

Connections

Immanuel Lutheran Church in Houston Heights

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January 2016

New Year's Resolutions



The guests have gone home. The tree has been taken down. (maybe...)
Another Christmas has come and gone and now it is time to look to the new year. What will 2016 hold in store for you? If you are a planner, as I am, you might have some pretty good ideas of what you would like to get done over the course of the next twelve months. Many people as part of this process of planning make New Year's Resolutions. I have a suggestion for one and all. This year, make a resolution to God. In Luther's Small Catechism he gives the first commandment and its meaning. "You shall have no other Gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things." My article this month has to do with making a resolution to God to do just this, to trust in Him to take care of all of our needs, both spiritual and physical.

I would like to share with you a story from when I was still in the planning stages of coming to the seminary. Back in my former career I had been saving for quite a while to quit my job, go back to college, and get my degree so I could come to seminary. Some of you may remember the mini-crash the stock market went through back in 1997. To me it wasn't so mini. In less than 36 hours I lost most of my savings. For the time being the loss was only on paper. It would only count if I cashed out my funds, which is exactly I was planning on doing to finance my schooling. I had a choice. I could stay with my job for a few more years, recovering from the crash letting my savings build, or I could step out in faith. I felt that I was supposed to be moving my life into the path of full-time church work. The situations of the world wanted me to put that off. Most "normal" people would have probably stayed with their jobs and made sure that their finances were in order before making a move of this sort.

I guess I'm no "normal" person. I'm a Christian. One who, apparently, takes my confession to trust in God very seriously. Without knowing how it would be paid for, I took the meager remains of my savings and quit my job as planned and enrolled in school. I had chosen to step out in faith. Some might say leap out in faith. Don't get me wrong, I am not trying to pat myself on the back. No, this is actually a witness of what God did for me, not a testimony of what I did.

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Happy New Year & God's Continued Blessings

As we enter the New Year, our thoughts are resolutions for the year to come. Thoughts like lose weight, exercise daily – as in all years, good intentions.

Have we forgotten Mary and Joseph and the life ahead with a new baby called Jesus? This couple was beginning a new life, a new married couple, a new baby, and after eight days, Jesus was to be circumcised. They must be ready to travel to Jerusalem and at the temple to have Jesus circumcised.

Were you filled with joy and excited on the day your child would be baptized? You sure were, and so were Mary and Joseph. But circumcision blood is shed, pain followed by a cry. Different than what we do as a child is brought to be baptized.

Circumcision was a command, and marked a promise by God to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you." (Gen. 17:7) Circumcision was an assurance of belonging to God forever. That's what our baptism is to us.

Upon their entrance to the temple, they would be surprised by Simeon and Anna. Simeon, an elderly man, had been promised by God that he would see Jesus. Simeon did see Jesus, and the couple with the doves to be sacrificed.

Simeon prophesied as what was the future of this child. Anna, who was a widow, heard the words of Simeon and told all those in the temple. Mary, as always, kept this in her heart.

Jesus had no human father, therefore He bore not the corruption of original sin. Nevertheless, he submitted himself to be circumcised, his flesh let out the first drops of blood, in order that His heavenly Father's covenant promise might be given to His offspring by faith. He began keeping the law for us, this was also the way to the cross for our sins.

Because of Jesus' circumcision, we are children of God. Not the shedding of our blood, but by our baptism. Our new life began when Christ was circumcised. Thank you, Jesus.

~Pastor Perez

Resolutions . . .

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I did not know how things were going to get paid for but I trusted in God to provide the means for His plans. As I moved to Austin to go to school, I was immediately offered a part-time job that would work around my schedule. God provided, without me even asking. He plans better than I do. As expenses increased another supplemental job was offered on the weekends. I completed my degree at Concordia Austin and then another in St. Louis. This was not due to my financial planning or anything I did. This was due to God taking care of his people.

Many people think that the "trusting in God" should be left only to spiritual matters and our eternal salvation. If we can trust in Him for

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Resolutions . . .

(continued from page 2)

something so big as our eternal wellbeing and care, why should we not be willing to trust in Him to care for us while we spend our lives in the world which He created? He is the giver of all good things and our loving Heavenly Father. It is in Him and Him only which we should put our trust.

You might be wondering how this ties into New Year's Resolutions. Why do we make resolutions in the first place? Most of us are trying to change a habit or start doing something which we have not done in the past. We vow to eat better, exercise more, go to church regularly, treat our spouses better, pet the dog more... I think you get my point. We make resolutions as a "plan" to improve ourselves. This year I suggest we make a resolution concerning God.

I've already talked about how God takes care of us. He provides all we need, even that which we earn. I suggest this year to step out in faith in what we give back to the Lord from which He has already given to us. The idea is one we call "first fruits." When we offer up our tithes and offerings we refer to them as First Fruits, not last fruits. Out of appreciation, trust, and respect we offer back to God a portion of that which He has provided us. Sometimes it is money, sometimes not. I have known many people who tithe their time and talents. This is also an offering pleasing to the Lord. For these are gifts which He has given to us as well.

