



O December | O 2010

Shining Mountains *news*

"IT IS OUR MISSION, AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD AND COMMAND TO GROW IN HIS WORD, TO GATHER AROUND HIS WORD, AND TO GO WITH HIS WORD."

Throughout Advent and Christmas, we focus on the wonderful truths of a God who draws near to us. At times like this it's natural to ask:

"Are You Close to God?"

I have a confession to make: *I hate that question.*

Have you ever been asked it or thought about it? Especially at this time of year as we find ourselves surrounded by Christmas services in church and Christmas specials on TV, it's a common question to ponder: *Am I close to God?*

What's wrong (or at least misdirected) about that question? *It's all about me.* There are only a few ways I know to answer that question on my own: Do I *feel* close to God? Do I *look* close to God? Does my life look very godly?

It's not that it's wrong to ever think about that question, but it only leaves us on uncertain ground. I do feel close to God sometimes—but when problems come up, guilt resurfaces or depression rears its head and my feelings go down the drain, does that mean that I'm further away from God than I was when everything was going well? Is he missing when I need him most?

The same happens my *closeness* with God by what's going on in my life. We live in a sinful world. When a

catastrophe strikes, does that mean God has left me? If so, that means he certainly must have abandoned his apostles—ten of the faithful eleven of them died terrible deaths. And we still have our sinful natures. When I fall into sin, does God leave me then—the same God who promises to deal with us by *grace* and forgive our sins?

It's good to think about our relationship with God; it's *vital* that we're asking the right questions as we do. Throughout the Advent and Christmas season this year, ask instead, "What do God's promises say to me?"

Isaiah records the beautiful answer. To a people who *must* have felt far from God as they saw their own wickedness and suffered from the problems it brought to them, Isaiah spoke these Spirit-given words: "*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel*" (Is 7:14). It wasn't about how close they felt to God; *God* was drawing near to *them*!

God grant we walk away from this Christmas with that conviction firmly in mind: No matter how I feel, no matter how well or badly my life is going,



even regardless of what sins are in my past, or tempt me in the present, the eternal Son of God has loved us so much that he descended from heaven, was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and was born among us.

May God richly bless your worship of the Lord who draws near to you.

Advent Wreaths

A daily reminder of the dawning light of Christ

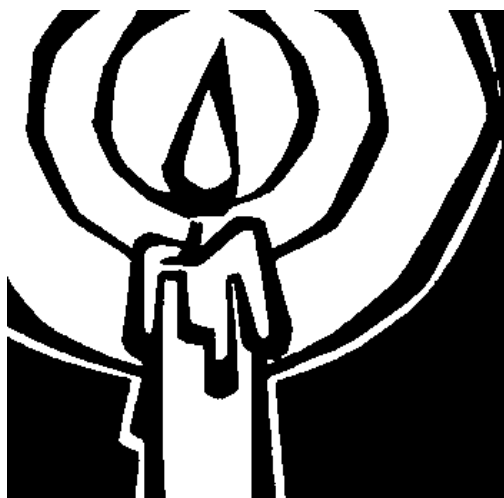
The Advent Wreath plays a noticeable part in our Advent worship at Shining Mountains. It seems, though, that the wreaths actually originated in Christian *homes* a few hundred years ago. The wreaths—together with their four or five candles—can be a wonderful and memorable tool for your family devotional life in the week's leading up to Christmas. Here's how they might be used:

Wreaths can be purchased online or from religious bookstores—or even made. They are generally circles of evergreens with four candles (generally all purple, or three purple and one pink). Many often include a white candle (representing Christ) in the center. Starting with the first week of Advent (beginning Sunday, Nov. 28th), one candle is lit each week until Christmas. The Christ candle may be lit on Christmas Day.



Find Advent devotional materials. These could be as simple as reading the first few chapters of the gospels, reading Advent hymns from the hymnal, or purchasing a devotional book. (Northwestern Publishing House has some wonderful devotional books with a 1-page devotion for each day of Advent at www.nph.net.)

