**Advent and Christmas**

**at The Federated Church**

**Sunday, November 30, 2014**

Advent begins

Worship at 9AM and 11AM

**Sunday, December 7, 2014**

Worship at 9AM and 11AM

with communion

Advent Workshop (3PM)

Chili Cook-off (5PM)

**Sunday, December 14, 2014**

Worship at 9AM and 11AM

**Sunday, December 21, 2014**

Worship at 9AM and 11AM

Christmas Pageant (11AM)

Blue Christmas Service (4PM)

**Christmas Eve, December 24, 2014**

Service of Lessons & Carols (5PM)

Christmas Potluck Supper (6PM)

Candlelight Service with Communion (11PM)



**2014**

**Advent Devotions and Stories prepared for you**

**by Members and Friends of**

**The Federated Church**

**Fergus Falls, MN**



The word “Advent” is derived from the Latin word adventus, meaning “coming.” Scholars believe that during the 4th and 5th centuries in Spain and Gaul, Advent was a season of preparation for the baptism of new Christians at the January feast of Epiphany, the celebration of God’s incarnation represented by the visit of the Magi to the baby Jesus ([Matthew 2:1](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=esv&q=mt+2:1)), his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist ([John 1:29](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=esv&q=joh+1:29)), and his first miracle at Cana ([John 2:1](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=esv&q=joh+2:1)). During this season of preparation, Christians would spend 40 days in penance, prayer, and fasting to prepare for this celebration; originally, there was little connection between Advent and Christmas.

By the 6th century, however, Roman Christians had tied Advent to the coming of Christ. But the “coming” they had in mind was not Christ’s first coming in the manger in Bethlehem, but his second coming in the clouds as the judge of the world. It was not until the Middle Ages that the Advent season was explicitly linked to Christ’s first coming at Christmas.

This collection of scripture readings and stories is prepared by the members and friends of The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN. We hope it will be a source of blessing to you in this season of waiting and watching.

Have a blessed Advent and a Merry Christmas!

Pastor Doug Dent

**Advent Readings**

Sunday, November 30th Isaiah 40:1-5

Monday, December 1st Isaiah 52:7-10

Tuesday, December 2nd Isaiah 40:9-11

Wednesday, December 3rd Genesis 3:8-15

Thursday, December 4th Genesis 15:1-6

Friday, December 5th Deuteronomy 18:15-19

Saturday, December 6th Psalm 98:1-4

Sunday, December 7th Isaiah 11:1-10

Monday, December 8th Zechariah 6:12-13

Tuesday, December 9th Micah 5:2-4

Wednesday, December 10th Malachi 3:1-6

Thursday, December 11th John 1:1-8

Friday, December 12th John 1:9-18

Saturday, December 13th Mark 1:1-3

Sunday, December 14th Luke 1:5-13

Monday, December 15th Luke 1:14-17

Tuesday, December 16th Luke 1:18-25

Wednesday, December 17th Luke 1:39-45

Thursday, December 18th Luke 1:46-56

Friday, December 19th Luke 1:57-66

Saturday, December 20th Luke 1:67-80

Sunday, December 21st Isaiah 7:10-14

Monday, December 22nd Luke 1:26-35

Tuesday, December 23rd Isaiah 9:2-7

Wednesday, December 24th Matthew 1:18-25

Thursday, December 25th Luke 2:1-20

**November 30, 2014**

**Waiting Expectantly**

Bev Richter

Advent is the season of anticipation of something momentous to come; in our Christian faith it is awaiting the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ. My personal advent experience began about mid-February, 1986. Our married son was with the U. S. Army in California where he and his wife settled after their marriage.   The young couple had joyfully let both families back in Minnesota know that - like Mary and Joseph in the Advent story in the Gospels - they were expecting a child. For our family, this was to be grandchild number one, so our family was especially delighted and excited for the coming of this little welcome addition.

Spring came and melted into summer. Summer blended into fall; then came the month of October! Late in the day on October 28, the call came! We were grandparents...mother and baby girl were doing fine. And, apparently, so was the new daddy.