Whether it be time, skills, or money I challenge you, this year, to offer back to God with trust. Do not hold back until the end of the month. Do not wait until you see "if there is going to

be enough left over." Instead, trust in God to provide all that is necessary. Offer your thanks and offerings at the beginning of your month. Give to Him the first of the harvest, so to speak.

Many times I have spoken with people after they have made this move and the testimonies are incredible. When I made this move it was another leap. In the past I had worried about if I would have enough at the end of the month. This was me listening to my sinful distrust. I could come up with reason after reason why I should give back to God last and not first. Once I began to take the commitment to trust in God seriously, I found it more difficult to come up with excuses. To this day, when I have given to the Lord's work first, I have never come up short for my needs. I cannot say the same about when I trusted instead in my abilities to ration out to my needs then to God.

My challenge is this. Trust in God above all else. Make a point to give back to Him before all else. Do not put Him second to anything. Because He first loves us we are able to have faith in Him. So do not return His love by putting Him last. Pray to Him first thing in your day. Remember to thank Him first when you are blessed and provided for. Finally, give to Him first. Make yours an offering not of regret and leftovers but instead an offering of joy and thanks.

As we enter another year may the Lord Bless you and keep you and strengthen your faith so that you trust in Him above all things. Happy New Year.

*~Yours in Christ's Service,
Pastor Jeffrey King*

Focus on Stewardship

“In all things I have shown you that ... we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35). And indeed it is. Does this not strike a chord that resonates in us all? Which of us can’t recall the look of surprise and thanks for the Christmas gifts that we labored to give to those whom we love? And the joy written on their face when that gift is received with thanksgiving means more than all the gifts we have received. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Our Lord knew this because He practiced it. He gave of Himself, sparing not even His life in death, in order to give us back to our Father in heaven. He knew that in giving, you get more because in giving joy is multiplied: the one who receives and the one who gives both rejoice in what is given and received. What is more the one who receives is thankful and only wants to give back to the one who gave so generously.

So also with our tithes and offerings in church. We want to give because we have received from God all that we are and all that we have. Our giving does not originate in what we must do to earn God’s favor. We have God’s favor because of the gift of His Son which we receive through Word and Sacrament. Thus, we are made free from the compulsion of giving. Now our tithes and offering are freely given *in thanksgiving* for what God has so generously given to us.

Why then does the church struggle to make budgets? Why does the church always seem stretched so thin? After all the Church is the

place where God not only gives to us once, but continually again and again. And what gifts He gives! He gives us the forgiveness of sins, generously pouring out His grace and mercy because He loves us. So why does the church struggle?

It is because sin still clings to us. Our fallen nature makes us selfish and miserly. It leads us to believe that we can have our cake and eat it too. Because of sin we want to receive, but not give. We want God’s blessings, but we don’t want to share them with those around us. We want to remain comfortable in our own self-contained, neat, and tidy lives, without the headaches of loving those around us by helping them in their time of need.

“Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Remember that God has placed you in a church, not only to receive His grace and mercy, but also to use you to bless others. Your tithes and offerings ensure that those around you have a pastor to preach the life-saving and life-giving Word of God. They ensure that the lights and heat and air-conditioning are working. They ensure there is water for Holy Baptism and bread and wine for the Holy Communion. Everything the Church does, she is able to do by and through the generosity of the members of the Church.

So remember the words of the Lord Jesus. It is more blessed to give than to receive. And remember the joy that attended the gifts you gave at Christmas. This same joy attends your gifts to the church.

*(Stewardship newsletter insert for January 2016, provided on the LCMS website
<http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=3854>)*

~submitted by Kathy Angst

“O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright!” The “Queen of Chorales”

This is another gem in the *Lutheran Service Book* written and composed by Philip Nicolai. Along with “Wake, Awake for Night is Flying,” the “King of Chorales,” also by Nicolai, it has beautiful poetic structure and a powerful tune. It was written with seven stanzas (the second is omitted in our *Lutheran Service Book* #395). It has an acrostic structure, the initial letters of each stanza of the original German W, E, G, U, H, Z, W, refer to Wilhelm Ernst, Graf und Herr zu Waldeck, a friend and student of Nicolai. Like “Wake, Awake,” it was published in the appendix to his *Frewden Spiegel des ewigen Lebens* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1599).

The hymn is based on Psalm 45, but the “Morning Star” in stanza 1 comes from Revelation 22:16, and “the end and the beginning” in stanza 6 reflects Revelation 22:13. This hymn became a great favorite and enjoyed wide usage at festival occasions, not only of the church year, but especially at weddings. The translation was prepared by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship for inclusion in *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978). It is found in the Epiphany section of our hymnal.

The tune “Wie schon leuchtet” is generally attributed to Nicolai, but was probably based on the melody of “Jauchst den Herrn, alle Land,” a setting for Psalm 100 in the *Strasbourg Psalter* of 1538. That it was a popular tune is evidenced by its frequent use by J. S. Bach, Dietrich Buxtehude, Felix

Mendelssohn, and other composers in organ, keyboard, vocal, and orchestral works.

