

## Pastor's Ponderings

*Pastor David Eisenhuth*

Where is the navel of the world? No, I'm not talking about an orange grove in central Florida. I'm talking about a silver star on the floor underneath an altar in the grotto of a church in Bethlehem. The Basilica Church of the Nativity is the oldest place of worship in continuous use in Christendom. The original church was commissioned by Constantine the Great after his mother, Helena, visited the Holy Land in the years 325-326. Christians there identified the exact spot on which, tradition held, Christ was born. That first church was dedicated on 31 May 339. It was destroyed by fire in the sixth century. The "new" church was built a number of years later. Despite the addition of many parts, including three monasteries, over the ensuing centuries, the church has pretty much stayed the same.

A set of narrow steps takes one directly under the high altar of the basilica. Down below the high altar is a rather small space with a low, barrel-vault ceiling. The altar at one end stands above a silver star embedded in the floor. Pilgrims are encouraged to get on their hands and knees and kiss the star. This is the very place on which stood the manger in which the newborn Christ child was placed.

Now with most places in the Holy Land, this may or may not be the *exact* spot where Jesus was born. Is the tomb of Lazarus really where that friend of Jesus was buried? Did Jesus turn water into wine in a place in Cana of Galilee where a beautiful church now stands? Did Peter live in a house now beneath a glass floor of a church in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee? Who knows for sure, but in the end it doesn't matter. Just being there is amazing. Christians who visit Israel are truly blessed to the somewhere in the vicinity where Jesus walked.

That star in the grotto is affectionately known as the navel of the world. Now what is a navel? It is, of course, a person's belly button. This is the point of connection between a mother and her developing fetus. Through the mother's placenta, by way of the umbilical cord, a child receives nourishment as it grows over the course of nine months. Whether it's an "innie" or an "outtie," we all have

one. It must be seen as a reminder that we were attached to someone who gave us birth.

Christmas is the point of connection between the divine and the human. Christianity is the only world religion in which the divine becomes intertwined with the human creation. It's a messy thing. It's difficult to understand (think bodily functions, *et cetera*). But it is a central point of our faith that God loved us so much that the Father sent his Son into the world to take on our human nature. This child fulfills the predictions of scripture that God's wayward people would be redeemed in a very special way.

The infant Jesus grows up to be a man who teaches and preaches, who does miracles and heals people, but in the end dies for us. But that is not the end of the story. Death cannot defeat God's plan for the salvation of the world. Jesus rises from the dead and offers us the gift of the divine. So the divine becomes human and the human ultimately shares in that divinity.

Whether or not the star in the floor is *the* place where God entered the world in human form as the baby of Bethlehem doesn't matter. What matters is that point of connection—the navel—that the star and that magnificent

church signify. It's a humbling experience to be there. I have been there two times. On both occasions, groups of pilgrims were there in the grotto listening to the Christmas story being read. The words take on new significance in that place. And yes, both times I got on my hands and knees and kissed the star.

"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to their own town to register.

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# The Big Picture

*June Habeck-Holler*

What do you do with eight adults and three children while they wait their turn at the Outreach Center?

For many years, they stood and waited in the hallway inside the Randolph Street entry way. In recent years, a waiting Room was provided with sofas, chairs, cold water, air conditioning, and privacy. More recently, reading materials were provided, as well as a large table where volunteers give away unneeded possessions after clearing closets, basements *et cetera*. Our guests take away items like decorations, toys, glassware, jewelry, DVDs, curtains, tools, and so on, that they can use.

For the little ones, a plastic children's table and chairs were set up, and volunteers provided toys and coloring books for the youngest.

Recently the children's toys began to disappear, apparently taken by our guests. So we posted a sign saying: "Please leave toys here so that our other guests may enjoy them," and we replaced the toys. The next week the sign was gone and so were the toys.

Our responses to this varied. Some said indignantly that it was appalling how our guests could rob a church, especially one that is helping them with food and clothing. Others said we would have to increase member presence in that area to monitor our guests' behavior.

But the very ones who donated the toys said, "Economically, things must be getting harder, not better for them," and, "With Christmas coming, they need toys for their kids."

Our teams are still contemplating how to address this situation. But in a recent November church service, we prayed to God, "Keep your love alive in us and in our communities, so that we might bring hope to a suffering world."

