

CONGREGATIONAL CHRONICLES



Declaring the Good News to all.

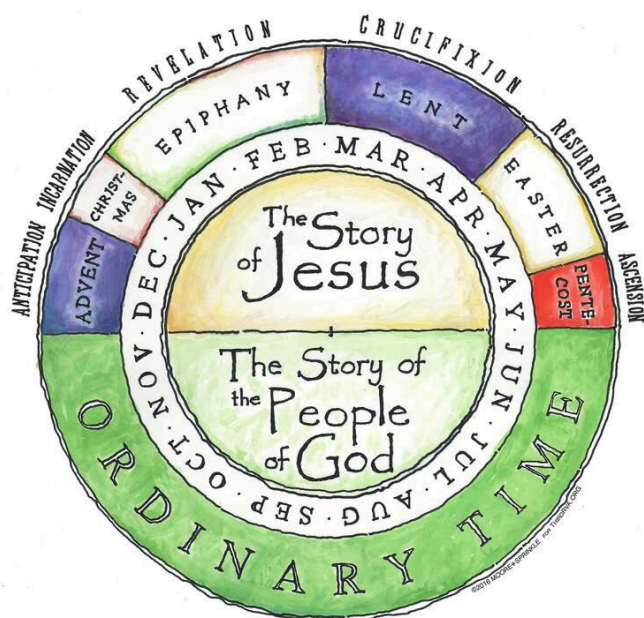
Notes from the Undershepherd's Heart

By Pastor Ben Spera

Happy New Year! You might be thinking New Year's is next month, and you'd be right, but you might be surprised to find out that Advent actually begins the Church's Liturgical Calendar. Perhaps you grew up in a Lutheran Church or maybe an Episcopal or Methodist church that followed a church calendar and had certain readings for each Sunday of the year that they cycled through every few years. Even our church follows a (modified) liturgical calendar, which is why the pulpit banner is generally Green but changes to purple during Advent & Lent and White after Christmas and Easter.

In the liturgical calendar, we follow Jesus' life from Advent through Pentecost. From the beginning of Advent to Christmas we anticipate Jesus' Coming, from Christmas to Epiphany we remember Jesus' incarnation (human birth), from Epiphany to Lent we are to reflect on Jesus' perfect life up till he started his ministry, from Ash Wednesday to Holy Week we reflect Jesus' ministry, holy week we see how Jesus went to the cross, and from Easter to Ascension we consider the resurrected savior and at Pentecost we think about how Jesus gave us His Spirit. The rest of the year we call "ordinary time", where we think about the ordinary Christian life, empowered by the Spirit to live like Christ.

I think there is something nice about beginning the Church year at the same time we are ending our calendar year. It teaches us to focus on Jesus' story. What might it do to us if we thought of Christmas as the beginning of the year, not the end of it? Do we begin with anticipating Jesus or do we end with? I think the liturgical calendar actually helps us to see that we begin with the story of Jesus, not end with it; we begin with anticipation, and Jesus comes fulfilling his promises. Every year we go through this cycle, we begin with the story of Jesus; and once we really understand Jesus, then we can get into ordinary life. The life God made us for. The life Jesus is calling us to.



Sunday Service

Every Sunday
10:00-11:00 am

Ministries for Youth

Every Sunday during service,
from September - May.
For children PreK - 6th grade.

Women's Fellowship

A gathering of women to share in service
to God. Meetings are held monthly on the
third Tuesday, at 10:15 am.

Upcoming Scripture Readings

- **December 7th:**
 - *Philippians 2:1-5 - Isaiah 59:14-21*
- **December 14th:**
 - *Philippians 2:5-7 - Isaiah 60:1-9*
- **December 21st:**
 - *Philippians 2:5-8 - Isaiah 60:10-14*
- **December 28th:**
 - *Philippians 2:8 - Isaiah 60:15-22*

Prayer Emphasis

This month, let us join together in praying for **Unity** and **Humility**. A big theme in our Advent passage (Philippians 2:1-11) is how Jesus is a model of Humility while having complete Unity with the Godhead. And Paul teaches us that (because of Christ) unity and humility actually increase our joy. So, pray that we will abound in unity and humility together.

A Word From Women's Fellowship

By Marlys Colyn

1 Thessalonians 5:18 was the message of Diane's devotions on November 18th. The verse says, "Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus" reminding us of the need to remember the gifts of goodness and generosity that God provides regardless of the situation.