Make it an evening tradition. Every night after dinner or before bed, light the appropriate candle/candles, depending on which week we're in. (Children love to take part in this, but supervise well!) Read the devotion or chapter of Scripture. Say your after dinner prayer or bedtime prayers together, and extinguish the candle. As the weeks go on and more candles are lit, the growing light of the candles remind us of our coming Christmas celebration and the readings help us grow in our faith as we look forward to Christ.



Midweek Advent Worship—Dec. 1, 8 & 15

Throughout the Wednesdays of Advent we gather together for special midweek services. The services provide a chance for us to escape the busyness of the Christmas season and refocus our hearts and minds on the message of the coming Savior.

This year's services all focus on the truths of holy baptism. God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for Christ. In the same way, baptism is the way that God draws near to us and unites us to one another. What a fitting focus as we prepare to celebrate the Christ becoming flesh!

The 7:00pm worship services are preceded by fellowship dinners held at 6:00 pm. All are welcome to come. If you're able to bring food for one of the weeks, please sign up on the bulletin board.

Join Us for the Annual SMLC Advent Party!

On Sunday, December 5th, you're invited to join us for Shining Mountains' annual Advent party.

Meal

We'll begin shortly after church with a joint meal—there's a sign-up sheet in the narthex if you feel able to bring some food to pass.

Decorating

Just as we put in time decorating our own homes for Christmas, we set aside time to ready our church home for the proclamation of Christ's birth among us.

Games and Gifts

Games will be held for our children and the adults are welcome to take part in a gift swap (please limit yourself to \$5 gifts or less).

Music

We'll take the opportunity together to sing through our favorite Advent and Christmas hymns—requests are welcome.

We'll see you there!



Advent

Spiritual Truths in Wood & Stone—part 1 of 6

A five month series that looks at the ways our houses of worship express the truths confessed there

My bedroom doesn't make a very good kitchen. It's not that it's a bad room; in fact, it's a wonderful place to spend the night and wake refreshed. But the dresser doesn't work well as a stove, the bed doesn't wash dishes well and the closet never keeps the milk from going bad. As great of a bedroom as it is, a kitchen has a different *purpose*, so it has a different *design*.

What should a church look like? Have you spent much time thinking about that? Most likely all of us have a concept in our mind of what makes a building “a church.” Since Shining Mountains is seeking a chance to build or remodel a church, it's worth taking some time to discuss how Lutheran theology shapes a church—that is, how our *purpose* shapes our *design*. For the next six months, this series of articles seeks to do that. God-willing, such a focus can help us appreciate aspects of our current house of worship as well.

The hallmark of Lutheran (that is to say, Scriptural) theology is that God comes to serve us in the Means of Grace. The Means of Grace is “the gospel in Word and Sacrament.” The gospel is “the power of God for the salvation of all who believe” (Romans 1:16). We don't just come to church to *learn* or *pray* or *sing*. We come to hear the powerful message of God's free forgiveness for us proclaimed in the words of Scripture, the water of baptism and the bread and wine of Holy Communion. That means that the focus of worship is singular and threefold at the same time. Everything in our worship is to focus on the gospel, yet the gospel comes to us in three distinct ways: the Word, Holy Baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

It shouldn't be surprising, then, that distinctly Lutheran churches are built with this unique focus. A pulpit and lectern (or, like Shining Mountains has, a single *ambo*) are the places for the reading of God's Word. The altar has a key presence in the church—not as a place of sacrifice, but especially as the *table* where Christ invites us to be guests at his Supper. The baptismal font also merits a clearly visible position. Some churches (like Shining Mountains) place the font on the chancel with the pulpit and ambo. Others place the font at the entrance to the sanctuary as a reminder that it is through baptism that we enter God's family. Either position can give a clear Lutheran testimony.

This style of architecture differs strongly from many churches built in the last fifty years in America. Increasingly, a stage area replaces the chancel. Font, altar, and even pulpit are nowhere in sight. This isn't accidental. Since the *theology* of such churches is that converts are made to Christ through an emotional or rational decision (instead of by the supernatural working of the Spirit through the Gospel), churches are designed with stages where charismatic leaders and music bands seek to lead the hearers to the appropriate emotional state to “accept Christ.”