*God's love.* So we try to understand, forgive, and keep addressing the needs of our suffering world. As Christians, we see the big picture, not just the latest aggravation.

What we see is that God spoke to the first humans and to Moses, then sent numerous prophets over earth's time; initially he gave us laws guiding us in living for the purpose we were created. Over and over again we ate the apple and broke the commandments.

When Jesus's death and resurrection for our human sins became our only way to be reconciled with our creator, the Gospel of Love took precedence over the law. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you love one another" (John 13:34). How do we do that? "Tend my sheep," Jesus told Peter when Peter swore three times that he loved Jesus. (John 21:16).

The church has many big decisions to face in the coming years. We must re-evolve as a body of believers. Cur-

*Continued next column.*

rently, Jesus's example and words seem a good place to start. After Jesus' resurrection, he told his followers: "All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

What is Jesus calling us to do? Tell, show, and live God's love in the world, convey the assurances of the Holy Spirit's presence, and teach others by word and actions all what Jesus has taught us.

We are not called to be a private social club, to construct buildings, to convert people to our group identity, to replace indigent people's beliefs with ours, to make money, to look askance at those who speak, dress, love, worship or vote differently, or to judge anyone's motives or value.

We are to love because we are so loved. To tend the sheep around us, to forgive without ceasing, to be the kind, merciful and hopeful to all we encounter.

No, it is not our nature. But it is for what we were created.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

The Food Pantry needs crackers, oatmeal, and cake and cookie box mixes.

The Clothing Bank greatly needs blankets, sheets, towels, and mens shoes.

## PONDER THIS

"The movement in our relationship is always from God to us. Always. We can't, through our piety or goodness, move closer to God. God is always coming near to us. Most especially in the Eucharist and in the stranger."

—Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber



# From the Organ Bench

*Pastor Greg Shook*

Dear Flock,

Some years ago Mark Oldenburg, now retired chaplain at Gettysburg Theological Seminary (now United Seminary), gave a presentation that he called "Why Bother About Advent?" He spoke of Advent being the forgotten season of our church year.

With Advent drawing closer, I wanted to ask you to think about Advent and its relevance in your life. Why should we bother about it? What is the significance of Advent? It seems like we arrive at Christmas earlier each year. Some merchants were putting Christmas items on display in late August! December really is a busy month for many of us. Advent begins on December 1! Take a few moments out of the hustle/bustle for you . . . for reflection . . . to prepare yourselves for Christ's entrance into the world.

Join us for these seasonal musical events.

Soli Deo Gloria!  
Pastor Greg



## ORGAN PROJECT UPDATE

As I write this article, the organ project is well underway and should be finished in about 10 days. The console was gutted, wiring pulled from under the floor, and the restoration started. New wiring and circuitry will be installed in the console and run into each chamber. Watching the workers begin their task was like watching one of the house restoration TV shows where a house is gutted and given a new start. We look forward to the project being completed by the First Sunday in Advent. There will be no visible changes from the congregation, however a close-up view of the organ console will show some changes and enhancements. Peter Luley and Associates from Pittsburgh are doing the work.

## ADVENT VESPERS

At 4 p.m. Sunday, December 1, at St. John's Lutheran Church, our choir will join with other Lutheran churches from throughout the county to present Advent Vespers: Lessons and Carols for Advent. This event will be a series of readings, Advent carols, and music for organ and instruments. Those attending are asked to bring a nonperishable food item or items for the food banks at St. Mark's, Trinity, and Zion Lutheran. A free-will offering also will be received to be divided up between the food banks.

This is a wonderful way to begin your Advent season with seasonal readings and music. The program is open

to the public. St. John's Lutheran Church is located across from the Washington County Free Library on South Potomac Street. Please share the event with your neighbors, attend the event yourself, and be generous with nonperishable food items and monetary donations.

## HAGERSTOWN CHORAL ARTS

HCA will present their holiday concert, Carols with Choral Arts, at 4 p.m. on Saturday, December 7, at Trinity Lutheran Church. The concert will feature selections for the Advent and Christmas seasons accompanied by a small ensemble and piano. A special treat for this program will be guest pianist Sharon Teeter. A quite accomplished pianist in her own right, Sharon will join our regular accompanist Mary Remsburg (who is her daughter!) on several choral works, and they will perform several solo works for two pianos. The concert is open to the public and a free-will offering will be received. Invite some friends to join you for this program of seasonal music.

