



December 24, 2023 4th Sunday of Advent

The Story of the Christmas Tree

In earlier times Advent was a period of fasting during which people's thoughts were directed to the expected second coming of Christ. Advent is meant to be a time of stilling, simplifying, purifying from sin, and preparing, represented in the Indigo candles and evergreen draping. In them, see the winter nighttime sky. Fasting also stretched the often times dwindling food stores. The Christian Church has always waited for the feast of Christmas to celebrate the fullness of the Incarnation Good News, and then does so for 12 days (the symbolic number of abundance and fullness) with lit trees, food, and goodies.

The story of the Christmas tree can be traced back to ancient civilizations when people had the custom of decorating their houses with evergreen trees and dried flowers, seeing in them a sense of magic and divinity because they appeared not to die.

The Greeks and Romans decorated their houses with ivy. The Celts and Scandinavians adorned theirs with mistletoes and other evergreen plants (like holly, butcher's broom, laurel, and pine tree) because they believed that they offered magical medicinal benefits. Among the Celts, the tree was considered sacred. Trees were adorned and venerated by the Druids of Central Europe whose main belief was that nature, and trees in particular, was where the spirits lived and danced in the breezes.

The Nordic feast of Frey, the god of the sun and fertility, was celebrated by decorating an evergreen on the days approaching the Christmas season. The tree was named Idrasil (Tree of the Universe): in whose leaves were the heavens, Asgard (the abode of the gods) and the Valhalla (the palace of Odin) while in its roots was Helheim (the kingdom of the dead).

When Central and Northern Europe were conquered and evangelized by the Holy Roman Empire, the new Lords of these towns Christianized the traditions and instead celebrated the birth of Christ on those dates.

One very interesting and popular tradition – partly from history and partly from legend – in Germany affirmed that the Christmas tree was popular in the 8th century. Saint Boniface (675-754) was an English bishop who went to Germany (particularly to Hesse) to spread the Christian faith. After a difficult period of evangelization, but nonetheless with considerable fruit, Saint Boniface went to Rome for an audience with Pope Gregory II. During his return to Germany in Christmas of 723, he felt offended on discovering that the Germans had reverted to their former pagan customs and were preparing for the Winter Solstice by sacrificing a young man under the oak tree of Odin. Fired by holy anger, like that of Moses before the golden calf, Saint Boniface took up an axe and began to cut down the sacred oak. The people were dumbfounded and instantly recognized the hand of God in the phenomenon. In turn, they humbly asked Saint Boniface how they should celebrate Christmas. Saint Boniface, the legend continues, noticed a small fir tree that miraculously survived the ruins. He saw it as a perennial symbol of the love of God. Next, he adorned it with fruit (which symbolized temptation) and candles (which represented Christ who lights the world).

In line with the popular custom of decorating the houses with evergreen during winter, he asked the people to take with them a fir tree that would symbolize peace and immortality (represented in its green color) and heaven, the Kingdom of God (represented by its pointed structure reaching upward and outward). <https://www.earlychristians.org/the-origins-of-christmas-tree/>

Customs of erecting decorated trees in winter time can be traced to Christmas celebrations in 16th century guilds in Northern Germany and Livonia. The first evidence of decorated trees associated with Christmas Eve and Day were trees in guildhalls decorated with sweets to be enjoyed by the apprentices and children. Over time, the practice moved into individual homes as well. The candlelight on the tree represented the arrival of the light of Christ and the promise of eternal life! [The impact of this symbol was much more significant in a world without electricity.]

Does any of this history align with the reason you place a Christmas tree in your home or church?



We now have an AED in our church entry-way! Locate it near the elevator, and be prepared!

Thanks to a grant through the hospitals of Linn County, St. Paul now has an AED in our worship space. An AED – short for automated external defibrillator – is an easy-to-use medical device that can restore a normal heart rhythm to someone who has gone into cardiac arrest (having a heart attack).

An AED is designed to be used by anyone, even if a trained person is not on site.

If someone collapses, the first thing to do is check for signs of life, such as whether the person is breathing or has a pulse. Always call 911 first, then begin CPR if necessary. If possible, have someone else locate the AED. Do not stop CPR.

Inside the AED box found near the elevator in the St. Paul Church entryway, are pads and a diagram that shows where to place them on the bare skin. **Push the button to turn on the device and a voice tells you exactly what to do.** You put the adhesive electrodes on the person's chest and then just listen for the voice prompts. It will actually tell you 'shock not advised' or 'shock advised.' It will tell you very plainly whether or not this person needs a shock from the AED, and it will also tell you to continue CPR. So you just do whatever it says until emergency help gets there.

