary and tired as her people were, they did not dare to believe that the Messiah was really on the way. I wondered if I had lived during that time if I would have believed this miraculous announcement or if I would have been skeptical, too. When the Christ Child was born, the angels proclaimed the good news. After a time, wise men from the east came to worship him after following a special star. The star shone so bright that these men had to come and see. Unknown to most the people of that time, the relationship between God and man would change. After the sacrifice of this perfect child on the cross, we would have free access to the God of Creation.

As I have been trying to prepare for the celebration of the birth of the Christ Child, the Son of God, I struggle with many feelings of weariness. The world around me seems to be spinning downward as people at large aren’t as thoughtful to one another in the stores or on the highways. “I am more important than you.” It doesn’t really matter if I obey the law as long as I don’t get caught.” “Me first.” There are wars and rumors of war. Families are fractured and dysfunctional. Young people are killing one another in metropolitan cities are the country. Parents are mourning for their children who have chosen lifestyles that dishonor their bodies and God. The Golden Rule “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” doesn’t resonate. Oh, how weary is the land!

But...I have a hope! The prophet Isaiah proclaimed, “Comfort!” A promise has been given and a promise has been fulfilled. It is the joyful knowledge that that little baby born in Bethlehem so long ago comes to bring light to the weary lands. His birth means that, unlike the gods of other faiths, He became flesh and lived among us. Emmanuel, God with us! He understands our needs because He experienced them Himself. He lived as a poor tradesman with no entitlement. He experienced sadness, pain, and experienced the sinful world. He understands us because He live a mortal life. He was both man and God. His sinless life and sacrificial death provided a way for us to commune with God, the Father.

So as the New Year begins, I ask you, “Are you still living in a weary land?” I am here to tell you that the light is shining and an invitation has been extended to you to come and see. Will you come and look into the face of the Christ Child and accept His miraculous birth as your opportunity to know your Heavenly Father?

Pam Reents, Editor



Special Days in January at Grace Church

- ◆ 1 - Happy New Year
- ◆ 9 - Church Council Meets.
- ◆ 13 - Survival ESL Classes fro Sudanese Women resume.
- ◆ 15 - Martin Luther King Day. Federal Holiday.
- ◆ 16 - "On Being Lutheran Study."
- ◆ 21 - Unity Service at Wheeler Presbyterian Church. No Service at Grace.

'Twas the month after Christmas, and all through
the house
Nothing would fit me, not even a blouse.

The cookies I'd nibbled, the eggnog I'd taste
At the holiday parties had gone to my waist.

When I got on the scales there arose such a num-
ber!
When I walked to the store (less a walk than a
lumber).

I'd remember the marvelous meals I'd prepared;
The gravies and sauces and beef nicely rared,

The wine and the rum balls, the bread and the
cheese
And the way I'd never said, "No thank you,
please."

As I dressed myself in my husband's old shirt
And prepared once again to do battle with dirt---

I said to myself, as I only can
"You can't spend a winter disguised as a man!"

So--away with the last of the sour cream dip,
Get rid of the fruit cake, every cracker and chip

Every last bit of food that I like must be banished
"Till all the additional ounces have vanished.

I won't have a cookie--not even a lick.
I'll want only to chew on a long celery stick.

I won't have hot biscuits, or corn bread, or pie,
I'll munch on a carrot and quietly cry.

I'm hungry, I'm lonesome, and life is a bore---
But isn't that what January is for?

Unable to giggle, no longer a riot.
Happy New Year to all and to all a good diet!



**Ever wonder about
people who pay \$2
for a bottle of Evian
water?**

**Just spell "Evian"
backwards**



**"I've been on a constant diet for the
last two decades. I've lost a total of
789 pounds. By all accounts, I should
be hanging from a charm bracelet."**

Erma Bombeck

Luke Christmas Puzzle

WORD LIST

afraid	great	tidings
all	heavenly	time
amazed	host	told
angel	in	us
appeared	inn	
baby	Jesus	
be	Joseph	
Bethlehem	kept	
betrothed	let	
birth	line	
born	Lord	
bring	made	
Caesar	men	
census	Nazareth	
Christ	no	
day	peace	
end	pondered	
expecting	praising	
fields	register	
Gabriel	Savior	
Galilee	see	
glorifying	shepherds	
God	son	
gone	swaddling	

y
 a l e
 d p n e d
 s d l e i f a
 d r o l v a p u m
 i c a p c
 l s n e g a e
 a i d a h n e m h
 g d n r e g i s t e r
 e e m o y a u
 d s h i n i r g s
 a i m p t e f n d a e
 a m a z e d o i e e v a j
 r l h h l r j x i
 c f n s d e o t p o a
 m h a g d d s l t e r n l
 b o r n a n e h g h c b g v l
 i w o p o b i r t h e
 d s p h s g a b r i e l g
 i n t h t e r a z a n y b a b
 t p e k p r a i s i n g n i r b
 e r i
 p r b
 d o g

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I MAY NOT BE A "WISE MAN," BUT AT
LEAST I NEVER GOT SO LOST I HAD TO ASK
HEROD FOR DIRECTIONS.



Hmmmm....

If you're in a vehicle going the
speed of light, what happens
when you turn on the head-
lights?

Why do we sing "Take me out to
the ball game" when we're al-
ready there?

When you go in for a job inter-
view, I think a good thing to ask
is if they ever press charges.

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