In this first-time grandmother's life, this was a thrill. As it was, Grandpa R. and I had almost two more months of expectant waiting before we could - at last - see and personally welcome little Michelle into our family.  Our son was due to be discharged from the Army and expected to be home for Christmas.   He sent his wife and infant daughter on ahead by plane a few days before the holiday to make the journey easier and less tiring for them.

On the day of their arrival the Fargo airport waiting room hummed with the chatter of two sets of grandparents and aunts as we awaited the plane bringing its precious cargo.  Of course, many other travelers were being met by family and friends as well, and Kevin Wallevan of WDAY television and his crew were there to, presumably, interview someone coming on this same flight.

Passengers began trickling into the waiting room amid the hugs and joyous greetings of loved ones while our expectant group eagerly waited for sight of the new mother and her baby. And, then, our daughter-in-law was spotted at the end of the long walkway.   We all crowded nearer the door totally oblivious to all others in the waiting area.   There were a lot of smiles, some tears of joy, a great deal of banter and laughter and questions rapidly fired at the travel weary young mother whom we had surrounded.

Suddenly, I found myself holding this baby I had so longed to see and to hold! I was overcome with thoughts and emotions: remembering the birth and care of Michelle's daddy who was our first-born child; pride in our son and daughter-in-law for presenting such a pretty, healthy, perfect little girl to their families; gratitude to God for bringing her into the world; guiding her parents in good parenting skills; and for the safe arrival into the loving arms of extended family.   What a joy!   In response to someone's shout "hold her up for the camera", I held Michelle up to face a camera pointed in our direction.

Christmas Eve, after my husband and I and two of our daughters home for Christmas had returned from the lovely, traditional service at The Federated Church, we settled in to watch some of the wonderful Christmas music programs offered on television. At 10 p.m., WDAY news was airing a special "home for the holidays" feature hosted by Kevin Wallevan. As we watched, suddenly there appeared on the screen Michelle surrounded by her many admirers!

The joyful group of proud grandparents, aunts, and new mother...all were there captured by the camera. Recalling it now, I feel that in this "advent experience" we could perhaps be compared with the shepherds on that wondrous night as they welcomed the newborn Jesus. For us, Michelle's family, the long period of waiting - wondering - longing - expecting had ended with a celebration of joy, adoration, and gratitude.

*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord…*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us’…The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:8-11, 15, 20

**December 1, 2014**

**God with Us**

Elizabeth Hatling

This year, so much is different. My heart is heavy.

The hearts of my family members are heavy.

Since our dad passed away in July, a huge part of our life has been missing.

*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name, ‘Immanuel’ (which means, God with us)*.*”* [Matthew 1:23]

Especially in times that life doesn’t make sense, this makes all the difference. God knows. He is with us. He isn’t a God separate from His creation, uninvolved and uninterested in their cares. God feels what we feel. He weeps with us when we hurt. He came, lived, went to the cross and rose again so that death isn’t the end, so that we are not without hope.

This year is going to be sad without our dad here. Yet, because Jesus is Immanuel – God with us – and because he lived his life in perfect communion with the Father, and walked the way God had for him – the way of being a servant and going to the cross in our place out of love for the world, we can be deeply saddened and feel the pain of death, without being defeated. We can experience the joy of Christmas; cherish our time with family and friends; feel, as we observe old traditions, that something is missing; cry and laugh as we remember our Dad together; generously give of ourselves, our time and our resources to one another, knowing that our days are who-knows-how-many, and much sweeter when we have a loose hold on things here on earth. Because this isn’t the end. There will be a day when we are with God forever, and he will wipe away every tear. Until that day we can live out the truth that, God is here, with us.

Note: December 1st is John Hatling’s birthday.

**December 2, 2014**

**The Christmas Card**

Ross Stone

Christmas break is coming in my freshman year at Moorhead State. Final exams have been scheduled, and one of my classes has its exam scheduled for the very last date and time. Great! All my friends and acquaintances will be leaving before my exams are over. I have no way to get home to St. Paul and it’s too cold to hitch hike. Money to buy a ticket home? I haven’t got enough money to buy a candy bar from a vending machine. What can I do?