Some people may hesitate to help because they're afraid of the liability; Good Samaritan laws protect people who step in to provide lifesaving care.

We are grateful to have this potentially life-saving device in our midst.



Two new prayer opportunities at St Paul led by Pastor Rodney!

Drumming Circle: Join others in the church chapel from 5:30-6:30 pm the last Monday of the month for drum prayer (see dates below). 10 hand drums are available, first come, first to choose. We will begin with sharing gratitudes and intentions, then drum, ending with a drum wash to those who wish it.

Drumming is a form of contemplative prayer that invites us to be present to the Heartbeat of God. As we listen to and feel the drums, we experience the One pulse that gives rise to all the rhythms and energies of life. It is actually from the feminine energy of the divine that drumming emerges, and men drum to draw themselves from the head into the heart, seeking harmony.

Upcoming dates for 2024 will be: Mondays, Jan. 29, Feb. 26, March 25, April 29, May 27

Create some intentional time for Focused Communal Silence (Meditation) - The benefits of meditation are real, but it is often difficult to make room for silence in our lives. Communal accountability can help uphold the commitment. Join with others in the St Paul Church on Monday and/or Thursday mornings, 6:30-7:00 a.m. for Meditation Prayer. We will pray out loud the Welcoming Prayer, have 21 minutes of silent meditation, then close with the Cantic of Simeon.

Noisy Offerings Ahead...



This years noisy offering will go toward the service opportunities and gatherings thru our youth program for 2024. So let's prepare for very noisy offerings during services starting on December 3rd thru the 24th.

Reading I: the Book of the Prophet Micah 5:2-5a The Message

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be our peace.

Anticipation. It’s all about the waiting. Throughout Advent we have been exploring the nature of waiting amidst our darknesses and its effect on the human heart. The people of Micah’s time were waiting for YHWH God to deliver them from the threat of foreign rule by Assyria. They stood to lose their identity if their land was conquered and the leaders were taken into exile. The people feared for themselves and their beloved Jerusalem because they were vulnerable under the incompetent, ego-driven king they had. They awaited a savior king who was God-fearing and truly interested in the common good. Micah compares their anxious waiting to a pregnant woman’s as she nears the day of delivery wanting nothing more than to ensure the safety of her child.

If you are able, ask a mother what this waiting feels like. Really listen for the emotions she expresses in describing this experience.

Micah responded to the people’s fear and longing by offering a prophecy of hope. According to Micah, one like King David would rise up to lead them from the place least expected, the tiny village of Bethlehem-Ephrathah, David’s home. He would be a strong shepherd whose love and care and steadfastness would bring them peace. The king’s kin would return from exile to build a new nation and a renewed people.

Bethlehem (in Hebrew means “House of Bread”) was a tiny village south of Jerusalem in the area known as Ephrathah, part of the region named after Judah, one of Jacob’s twelve sons. It was considered to be one of the less significant tribes, which lends even more surprise to the fact that the Messiah could emerge from this area.

Psalms 80:1-7

Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Awaken your might; come and save us. Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. How long, LORD God Almighty, will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people? You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have made them drink tears by the bowlful. You have made us an object of derision to our neighbors, and our enemies mock us. Restore us, God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.

Gospel: Luke 1:39–46 NIV

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord! Word of God, Word of Life. Thanks be to God.

Anticipation. It’s about waiting for a Visitation. Is it significant that this gospel encounter happens between two expectant mothers; one who has been blessed with a child in her old age when she was thought infertile, and the second a young faith-filled girl who responded “yes” to what seemed an improbable request from an angel? Yes! And Elizabeth, kinswoman to Mary, utters for all of us the amazement found in realizing that the Christ is being formed in her very midst. The Holy Spirit touched Elizabeth and revealed to her that the fruit of Mary’s womb was in fact the infant Messiah. Her people’s waiting was over.

Even John, who would later be called the Baptist, while an infant in his mother’s womb, was touched by Holy Spirit and leaped for joy in meeting his God (quickenings). His whole life revolved around the fact that in his bones he knew the Messiah was at hand, and his job was to prepare the way for the Kingdom of God to be revealed.