## JOYFUL NOISE

Our children's choir has been going full steam since early September. Each week we learn songs for the various seasons and have a craft project or a group activity. The children this "semester" have been quite energetic, but wonderful. The children have learned songs for autumn, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and are now working on Christmas songs to be presented at a program sometime in December. The date is not yet available, but we will announce it as soon as we know it. The children seem to be responding and have slowly learned to trust us to be there and work with them each week. Jane Drawbaugh has been my right-hand resource in this venture, and we are thankful for our assisting "elves," Marty Blake, Barb Jones, and Kathy King. This is a wonderful and very welcomed outreach from our church. Watch for updates.

## POINSETTIAS AND CARDS FOR OUR SHUT-INS

Poinsettias and cards for members of Trinity who are shut-ins will be available for pick up on Sunday, December 14. If you would like to deliver a plant and a Christmas card to a shut-in, please sign up on the log-in sheet, so efforts aren't duplicated. The weekly *Mini Messenger* will list the location of the plants. If you have any questions, please see Pastor Greg.

## TWELFTH NIGHT PROGRAM

Mark your calendars for 5 p.m. Sunday, January 5. The Capital Carillon Handbell Choir, under the direction of Karrick Baird, will return for our annual Twelfth Night program that will include seasonal carol arrangements, readings, and organ and instrumental music. Invite some friends to join you to get the New Year started with joyful music! The concert is free. A free-will offering will be received.

# December Announcements

## ALL SAINT'S DAY COFFEE HOUR

Many thanks for all who participated in the coffee hours following the services on All Saint's Day. We 20 donations of food items in memory of the saints in our lives. The stories that accompanied the food items brought smiles and tears. We had wonderful fellowship with the families of our members who entered the Church Triumphant this past year. We hope to continue this event next year. God's comfort and healing spirit were among us all.

## CHARITY OF THE MONTH

Thanks to all who have donated to our Charity of the Month projects. This fall we have helped with the Micah's Backpack ministry and the Thanksgiving Food Box project. We will now enter the Christmas season with gift cards for our Veteran Christmas project. This has been a well-received event the past few years. Your financial donations allow us to buy and give gift cards to the veterans at North Point Veterans Home. These cards are used by each veteran for their needs. A card gives them great joy, as many are able to purchase Christmas gifts for their family. The cards are greatly appreciated. Envelops for this project are available in Fellowship Hall on the tables and in the narthex as well as in the pews of the sanctuary.

## TOUR OF HISTORIC HOUSES OF WORSHIP

Take a look at the December issue of *Hagerstown Magazine*. It includes a wonderful article about the Tour of Historic Houses of Worship, featuring the photos from past photo contests. There are several beautiful pictures of Trinity decorated for the holiday! Trinity will once again welcome visitors from 3 to 7 p.m. on December 26. It is wonderful to see visitors' faces as they walk into our sanctuary! Their eyes open wide and their jaws drop! "Wow!" We need hosts here to greet visitors. You don't need to be an expert on the stained glass windows or our architecture. What we need is a smile and a "Welcome to Trinity!" We are open for four hours, but you do not need to stay the entire time. There will be sign-in sheets for each hour. We will serve hot Christmas punch and cookies. If you cannot be here on for the tour, please consider donating some goodies. If you have any questions or to volunteer, please contact Judy Conrad at (301) 992-5856 or Scarlett Michael at (301) 800-6666.

## CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES

Services will be at 4 p.m. in the Nave, 7 p.m. in Fellowship Hall, and 10:30 p.m. in the Nave. Please see the *Mini-Messenger* for complete details.

## JAZZ VESPERS

December Jazz Vespers will follow the Tour of Historic Houses of Worship Tour on December 26, beginning with a reception at 7 p.m. Please join us for songs and readings of the season!

## TAIZÈ SERVICE

Trinity will offer its second Taizè Service at 7 p.m. on Monday, December 30. Please join us, and invite your family members and friends, for this meditative and joyful worship service.

## Pastor's Ponderings, Continued

"So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them."  
—Luke 2:1-7



*Touching the navel of the world in the Holy Land.*

## A PERSONAL NOTE

On Tuesday, November 12, my partner of six years, Remberto Antonio Rivera Herrera, and I were married in a civil ceremony at the town hall of Frederiksberg, Denmark, a suburb of Copenhagen. We hoped this would happen during our summer visit to Denmark, but a glitch made that impossible at that time.