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:34: *Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

True, I had enough projects to complete by quarter’s end that I should be working on today. God had blessed me thus far, and I had every confidence that he would provide for my tomorrow as well. God would put someone in my path that was driving to St. Paul, or He wouldn’t. Either way, I had no control over it, so I left it to Him.

I must admit that once finals week arrived and friends began leaving for home, I occasionally wondered if I might hear of someone driving to St. Paul. But then on the afternoon before my last final, my prayer was answered in the mail.

My Aunt Jean sent me a Christmas card with a check for $14. Why would she send me money? She never had before. As my father’s life was coming to an end from pancreatic cancer, did she recall the gifts of money her brother had sent her in her freshman year of college and how helpful and timely that money can be? Even so: why $14? Why not $10 or $15? God made it clear to me that her gift was His answer to my prayer. $14 was the exact amount needed for a train ticket from Moorhead to Minneapolis. That last Christmas with all my siblings and both my parents was made all the more special, by God’s part in bringing me home.

Father, in this season we celebrate the birth of your son, Jesus. We recognize this gift as the opportunity for reconciliation with you through Christ. No greater gift or sacrifice could You give. Yet, help us also Father to expect, recognize, and appreciate, the many gifts and blessings you shower upon us daily. Your devotion to your children is beyond our understanding. Amen.

**December 3, 2014**

**Christmas 1945**

John MacFarlane



One of the first Christmas I remember with much clarity was that of 1945 mainly because in the first week of September WWII ended and two days later I entered the first grade at Hallock public school. It was an exciting time. Rationing was over; gasoline, sugar, pepper and the like were once again available. People had a feeling of security. Three of my mother’s brothers along with many others returned from the military.

Christmas had an elevated significance for most, perhaps because the worries of previous years were gone, there was a genuine feeling of thankfulness and renewal of confidence in the goodness of God. We had a Christmas program at school, think the first grade sang a couple of songs-after weeks of practice. It was probably not much by today’s standards but I thought it wonderful. The Northcote Presbyterian Church had its pageant; I was a shepherd and walked down the aisle in a borrowed bathrobe along with a couple others. That is where our small community came together, shared and this year especially, praised God.

Dad bought a tree at the Sterling Store in Hallock and we decorated it with mostly tinsel-the branches were a long way apart-no lights- Otter Tail Power would not get to our farm for another three years. Mom made all her traditional Christmas treats, the best; plum pudding with hard sauce. We spent Christmas with family. Visits had to honor milking time. Gifts were not as big a deal as they are today. I spent 10 cents for labels for jam jars for mom. She told me they were wonderful. When she passed away we found them among the treasures in her cedar chest- unused.

There was a lot of Christ in that Christmas. Fifteen years filled with depression, drought and war were finely over and folks were justifiably relieved and had reason for hope. Nearly everyone’s prayers had been answered and concerns lifted. Folks were not overscheduled and had time to think about the meaning of what we were celebrating. It was a good Christmas.

**December 4, 2014**

**Unpack the Christmas Crèche**

Submitted by Randy and Marian Wasvick

As we place the stable, let us remember how a place never meant to be a home sheltered out Lord. Let us pray that our homes will be places of hospitality for all who enter them.

As the star shone to give direction to the magi, let us hold high a faith in Christ to give direction to our lives.

As the shepherds were the most common of folk and yet the only ones to be summoned by angels, may we never forget that God calls the simplest among us to tasks of greatest glory.

As the magi moved in the deep belief that God was acting in this world, may we always look for that same redemptive activity and never be so proud that we cannot seek our Lord with childlike faith.

As sheep and donkey, oxen and lamb looked on the holy miracle in wonder and sang the newborn child to sleep, may we too stand in awe before each miracle, wondrous or simple, which our God will work.

As the angel proclaimed the tidings of God, may we be open to hear God calling us to be a part of God's plan.

As Joseph wondered, then obeyed where he could not understand, may we be obedient-even in the face of our own lack of understanding.

As Mary opened herself to the miraculous working of God through her, may we be instruments of God's love in whatever humble way we are summoned.