Christians over the years have worshiped in houses, in graveyards, on ships at sea, in hospital rooms and in storefronts. No building—no matter how beautiful or well-designed—brings someone to faith. Only the gospel does that. But our buildings can be an embodiment of and testimony to what we believe. God grant that when you come into church and see those physical representatives of the means of grace—the pulpit, the font and the table—you don't simply think, “Ah, this is *Lutheran*,” but rather, “Ah, this is the place where the almighty Lord comes down from heaven to serve me with his grace.”

CONCEPTS THAT SHAPE LUTHERAN ARCHITECTURE

Over the next five months, this article will explore the ways these concepts shape Lutheran church buildings:

- *The Means of Grace*
- *Transcendence and intimacy*
- *Mutual Encouragement*
- *Past and present*
- *Symbolism*



One example of a chancel area that draws attention to the Means of Grace. Three things share equal prominence: The ambo (pulpit), table (altar) and font.

Love one another

The mission that Christ gave to his Church is to glorify him by spreading the gospel—baptizing people and teaching them to hold to God's Word. That's the task of the Church.

The Church is not a political organization. It is neither Democrat nor Republican. The Church doesn't march on Washington nor sign petitions.

However, Christ calls individual Christians to be *actively concerned* about such earthly matters. We're to love our neighbors, pray for our leaders and others in authority, and speak up for those who are not able to speak for themselves.

As Christians take a role in such matters, we are *guided* by our faith without seeking to *legislate* our faith on others. A common example is that of abortion: God's Word convinces us that any conceived child is a living being, and that God wants us to preserve those lives. While we can't pass laws mandating that people recognize that babies have souls that are precious in God's eyes, we work with the trust that God's Word is true. That leads us to urge our leaders to listen to the messages of logic and science and pass laws that consistently protect unborn human life as equally as it protects those who are born.

Christian Life Resources (CLR), an organization within the WELS, is tracking Montana's consideration of legalizing physician-assisted suicide. CLR's director has sent the form located to the right of this article. Please consider educating yourself on the issue so that you can use—or not use—this form as you see fit. Or better yet, contacting Robert Fleishman (robertf@christianliferesources.com), the director of CLR to become better informed on the discussion and consider how you may help protect those in need.

**No assisted suicide.
No assisted elder abuse.
Preserve choice for seniors.**



In Montana, assisted suicide is not legal, but the door has been opened by the Montana Supreme Court. Unfortunately, in its decision the Court overlooked elder abuse, which is a significant problem in our state. If assisted suicide is legalized, there will be new paths of abuse against the elderly. Who is to know if a person's request for lethal drugs is made freely or through coercion?

To keep our communities free from assisted suicide, Montanans are uniting - neighbors and friends, physicians and nurses, relatives and co-workers. **We believe assisted suicide is not the answer.** Rather, excellent health care and old-fashioned neighborly concern are the key. **Will you join us?**

Help protect seniors with Montanans United for Safe and Effective Care.
Assisted suicide is not the answer. Good care is.

For more information: www.montanansunited.org / (406) 461-1668 / contact@montanansunited.org

I oppose assisted suicide, and I support safe and effective care.

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____
Email _____

☐ CHECK HERE to allow your name to be used in letting lawmakers know you oppose assisted suicide in Montana.

Mail to: Montanans United for Safe and Effective Care, P.O. Box 1229, Helena, MT 59624

Montanans United for Safe and Effective Care is a Nonprofit Corporation



Gingerbread House Decorating

The youth of Shining Mountains are invited to a day of gingerbread house decorating with Brenda McGough.

On Saturday, December 11, Mrs. McGough will help us decorate gingerbread houses to be delivered to local nursing homes and others who might benefit from this show of love and care. If you're interested in taking part, please speak to Pastor or Mrs. McGough for more details on place and time.