On another level, we need to pay attention to Luke’s intent in presenting this story. We are not told exactly why Mary, a 13 or 14 year old young woman, made this five day journey from Nazareth to her kinswoman’s home in Judah. Certainly, she would not have traveled alone. The point, it seems, is that Luke wants to bring these two women pregnant with expectation together so they can praise the God who has blessed both of them and the nation with new and surprising beginnings.

If you are near a mother, ask her when she first became aware of her baby’s “leaping for joy” in her womb. Yes, it is about Holy Spirit, and it is about life!

Taking it home:

- Where would you most like to experience the presence of God: In your own life? Through a family member's struggle or joy? In a renewed sense of neighborhood or city togetherness? Through a hope-filled vision in your country?
- In the gospel, an encounter with the Lord leads to a leaping in the Spirit. Recall a time you "leaped with joy" in realizing God's presence.
- Mary gave her body and her life over to God so that Jesus the Christ could be formed in the world. Think of and thank God for a particularly generous person you have known in your life.

Mindfulness (set aside three minutes. Breathe. Read slowly three times. Which words or ideas hold energy for you?

What images emerge in you? "It is almost impossible to fall in love with majesty, power, or perfection. These make us fearful and codependent, but seldom truly loving. On some level, love can only happen between equals, and vulnerability levels the playing field. What Christians believe is that God somehow became our equal when he became the human "Jesus," a name that is, without doubt, the vulnerable name for God."

— Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*

December 2023 Council Minutes

Present: Fred Austin, Pastor Rodney Bluml, Scott Chrisman (President), Michele Countryman (Secretary), Andrea Giegerich, Jamie Hamblin (Vice President), David Oldham (Treasurer), Vicki Wacker, Susan Koppenhaver

Not Present: Dustin Paulsen, Ella Vaughn

Opening Prayer and Call to Order by Scott Chrisman at 7:13pm.

Consent Agenda Discussion and Approval

October and November Financial Reports (attached), St Paul Council Meeting Minutes, Pastor's Report, Treasurer's Report.

Treasurer Report:

November Balances: General Checking \$15,110.81
Memorial Checking \$27,704.03
Land Maintenance and Development \$52,786.33

Our income compared to budgeted need for November was down \$4,665; on a positive note our expenses were down \$582. We have been able to keep our expenses in check this fiscal year. Income this month \$18,429 compared to \$18,351 in 2022. Expenses were \$21,688 this year and last year \$30,236. Cautiously optimistic with our revenue flow (see expanded report in 12/17 Pulse).

Pastor's Report

1. Funerals: Betty Lubben, 11/20/23; Mary Carol Lambertsen, 12/9/23
2. No New Members, Baptisms or Weddings
3. The Advent devotional, *Now In Flesh Appearing*, has been made available for membership. Reports of several groups meeting in homes to discuss it have been received.
4. Last month, Bibles were presented to 7 youth on behalf of the faith community: Korbin V, Isley J, Morgan A, Cruz W, Luke C, Adler J, and Patrick C. It is our way of supporting parents in being primary faith teachers and to fulfill the promises made at baptism.
5. Kaileen and I participated in the Career Expo at the Anamosa High School from 7:45 am-12:15 pm on 12/5. We had a number of quality interactions with our own youth and probably twice as many non-member youth. Our intention was simply to remind high schoolers that no matter what path they take or study and no matter what faith they hold, they can always respond to the meaningful call of serving their community as a minister (servant leader).

Motion to approve consent agenda by Jamie Hamblin with a second by Susan Koppenhaver. No concerns raised. Consent agenda accepted.

Old Business

From October meeting:

- Discuss whether or not to increase or leave the current donation of 3% of St Paul budget to the Synod. o Synod reached out and inquired as to why we discontinued donating to the Synod mission support. It had been discontinued in February. Payment resumed in July and August. The conversation at the time was that our giving was significantly low. We sent less than \$6000 of a \$19000 pledge last fiscal year.
- In May, the Council reduced the mission support pledge to 3% of general giving. Since July we are making good on our 3% commitment. David will call Amy Van Dyke at the Synod Office to communicate St. Paul Lutheran's mission support pledge has changed to 3% for fiscal year 2024.

From November meeting:

- Discuss donation to AMA: We have not donated to AMA yet this year. Susan Koppenhaver motions to donate \$500 out of our budgeted local mission support to the Anamosa Ministerial Association. Jamie Hamblin seconded this motion. Ayes Carry.
- Adjacent North House property discussion - Pursuing potential agreement.
- Doug Fairbanks and Fred Austin met with Larry Winders and Michelle Eaden. Attorney Adrian Knuth is working on a

(December Board Minutes cont.)