As God was in Christ, reconciling the world, may we in prayer kneel before the manger and wonder again at the miracle of Christmas.

by James C. Huffstutler

**December 5, 2014**

**Advent Beauty**

A Poem by John Piper

Tilting on her yearly track

Advent beauty circles back,

Flying faster with the years,

Hardly giving time for tears

First to dry upon the cheek—

Has it been more than a week

Since we laid both young and old

 In the ground now winter cold?

Has there really been a spring

When the birds began to sing?

Has there been both summer, fall

Since the Baby in the stall

Called us with a Christmas bell

to sing, O Come, Immanuel?

Tilting on her yearly track

Advent beauty circles back,

Flying faster with the years—

Ah, but overtaking fears.

Let the Lord of advent lift

Every care (an early gift!);

See the Savior and the Son

Shine in advent candle one.

**December 6, 2014**

**Advent Hospitality**

Doug Dent

*Come* – a command, a verb, a word of invitation, a welcoming. This word of hospitality begins the Advent journey. During Advent, we prepare to welcome a long-awaited special guest into our lives and our hearts. How do we prepare ourselves for the arrival of God’s Child, the Christ? Just as we shop for gifts, clean our homes, rehearse for choir concerts, plan special worship services, prepare seasonal food for our annual celebrations, Advent invites us to prepare our hearts. Advent calls us to sweep out the corners of our heart, to clear away the clutter in our minds and spirits, to make room for the coming of Jesus.

This inner preparation presents us with one of the great challenges of this season. I often wonder, *How could I possibly fit one more thing into this crazy, hectic life of mine? How in the world am I supposed to make time for prayer, mediation, and spiritual preparation?*



 But we experience the great paradox of the spiritual life when we enter God’s time through prayer, meditation, and study because we are no longer in *chromos* (clock time) but in *kairos* (God time). God time differs from clock time. Entering God time is like taking a journey into a space-time continuum. We’re somehow not subject to the same rules of clocks. We gain a life focus; a peace; a loving, connected place that assists us when we reenter clock time. I’m not saying it will add hours – or even minutes – to our day, but it does change time. Or at least it changes us.

**Prayer**

God of hospitality, I want to prepare my heart for your coming. Stay close by me as I walk through busy days. Open my eyes and ears and heart that I may see you all around me. Amen.

**December 7, 2014**

**The Burning Beard**

Jim Worner

In the late 1950s, The Federated Church had an evening Christmas program that included all the kids in Sunday School, up to 9th grade. One congregation member who remembers it well is Ginny Adams, since she had a leadership role, as did Chick Bopp, father of Kitt Schara and Bruce Bopp. Two members of the cast were Wise Men. (Nobody seems to know why there were not three Wise Men). One of the Wise Men was Jim Perkins, and his “staring role” was not written into the script.

As he and I, the other of the Wise Men, advanced forward down the center aisle in the relative darkness, all eyes were on us, in costume, wearing robes, head gear, beards attached by elastic straps, and carrying lit candles.

Perkins clearly remembers being told that since the Wise Men could not have had glasses, we could not wear our glasses. My role was to walk to the south side, and stand in front of the door to the pastor’s office (Bill VanDyken, at that time). Perkins’ role was to walk to the north side and stand in front of the door by the choir loft. Being more than a little near-sighted and in the near-darkness, Perkins stumbles over the box on the floor that was used by choir director Arnie Levsen. Perkins tripped, bent over, and the candle flame lit his beard on fire!

On the other side, I saw none of this, but heard a gasp from the full crowd of parents, grandparents, and members of Federated. Quickly, Perkins ripped his beard off, threw it on the carpet, and stomped the fire out. He then took his place in front of the door, as if nothing had happened. Ginny remembers that the carpet was not burned. In future years, she sat in the front row during the Christmas programs, fire extinguisher in hand.

Today, Jim lives in Crookston, MN. He spent some years as a lay pastor in that area, but since recovering from a heart attack in 2000, spends about four days a week being a volunteer driver, taking people to medical appointments both close, and as far away as Sioux Falls, SD, to Minneapolis and Rochester, MN. His address is 202 S. Hubbard St. Crookston, MN 56716. I know he would enjoy a card from Federated members.