The numerous events of the upcoming Advent season were discussed. We will again provide the poinsettias for the sanctuary which can be used for honorary or memorial recognition from a local 4H club as a means to contribute to their fund-raising project.

On Friday, December 12th we have agreed to do the Cocoa and Cookies event again during the tree lighting event on Main Street. Ryan will again let us use the funeral home.

Sunday, December 14th will be the hymn sing / soup supper.

If you are willing and able, there will be sign-up sheets in the Narthex so that you can help out with these events.

After the meeting was adjourned, the group bagged the snack mix that had been mixed after Sunday coffeetime. Attached to each bag was a bookmark with a Thanksgiving themed scripture and a greeting "from your friends at Baxter Congregational Church." These were made by Julia and were lovely. Sixteen bags were delivered to Discover Hope in Newton and two bags were delivered to local members.

The next meeting will be December 16th. Julia will be in charge of devotions and some special Christmas activities.



Christmas Hymn Sing December 14th at 5pm



"Come, let's shout joyfully to the Lord,
shout triumphantly to the rock of our salvation!
Let's enter his presence with thanksgiving;
let's shout triumphantly to him in song."

Psalms 95:1-2

Gather with us in the church sanctuary on Sunday,
December 14th at 5pm.

We will sing a number of classic Christmas hymns
together and have a light soup supper afterwards.

We hope you will join us!



Hymn of the Month

130 - O Come, All Ye Faithful



This favorite Christmas Carol comes from rather unknown origins. Widely believed to be a secret anthem for the Jacobite faithful (a movement in England to restore the Roman Catholic monarchy of the Stuarts in the line of King James II, aka Jacob), but this classic hymn probably has a much more significant history as a Latin refrain calling churchgoers to Christmas mass. Historical background aside, it has a long history in the Roman Catholic church as the final hymn in the Papal Christmas Eve Mass in St. Peter's Basilica and has become prominent in many Christmas Traditions of all sorts throughout the Christian world.

As we sing this familiar hymn together this month, I want to encourage you to meditate (especially) on the second verse. "God of God, and Light of Light begotten, Lo He abhors not the virgin's womb; very God begotten not created." This verse pulls directly from the Nicene Creed (which we celebrated the 1500 year anniversary of this past year) which says "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father." This is one of the main truths we Christians celebrate during the Christmas season and is right at the heart of our Advent Passage in Philippians 2:1-11.



Christmas Eve Candlelight Service December 24th at 5pm

Join us for our annual Christmas Eve candlelight service. We will light the Advent Candles, read the Christmas story, sing some carols, and spread the light of Christ to one another.





The Season of Advent - Experiencing the Nearness of Jesus

What is Advent?

We all know that Christmas is the day we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus, but what is Advent?

Advent is the season in the ancient church calendar that comes directly before Christmas. The word “advent” comes from the Latin word that means “arrival.” During this season, Christians have for centuries taken time to prepare their hearts for and meditate on the arrival of Christ.

Jesus’s birth is one of the most important events in history. God - our Creator and King - humbled Himself and came to earth as a human baby so that He could one day die on the cross for all our sins and rise from the dead. He did all of this to rid us of our sin so that we could be united to Him. The season of Advent asks us to slow down and sit in the gravity of what that means to us; it allows us to reenact the deep longing of the world before Christ came, and it invites us to anticipate His return to earth with an even more meaningful expectation and hope.

The weeks leading up to Christmas are typically fast paced and focused on going and doing. But Advent is about slowing down, waiting, and preparing. We slow down and meditate on the state of the world without Christ - we think about the darkness and the sin that Jesus came to remove and destroy. We wait with longing and hope for the celebration and joy that Christmas brings, and we prepare our hearts and our homes for Christ’s arrival- now, through the Holy Spirit, and in the last days when Christ returns.

Advent is not intended to distract from Christmas but rather to give more depth to our Christmas celebrations. During Advent, our hearts sing, “o come, o come, Emmanuel” so that they feel the weight of the celebration when we later sing, “joy to the world, the Lord is come” at Christmas.

The Advent Candle Lighting Tradition

The lighting of Advent candles is a tradition practiced worldwide, but where did it come from? And why might we practice it today?

The earliest roots of lighting Advent candles are unknown, but marking the birth of Jesus with purposeful practice fits well into the church calendar. The worldwide church has a similar time of remembrance called Lent, which commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus in the 40 days leading up to Easter. So, it seems natural to mark Jesus’s birth with a weeks-long celebration as well.