New Business

- Discuss setting up a separate Hospitality Committee account and having money from their projects go toward their use.
 - ⇒ The Hospitality committee is essential to our mission. We do not want this as a separate budget item. This committee supports the life of the congregation. To that end, donations do not reflect the effectiveness of this ministry. If the committee needs things to do this ministry, they are to request it. \$2000 are earmarked in the budget.
 - ⇒ It would be a best practice to have local families pay for whatever food charges are incurred for a funeral meal. The council is comfortable with the committee making decisions to purchase whatever is needed to conduct their ministry. The council appreciates their work, especially the broad involvement of members. We want to be as actual as possible in reporting so we can accurately reflect actual operating expenses.
- (P. Rodney) Proposed name for Campus Project: "Building A Future with Hope." {Jer. 29:11}
- Pastor Rodney made the motion to adopt this name for the campus project. David Oldham second the motion. Ayes carry.
- (P. Rodney) Fair Market Rental price for Parsonage
- In order to file taxes, a fair market value for the parsonage must be submitted to the accountant. After discussion, Fred Austin made a motion to put the fair market rental value for the parsonage at \$900 per month. Jamie Hamblin seconded the motion. Ayes carry.
- Pastor Rodney motioned to have \$6000 of his salary designated as housing allowance in his compensation package beginning January 1, 2024. Second by Susan Koppenhaver. No discussion. Ayes carry.
- Change the date for January's Council meeting. It will be on 1/15/24 at 6:30 b/c Pastor Rodney is participating in the Moses Project on normal meeting date

Review of Annual Calendar Reminders

Motion to adjourn meeting by David Oldham and second by Jamie Hamblin. Meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

The Serenity Prayer (by Reinhold Niebuhr)

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I
cannot change, Courage to
change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the
difference. Living one day
at a time, Enjoying one
moment at a time.
Accepting hardship as a
pathway to peace. Taking,
as Jesus did, This sinful
world as it is, Not as I
would have it. Trusting
that you will make all
things right, If I surrender
to Your will, So that I may
be reasonably happy in
this life, And supremely
happy with You forever in
the next. Amen



Dinner With Friends



Come to McOttos to join in some warm conversation while enjoying Dinner with Friends. Hope to see you on Thursday, January 11th at 5:00 p.m. Good food, good friends, good times always. Looking forward to seeing you!! If you have any questions, please call Sherri Evans at 319-981-0283.

Christmas Eve Services

Worship helpers are needed for four services on December 24th - 3:00, 5:00 and 7:30. If you know your Christmas Eve plans and are willing to help with worship, please sign the sheet on the bulletin board in the back of the church. Thank you!

Christmas Eve Services

3:00 p.m.
5:00 p.m.
7:30 p.m.

Supporting Mental Health in Anamosa....

The Anamosa Ministerial Association has developed a short-term mental health reimbursement program in conjunction with [RISE Counseling & Consulting, PLLC](#) to assist people requiring therapy services but may be unable to meet annual deductibles and copays, or are under-insured. We are making available \$250 per client per year. Melissa Paulson and her staff will assist you in applying for these funds when you arrange your appointments. WE encourage everyone to ask for what you need to support your mental health.

Pounds for the Pantry

Time is winding down, so please give!! It's the time of the year that more people are in need of food. This year, the challenge is being issued to our entire community of Anamosa called "The Pounds for the Pantry Challenge" the program is open to any business, church or organization that would like to participate. We have until December 31st to bring food items to church and there will be a box or cart there for you to put them in. Your goods will be delivered to HACAP or, if you prefer, you are welcome to take your donations to HACAP yourself, but be sure to tell them you are donating on behalf of St Paul Lutheran Church.



Please Pray for the Following

(Why people want prayers isn't important, *the prayers are!*)

We pray for all who need healing, strength or comfort especially Frankie McDonnell (grandson of Betty Hunter), and the families of Rose Hubler Flaig and Marvin Behrens (Linda Kenny's father) as they grieve the loss of their loved one. For peace in our nation & world, for safety in our schools and communities and for those seeking a safe home. To add a name call or email Kathy at 319-462-4841/stpaulanamosa@gmail.com. Names will be listed for 4 weeks and may be renewed.

*Next Week December 31st Readings
Mark 1:1-20*

GriefShare is available upon request. Please contact Nancy Douglas if interested 319-551-3358.