**December 8, 2014**

**The Mysterious Song**

Kathy Hatling

My husband John passed away suddenly on July 5, 2014. Since that day I have been thrown into a life that I didn't expect and I have to deal with and make decisions about things I know nothing about. My husband was an attorney in a solo practice, so when he passed away he left an office full of files and clients full of questions. I have always relied on God, but in the face of this enormous trial God seems even closer than usual.

Sixteen weeks after John died I was finishing clearing out his law office; the last of the boxes were loaded in the car and my friend Carol was vacuuming in another room. I was alone in the back corner of the main office, dusting a shelf and, out of seemingly nowhere, I heard music. I searched for the source of the music. It was coming from my cell phone.

Some people have music on their cell phone, but I am not one of them – I have a total of zero songs on my phone. The song playing was “How Great is Our God” by Chris Tomlin. At that moment, as we were finishing up the final to-dos in cleaning out the office of my deceased husband, I especially needed the reminder that we have a God greater than this. He had stayed with me every step of the last 16 weeks and guided each of my steps, one step at a time. (My daughter checked my phone – we still have no idea how it played that song.)



**December 9, 2014**

**A Poem by Cora Davenport**

(grandmother of Vivian Whipple)

She was young and she was pretty

That Jewish Maiden of long ago;

When an angel whispered “You Will be With Child”

To one greater than any you know

Now Mary was in awe: as she pondered it in her heart

To think, she was the one to play so great a part

Then came the time that taxes were due

And each must go to the city to pay

While Mary rode a lowly donkey

Joseph walked beside her all the way.

The city was crowded. The Inn was full.

So Joseph and Mary were turned away;

But a kind neighbor offered all that he had

So in that stable they chose to stay.

Now the time had come to deliver the child

In a stable full of animals meek and mild.

Then the word went out to all the earth

That a Child had been born of Miraculous birth.

This King of Kings and Lord of Lords

Is still with us today

Let us keep His Love deep in our hearts

And never, ever, let it get away.

**December 10, 2014**

**The Nutcracker**

Doug Dent

Each year I give my kids a nutcracker. It’s a family tradition. It started when I was a kid. My sister took ballet classes and her favorite dances were from Peter Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker Suite*. (Tchaikovsky took his inspiration from [*The Nutcracker and the King of Mice*](http://books.google.com/books?id=UD30AAAAMAAJ&dq=The%20Nutcracker%20and%20the%20Mouse%20King&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q&f=false) written by E. T. A. Hoffman in 1816.)  One Christmas I gave Janice a nutcracker as a gift. She loved it, and the tradition as born. After my sister died, Karen and continued collecting nutcrackers; our collection is now quite large and varied.

Now I scour the stores and the internet to find just the right nutcracker to fit Madalyn and Jonathan’s personalities. A few years back I gave Madalyn a Clara nutcracker (after the main character in *The Nutcracker Suite*) and to Jonathan I gifted a mouse king nutcracker. Another year Madalyn received a fisherman (she had just discovered the joy of fishing that summer) and Jonathan received a pirate nutcracker (because there’s nothing cooler than pirates!).

Each fall, when we decorate our home for the holidays, we bring out each nutcracker and talk about Aunt Janice and how the tradition started. We usually read or watch *The Nutcracker Suite* and lose ourselves in the story all over again.

According to German folklore, nutcrackers were given as keepsakes to bring good luck to your family and protect your home. The legend says that a nutcracker represents power and strength and serves like a trusty watch dog guarding your family from evil spirits and danger. A fierce protector, the nutcracker bares its teeth to the evil spirits and serves as the traditional messenger of good luck and goodwill.

Nutcrackers remind me of God who sent Jesus to bring us salvation. When God, in his glory, came among us as a child, he brought grace and power to bear in a world of darkness and death. God, our protector, bared his teeth at the evil spirits of this world to bring us peace and goodwill among those whom God favors.