We will apply for a "C" visa for Antonino, a visa for a married partner who lives in a foreign country. It could take up to 18 months. When Antonio is able to come to the U.S., we plan to have a service at Trinity to celebrate our marriage.

I would like to thank everyone who has been supportive during this journey. Your prayers for us are greatly appreciated. Antonio is especially eager to meet all the people at Trinity I talk to him about.



# Deacon Updates

*Peg Hardinge, OSSD*

Everything is going well with me; I am still involved in the activities I covered in my last newsletter report. I have been working on gold stoles for Pastor David and me to wear over the Christmas season. Jane Drawbaugh is creating the embroidered crosses that will be applied to them, and they will really be a beautiful touch! Jane, we are so grateful. Other than that, I am maintaining. I wanted to mention something to the membership that I have been spending a great deal of time thinking about. Being situated in the center of a need-driven demographic, my question has been, what skills do we, as individuals, have to offer that we could channel through Trinity, to our immediate neighborhood?

The community meals, Food Pantry, Clothing Bank, trunk or treat, and such events are well received, for sure. During our recent community meal, I just loved coming to sit and talk with the families who were there to have dinner at Trinity. I asked them questions such as where they are from (usually within walking or short driving distance), how they found out about the dinner (our sign/word of mouth) and, most importantly, how they feel Trinity could be of service to them in the future.

Everyone really appreciates the meals and the Food Pantry and Clothing Bank, and were quick to tell me how much they mean to them. But the one common denominator was activities for neighborhood children. I asked one mother what sorts of things she envisioned, and these suggestions rolled off her tongue like she was just waiting for someone to ask.

Here is her list: art sessions; making cards, ornaments, or crafts of any kind; having kid's movies with snacks; playing board games; cooking classes for latchkey kids; having a mentoring program for kids who are bullied; and hosting a talent contest. Where art is involved, she suggested an art show in our church, and she would love to see us perform children's theater. Her son, who looked to be about 11, stated that he is an "expert in the computer and if it acts up, I can fix anything, but if you have board games here, I'm all over it!" His mother even offered to lead these children's activities, and she happens to be a backyard neighbor within walking distance!

In my 40 years of theater experience through selecting, directing, and acting in plays, the most widely attended plays were those that had lots of children involved. Parents, grandparents, neighbors, and teachers all came to see what their little loved ones had accomplished. And, as we all know, children are our future church and, indeed, our future American citizens, who can only become more talented and confident with the members of Trinity

coming together to support them; by sharing our talents and mentoring as the youth talk about their world, their challenges, and difficulties.

I'm just saying, each and every one of us can play board games, cook a little bit, do entry-level crafts and chat with a child about whatever is on his or her mind. Once or twice a year for a Saturday morning or afternoon is not a huge commitment, and if we had a rotating member volunteer list of 20 or 30 people, it would not be hard on any one person. One additional request was free oil changes for single moms and widows. I just know there are men in our congregation who know how to change the oil in a car. How about haircuts for free twice a year; especially before school? Does anyone sew? Free clothing repair twice a year?

Folks, we can do this. I just know that *you*, you who are reading this right now, have been blessed with knowledge, equipment, and skill specifically for some higher purpose; like serving "least of these" our neighbors who need our help. As we begin to discuss our future directions for Trinity, we are looking to our membership to jump on this bandwagon and help redefine Trinity as one of the most effective pillars of its community. This is our time. We were put here, in this place, to become the change we seek. I look forward to partnering with you in this new direction!