AA meets in the lower level of the CE building on Tuesday evenings at 7:00 pm.

Jones County Food Bank: Help is always needed at the Jones County Community Food Bank - food and funds have fallen critically low. For the last few months, the number of families and individuals requesting foods has been increasing and the shelves are almost bare. Funds are also being diminished by the demands of purchasing food at higher prices.

To donate money, checks may be written to Jones County Community Food Bank and mailed to 105 Broadway Place, Anamosa IA 52205. Items needed this week: Peas, pancake mix and syrup, canned tuna, Mac & Cheese and personal care items. **Please place items in the back of the church for collection by St. Paul volunteers OR call the Food Bank to make delivery arrangements (462-4343)**

Recorded services are found on St. Paul website, YouTube page or Facebook page.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Available 24 Hours
Languages: English, Spanish
800-273-8255

Bread Bakers:

3 Communion Eve Services: B&M Lubben
January: Darla Algoe
February: Valerie Lambertsen
March:

Deliver Food to Food Bank:

January: Barb Kleis
February: Ralph & Sandy Andresen
March:

Wednesday, December 20

- 8:00 am Men's Worship Group—CE Building
- 6-7:30 WD4
- * **6:00pm Evening Service**
Comm Prep: Marlene Serbousek
Greeters: Darla Algoe
Readings/Prayers: Beth Hora
Comm Server: Beth Hora
PowerPoint: Myra Powell

Sunday, December 24 Christmas Eve

- * **9:00 am Service**
Comm Prep: Ed Gertz/Susan Koppenhaver
Greeter: Ed Gertz/Susan Koppenhaver
Readings/Prayers: Amy Fuller Belding
Comm Server: Ed Gertz/Susan Koppenhaver
PowerPoint: Linda Kenny
Livestream: Grant/Luke Chrisman
- * **3:00 p.m. Service**
Comm Prep: Darla Algoe
Greeter: Bob/Darla Algoe & Orlyn/Kathy Brunssen
Readings: Darla Algoe
Prayers: Beth Hora
Comm Server: Beth Hora/Ken Humpal /Valerie Lambertsen
PowerPoint: Dean Lambertsen
Livestream: Eli Lambertsen
- * **5:00 pm Service:**
Comm Prep: Dave/Deb Oldham
Greeter: Jamie/Kinsley Hamblin
Readings/Prayers: Nancy Lyon Douglas
Comm Server: Dave/Deb Oldham / Jamie Hamblin
PowerPoint:
Livestream:
- * **7:30 pm Service**
Comm Prep: Paula Sisler
Greeter: Tom Sabotta/Sherri Evans
Readings/Prayers: Paula Sisler
Comm Server: Paula Sisler/Tom Sabotta/Sherri Evans
PowerPoint: Grant/Luke Chrisman
Livestream: Grant/Luke Chrisman

Wednesday, December 27

- * 8:00 am Men's Worship Group—CE Building
- * **6:00pm Evening Service**
Comm Prep: Ken/Pam Humpal
Greeters: Ken/Pam Humpal
Readings/Prayers: Paula Sisler
Comm Server: Ken Humpal
PowerPoint: Myra Powell

Sunday, December 31

- * **8:00 am Service**
Comm Prep: Jan Allaire/Verna Lewison
Greeter: Orlyn/Kathy Brunssen
Readings/Prayers: Lois Ocenosak
Comm Server: Tom Sabotta/Sherri Evans
PowerPoint: Susan Koppenhaver
Livestream: Skylar
- * **10:30am Service**
Comm Prep: Nancy Lyon Douglas
Greeter: Nancy Lyon Douglas
Readings/Prayers: Scott Chrisman
Comm Server: Scott Chrisman/Nancy Lyon Douglas
PowerPoint: Elijah S.
Livestream: Grant/Luke Chrisman

Tuesday, January 2

- * 1:30pm Scripture Study
- * 6:00pm Grief Support by request, call Nancy Douglas
- * 7:00pm AA—LL CE Building

Mailing Address:
St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church
103 East Cedar Street
Anamosa, IA 52205



CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Dec 21	The "Star" movie @ 6:30 pm
Dec 24	4th Sunday of Advent 9:00 am Service Christmas Eve 3, 5, 7:30 Service
Dec 25	Christmas Day (office closed)
Jan 1	New Years Day (office closed)
Jan 11	Dinner with Friends @ McOtto's