Serving Us in December *Thanks to those who served in November!*

	<u>Ushers</u>	<u>Refreshments</u>	<u>Flowers</u>	<u>Cleaners</u>
12/5	D Pruitt / M Joecks	open / open	E Baker	Pruitt, A & R
12/12	J Lauersdorf / T Zulauf	Lauersdorf / open	open	Thiede
12/19	D Gustafson / D Gentry	V Baker / open	open	Baker, E
12/26	J Lauersdorf / T Zulauf	Lauersdorf / open	Buchholz	Baker, L & V

Ushers for special services

Advent services

12/1—L Baker, B Baran
12/8—J Thiede, D Thiede
12/15—J Kohler

Christmas services

12/24—A Pruitt, J Becker
12/25—J Hammer, B Thiede

Upcoming Messages

Throughout December we worship in the seasons of *Advent* and *Christmas* at the beginning of a new Church Year. Below is a list of both our Sunday worship and Midweek worship themes and focuses.

May the following schedule help you as you prepare for worship or look for opportunities to invite a friend!

Sundays in December

Dec. 5 *Advent 2: God's Kingdom is Worth Waiting For (Isaiah 11:1-10, Romans 15:4-13, Matthew 3:1-12)*

Dec 12 *Advent 3: God's Kingdom Gives us Strength and Courage (Is. 35:1-10, Ja. 5:7-11, Mt. 11:2-11)*

Dec 19 *Advent 4: God's Kingdom Will Come through the Child Immanuel (Is. 7:1-17, Ro. 1:1-7, Mt. 1:18-25)*

Dec 26 *The Festival of the Holy Innocents (Jeremiah 31:15-17, 1 Peter 4:12-19, Matthew 2:13-18)*

Midweek Advent Worship

Wed., Dec. 1, 7:00 pm *How does Baptism Unite Us to Christ? (Luke 3:1-6; Colossians 2:11-14)*

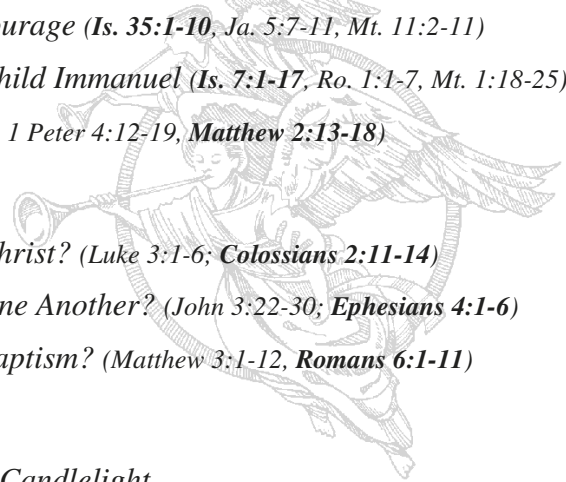
Wed., Dec. 8, 7:00 pm *How does Baptism Unite Us to One Another? (John 3:22-30; Ephesians 4:1-6)*

Wed., Dec. 15, 7:00 pm *How Is Confession a Return to Baptism? (Matthew 3:1-12, Romans 6:1-11)*

Christmas Celebrations

Fri., Dec. 24, 7:00 pm *Children's service of Carols and Candlelight*

Sat., Dec. 25, 10:00 am *The Festival of the Nativity (Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-9, John 1:1-14)*



December 2010

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		Nov 30 6:30pm Confirmation Class (at parsonage)	1 6:00 Soup Supper 7:00 Midweek Advent 1	2	3	4
5 9:00 Sunday School/ Bible class 10:00 Worship w/ H.C. 11:30 Advent Party	6	7 6:30pm Confirmation Class (at parsonage)	8 6:00 Soup Supper 7:00 Midweek Advent 2	9 6:15 pm Council meeting	10	11
12 9:00 S.S./Bible class 10:00 Worship 11:15— Christmas Eve rehearsal 8:00 pm—College group at parsonage	13	14 6:30pm Confirmation Class (at parsonage)	15 6:00 Soup Supper 7:00 Midweek Advent 3	16	17	18 10:00am-Noon— Christmas Eve rehearsal
19 9:00 Sunday School/ Bible class 10:00 Worship w/ H.C.	20	21	22 6:30pm Christmas Eve rehearsal "snow date" to be used only if needed	23	24 7:00 Christmas Eve can- dlelight service	25 10:00 Christmas Day worship with Holy Com- munion
26 10:00 Worship: Festival of the Holy Innocents	27	28	29	30	31	