What joy to know, when life is past,
The Lord we love is first and last,
The end and the beginning!
He will one day, oh glorious grace,
Transport us to that happy place
Beyond all tears and sinning!
Amen! Amen!
Come, Lord Jesus!
Crown of gladness!
We are yearning
For the day of Your returning!

Information for this article was taken from Lutheran Worship: Hymnal Companion, Fred L. Precht, Concordia Publishing House, 1992.

~Diane Robinson



January Events Home Games

Boys Basketball
8th 7:00 pm 19th 7:00 pm

Girls Basketball
8th 5:30 pm
12th JV 4:00 pm & V 5:30 pm
19th 5:30 pm

Boys Soccer
5th 6:00 pm 11th 6:00 pm
7th 7:00 pm 19th 6:00 pm
21st 6:00 pm

Girls Soccer
14th 5:00 pm 25th 5:00 pm

~Lynn Eickemeyer



TOYS



Thank you for your
**GENEROUS SUPPORT
AND DONATIONS** to
the 2015 HOUSTON
AREA WOMEN'S
CENTER (HAWC)
CHRISTMAS PROJECT



**\$ 440.00 in
Gift Cards**

**\$ 5655.28
in Cash**

31 Women's Baskets



More TOYS





Thank you for making *Thanksgiving Share-A-Meal* A successful outreach event

On Tuesday December 8th, Immanuel was able to bless (9) Pastors and their families, the Lutheran Campus Ministry and (2) Congregational families. Each family was given a boneless ham, 2 boxes of food, paper towel, toilet paper and a \$10 Gift card. Your contributions from “plucking feathers” was a huge help in making this event a success. Proceeds from your support of the Turkey dinner along with monetary donations were used to purchase the hams and more food. An additional \$250 support was received from Thrivent Financial. This was used to purchase paper goods, boxes and food items.

Without your participation and support, this event would not have been possible. All of the recipients were very appreciative and could not say “thank you” enough.



Pastor Johnson Petta



Pastor Kbrab Issak



Pastor Jesus Santos



Pastor Jose Flores



Pastor Baudilio Herrera and family



Pastor Rodrigo Fernandez



Pastor Ben and family



Perla and children



Pastor Jules Renzano



Immanuel Lutheran Church
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Return Service Requested

To the Family of:

Loving God ~ Loving Neighbors ~ Serving Others

Get Into the Word In 2016

Women's Bible Study 1st & 3rd Wednesdays
10:00 am in Miertschin Hall @ Immanuel

Men's Bible Study 2nd & 4th Tuesdays
6:30 am @ AAA Restaurant on Airline

Weeknight Bible Study 1st & 3rd Mondays
6:30 pm in Miertschin Hall @ Immanuel

Immanuel Lutheran Church - January 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				Dec 31 Offices Closed in observance of the holiday.	1 New Year's Day Offices Closed in observance of the holiday.	2 Unveil Setup @ 11:00 – 1:00 pm
3 Usher Team #2 Worship @ 9:00 am w/Communion Adult Bible Class and Sunday School Unveil Church @ 10:15 am	4 Bible Study @ 6:30 – 8:00 pm	5 All Boards @ 7:00 pm	6 Women's Bible Study @ 10:00 am Unveil Fellowship @ 6:00 – 9:00 pm	7 Choir & Handbells Fellowship @6:30 pm (Robinson's house)	8	9 Unveil Setup @ 11:00 – 1:00 pm FOD New Year's Dance @ 4:00 – 9:00 pm
10 Usher Team #3 Worship @ 9:00 am Adult Bible Class and Sunday School Unveil Church @ 10:15 am	11	12 Men's Breakfast @ AAA restaurant @ 6:30 am Church Council @ 7:00 pm Naomi Meeting @ 7:00 pm	13	14 Handbells @ 6:30 pm Choir @ 7:30 pm	15	16 Unveil Setup @ 11:00 – 1:00 pm
17 Usher Team #4 Worship @ 9:00 am w/Communion Adult Bible Class and Sunday School Unveil Church @ 10:15 am	18 Martin Luther King Day Bible Study @ 6:30 – 8:00 pm	19	20 Women's Bible Study @ 10:00 am	21 Hamburger Fry @ 11:00–1:00 pm Handbells @ 6:30 pm Choir @ 7:30 pm	22	23 Unveil Setup @ 11:00 – 1:00 pm
24 Usher Team #5 Worship @ 9:00 am Adult Bible Class and Sunday School Unveil Church @ 10:15 am	25	26 Men's Breakfast @ AAA restaurant @ 6:30 am Voters @ 7:00 pm	27	28 Handbells @ 6:30 pm Choir @ 7:30 pm	29	30 Unveil Setup @ 11:00 – 1:00 pm
31 Usher Team #1 Worship @ 9:00 am w/Communion Adult Bible Class and Sunday School Unveil Church @ 10:15 am Social Ministry Door Offering						