**December 11, 2014**

**Advent 1997**

Molly Stoddard

In 1997, I felt the Spirit of Christmas in a new and powerful way. I was sitting each Sunday in Advent services at our home church in Watertown, WI. I was able to identify with Mary this year in a different way because I was pregnant with our daughter Emily. It gave me fresh appreciation for the donkey ride to Bethlehem, and I felt a connection as one new mom to another experiencing pregnancy for the first time. (When my due date came and went, my co-workers half-jokingly offered to take me out off-trail on an ATV; that was as close as I got to a donkey ride.)

That is where the similarity ended through. I was an adult, married, gainfully employed, living unoppressed in a free country. At the end of that first trimester, I was experiencing some of the same horrible symptoms I experienced the previous spring at the same point in the pregnancy, only to miscarry that baby. Naturally, I worried the same thing was happening again. No guarantee, as Mary had, that this baby was going to make it. I thought Mary truly was “blessed among women.” Advent progressed at a gruelingly slow pace, heavy with uncertainty and waiting.

Even though I knew the outcome of Mary’s pregnancy, Mary originally did not yet fully know how her life would change and what her future would be like as the mother of the Son of God. Yet, this unwed teenager had such great faith to humbly tell the angel Gabriel that she accepted her new assignment from (none other than) God in which her pregnancy and Bethlehem path would extend outward through the rest of her entire life. It helped me to think about my pregnancy as a journey in which I did not yet know the outcome, in which I could pray to God for faith that he was guiding the healthy growth of my baby. Relating to Mary in this way somehow made taking that journey with her and Joseph more real that year. I am grateful, of course, that we made it through that first trimester and to appreciate the holy gift of Christmas with great personal meaning.

As we journey together through another Advent, I invite you to pray for expectant moms and dads and for those parents who grieve the loss of a child through miscarriage. Pray for their faith, for their baby, for their hope, that they may know God shared in their joys and sorrows. May they know the peace of Christ, the baby born to us all. Amen.

**December 12, 2014**

**Joy and Hope**

Donna Hendel

Advent to me is the season of Joy, Hope, Anticipation and Celebration.

This year, for my family, the Advent season is also a season of gratitude. We are so grateful for our “Church Family” and the prayers and concern for our son Brett. Brett’s leukemia seems to be responding to treatment and is staying quiet. He is back to nearly normal activity! We have been reminded that life is a precious gift. Thank you all for your prayers.

For this Advent season, I would like to share a favorite blessing written by St. Teresa of Avila and included in Caroline Kennedy’s poetry collection titled: *She Walks in Beauty.*

 ***May today there be peace within***

“May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received,

and pass on the love that has been given to you.

May you be content knowing you are a child of God.

Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance praise and love.

It is there for each and every one of us.”

With Joy and Hope,

Donna Hendel



**December 13, 2014**

**Discovering the Present**

A poem by J. Barrie Shepherd

Our trade is with the future,

As a rule,

Charting the bright courses, channels,

Navigations of the distant lighted vessels

Of the heavens, probing through the viscera

Of sacrificial beasts,

Observing birds in flight, relating,

Visions of the night to what will come

To pass in days and years to come.

This white and mobile star, however,

Tells us nothing of what is to be,

Directs the sight instead

Toward what is.

I meant eh present, here and now,

And what, or better, *who* is born

Within this tight yet waking moment.

The Presence of new life

Awaits our presence

And the precious gifts we too might bear

Inside the stable of the self.

*Note: These magi find their wisdom redirected from the foretelling of the future to the unveiling of the significance of the present moment in all its givenness.*

**December 14, 2014**

**Christmas Eve Engagement**

Al Seltz

Connie and I met in February of 1962. She was a Registered Nurse employed at Northwest Hospital in Minneapolis. On Christmas Eve that year, we agreed to meet at her apartment after she got off work at 4, then take off for the Drevlow farm near Long Prairie, about 100 miles NW. My folks lived in Thief River Falls, perhaps another 200 miles. I didn’t expect to make it there until way past midnight, but at that stage of my life, I didn’t feel threatened.