We see Advent celebrations mentioned as early as AD 380 in a document from a church leadership meeting called the Council of Saragossa. The first Advent wreath and candles were used in Germany in 1839. There, a Lutheran minister who took care of orphaned children made a wreath out of a wheel and placed twenty white candles and four red candles on it. A white candle was lit each weekday, while a red candle was lit each Sunday in the four weeks leading up to Christmas.

Eventually, this idea spread, and the traditional Advent wreath with one candle for each Sunday of the Advent season (and optionally, a Christ candle at the center to be lit on Christmas Eve) was born. Often, the Advent wreath that holds the candles is adorned with evergreen branches. The evergreen, which is vibrantly alive even in the depths of winter, reminds us that God is eternal, and in Him, we too have everlasting life. The wreath is a circle that has no beginning and no end, reminding us that God always has been and always will be.

Each of the candles is symbolic and encourages us to remember the first coming of Christ and look forward to His Second Coming in a unique way. The candles represent hope, peace, joy, and love. The optional fifth candle is called the Christ candle and represents Jesus. Each week, when a candle is lit, the flicker of the flame points to Jesus as the Light of the World. His first coming shines in the darkness, lighting the path to a relationship with God the Father and illuminating His plan and purpose through the work of the Holy Spirit. And we await His Second Coming when He will light the world with His glory (Revelation 22:5). John 1:4-5 says, “In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.” This is what the Advent season is all about: celebrating the light in the darkness - Jesus.

Sunday School Sessions

Monthly Memory Verse:

1 Peter 3:18

“Christ died for sins once for all, to bring you to God”

~ Reminder to Kids ~

You have until the end of the year to recite any of our memory verses this semester to Pastor Ben for a prize!
(John 1:29, Ephesians 2:8-9, Mark 8:31)

- **December 7th :**
 - The Sun Stops Shining
 - The Crucifixion, from Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19
- **December 14th :**
 - God's Wonderful Surprise
 - The Resurrection, from Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20
- **December 21st :**
 - The Nativity Story
 - Jesus's birth, from Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20
- **December 28th :**
 - Winter Break - No Sunday School

Test Your Knowledge! The Birth of Jesus

1. What 2 books of the Bible give an account of Jesus' birth?
2. Which Old Testament prophet prophesied that the Messiah would be born of a virgin?
3. What city was Jesus born in? Why did Mary & Joseph travel there before Jesus' birth?
4. Where did Mary lay baby Jesus after He was born? What was he wrapped in?
5. How did the wise men know where to find Jesus & what direction did they come from?
6. What title did the wise men call Jesus by in the book of Matthew?
7. What 3 gifts did the wise men bring to Jesus?
8. How did the shepherds hear about Jesus' birth? What was the sign they were to look for?
9. What did the shepherds do when they returned home after seeing Jesus?
10. What does Immanuel mean?

Psst! You can find answers at the bottom of the last page, or your Bible!



Upcoming Meetings

- **Community Coffee:**
Every Tuesday 9-10 am
- **Women's Group:**
12/16/25 at 10:15 am

Talk To Us

Main Office

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Contact Pastor Ben

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bspera@baxtercongregational.com

Contact Pastor Parish

Greg Christianson

(515) 669-6703

gjchristianson@hotmail.com

Upcoming Events

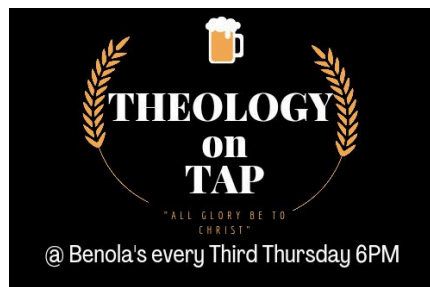


Midweek Bible Study

With Pastor Ben

Every Wednesday at the Church

6:00 - 7:00 pm



Canceled for December

With Pastor Ben

Every Third Thursday at Benola's

6:00 - 7:00 pm



Friday Prayer Meetings

With Pastor Ben

Every Friday at the Church

10:30 - 11:30 am

Quiz Answers:
1. Luke & Matthew, 2. Isaiah, 3. Bethlehem - To register for the census in their hometown, 4. Manger - Swaddling cloths, 5. The Star - The East, 6. King of the Jews, 7. Gold, Frankincense & Myrrh, 8. An Angel of the Lord - Baby wrapped in cloth, in a manger, 9. Glorified & praised God, 10. God with us