God bless you, every single one.  
Peg Hardinge, OSSD

Prepare  
the way  
of the  
LORD.  
ISAIAH 40:3

# DEC 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
<b>01</b>	<b>02</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>04</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>07</b>
8:45am Praise Worship 10am Sunday School 11:am Traditional Service 4pm Advent Vespers	1pm Parish Life 7pm Boy Scouts 7pm Bible Study	10am Bible Study 1:30pm Sr. Ministry 7pm Property 7pm Choral Arts Rehearsal	10am Social Ministry 6pm Crochet Group 7pm Labor of Love Service 7:30pm Parish Choir	6:30pm Praise Band 7pm Choral Arts Rehearsal		4pm Choral Arts Concert
<b>08</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>C/W SHELTER</b> 8:45am Praise Worship 10am Sunday School 11am Traditional Service	<b>C/W SHELTER</b> 11:30am Widows Luncheon 5:30pm Civitan 7pm Boy Scouts 7pm Bible Study	<b>C/W SHELTER</b> 10am Bible Study 6:30pm Personnel 6:30pm Mutual Min.	<b>C/W SHELTER</b> 10am Social Ministry 5:30pm Civitan Karaoke 6:30pm Christian Ed 7:30pm Parish Choir	<b>C/W SHELTER</b> 5:30pm Exec Team 6:30pm Praise Band	<b>C/W SHELTER</b> <b>NEWSLETTER</b> <b>ARTICLES DUE</b>	<b>C/W SHELTER</b> 10am Worship and Music
<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>
8:45am Praise Worship 10am Sunday School 11am Traditional Service	7pm Boy Scouts 7pm Bible Study	10am Bible Study 6:30pm Council	6pm Crochet Group 7:30pm Parish Choir	6:30pm Praise Band		
<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>
8:45am Praise Worship 10am Sunday School 11am Traditional Service		<b>CHRISTMAS EVE</b> 4pm Service 7pm Service 10pm Music Prelude 10:30pm Traditional Service	<b>CHRISTMAS</b> <b>OFFICE CLOSED</b>	4pm Tour of Churches 7pm Jazz Vespers		
<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>				
8:45am Praise Worship 10am Sunday School 11am Traditional Service	<b>NEW YEARS EVE</b>					



It is time to order the poinsettias that will decorate our worship areas on Christmas Eve. Below is an order form to sponsor one or more plants in memory of, or in honor, of loved ones. The cost is \$10 per plant. Please complete the order form below and return it with a check by Monday, December 16. Please make checks payable to Trinity Lutheran Church, and designate "poinsettias" on the memo line.

Booklets that list the names of donors and loved ones honored and remembered and will be available on Christmas Eve.

In Memory of:

In Honor of:


Given by:

Amount given:

--	--



\* Indicates under 10

\*\* Indicates over 75

- 2 Douglas Stull
- 3 Brent Toms
- 5 Cathy Gorsuch
- 7 Gary Hammond  
James Rohrer
- 8 Fred Garrett\*\*  
Genevieve Rochefort
- 9 Angel Stull
- 11 Jean Kendle\*\*
- 13 Anne Mowen
- 14 Vi Carlson\*\*
- 16 Addie Hardinge
- 21 Thomas Anthony  
Keith Scheer
- 24 Patrick Anthony  
Matthew Stull
- 25 John Hershey, III
- 28 Ronald Kershner
- 29 Joel Pryor
- 31 Joseph Krueger  
Junior Michael\*\*  
Maria Winebrenner

## "Thank You!"

Dear Trinity,

Thank you so very much for all the years that you allowed us to use the church for our monthly meetings and special classes. Our NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) affiliate is no longer active, so we will not be in need of a meeting facility.

A special thank you to Ricky. He was always helpful and friendly and I know that he is an asset to your staff.

—Sincerely, Connie Pauley

Dear Trinity,

Thank you very much for the beautiful collection of flowers. They were a very thoughtful birthday gift. Thank you again.

—Watson Rasey



\* Indicates 50 years or more

- 2 Shane & Stephanie Angles
- 12 Kenneth & Erma Leedy, Jr.\*
- 17 Kenneth & Judy Purdham
- 19 Dave & Nancy Krueger
- 22 Ralph & Judy Conrad
- 28 Michael & Cathy Gorsuch  
Ronald & Sue Kershner\*
- 30 Jeff & Lezlee Sabo

**Trinity Lutheran Church**  
15 Randolph Avenue  
Hagerstown, Maryland 21740

Phone: (301)733-2878 [www.tlchag.org](http://www.tlchag.org)

Sunday Worship at 8:45 a.m. and 11 a.m.  
Sunday School for All Ages at 9:55 a.m.  
Church Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday

**MAKING DISCIPLES FOR CHRIST**

**CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED**

Food Pantry and Clothing Bank: (301)733-5651  
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 11 a.m. to 1:45 p.m.

Washington County Literacy Council: (301)739-4208  
Tuesday and Thursday: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