I arrived at Connie’s apartment before she did. I was anxious, and not just because it was Christmas Eve, or because I had a long drive coming up. Clutched in my right hand, deep in my pocket, was the diamond ring I planned to give Connie, if she’d take it. On the drive to The Farm, we had much to talk about. Upon arrival, her folks, brother and Grandma Drevlow quickly warmed to our commitment. But I soon got antsy to get rolling. Connie’s Dad, Hubert, in his generous, yet respectful and purposeful way, offered to fill my new F-85 Oldsmobile with gas. In my euphoria, I reacted thoughtlessly with, “No thanks; that won’t be necessary. There are lots of truck stops on my route.” I’d be going through Wadena, Detroit Lakes, Erskine...all towns with good truck stops.

Except that no gas stations were open anywhere on Christmas Eve. My mind shifted from “I can’t believe ALL the gas stations are locked up,” to “how far can I get on what I’ve got?” Oh yes, at the time it was -20°in Long Prairie, and not warming as I continued north.

Well, I did run out of gas, but miraculously, not until I was within Thief River’s city limits! As my F-85 started coughing out its last hp, St. John’s Lutheran – Dad’s church – appeared on my left. I casually glided into the parking lot. I’d made it!! “Home” was just a few blocks west. I slipped on hunting garb I’d neglected to unload after deer season: ear-lapper cap, insulated coveralls, felt-lined pac boots, woolen mittens. It was a cheerful walk home. But don’t give me credit: Connie had said “Yes”, my little car came through…and Jesus loves me, this I know.

**December 15, 2014**

**Joy to the World**

Karen Anderson-Dent

“Joy to the World” has always been one of my favorite Christmas carols. Most of us can sing the words from memory, and Christmas Eve services would not be the same without it. I recently had a revelation about the words to this song, however: it may not be a song about Jesus’ birth—of his first coming to us. “Joy to the World” may be known as a Christmas hymn, but it may really be a song that looks forward to Jesus’ second coming! And that, in my opinion, is reason for us to be truly joyful at Advent!

Consider the words:

*“Joy to the world! The Lord is come! Let earth receive her King! Let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing . . . .*

*Joy to the world! The Savior reigns; let men, their songs employ. While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains, repeat the sounding joy. . . .*

*No more let sin and sorrow grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found . . . .*

*He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love. . . .”*

On that first morning, when Jesus entered our world, he was a BABY. An innocent, precious, completely vulnerable baby. A child who “grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him” (Luke 2:40). And although Jesus was and is our Savior, He did not then, nor does He YET, fully REIGN here on earth. We may allow Jesus to reign within our hearts, but the time has not yet come for Jesus to truly reign over all the earth. That great event and time will only happen when Jesus comes again—in fact, the “whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time”(Romans 8: 22), waiting for Him to “liberate (creation) from the bondage of decay and (be) brought into glorious freedom”(Romans 8:21). As believers, we know that we are cleansed of sin in the eyes of God, but sin still exists here on earth. It has not been fully eradicated. Thorns still permeate our ground, and yet when Jesus comes again “the leaves of the tree shall be for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will see Him” (Revelation 22:2b-3). I don’t know about you, but I genuinely look forward to the time when Jesus will rule the whole world with truth and grace, when all the nations of the world will worship Him and live in righteousness. Clearly this time has not yet come, and yet what a time to look forward to, to hope for!

“Joy to the World” may be sung at Christmastime, but its words point us to the future time when Jesus will complete that which he came to do on the first Christmas morning, and that is truly what I think about, hope for, and anticipate during Advent and Christmas. Consider the time when we will see “a new heaven and a new earth . . . for the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them and . . . be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:1-4)

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

**December 16, 2014**

**One Who Sets Us Free**

Beth A. Richardson

*Come, thou long-expected Jesus,*

*born to set thy people free.*

During Advent we welcome One who was “born to set thy people free”. What words of grace – *born to set us free*.

We are in bondage today to so many things. We are held captive by expectations – to do the best, to have the most, to be the happiest, to know the right thing always to say and do and be. We are bound by expectations – from others, of ourselves.

Held captive by our status in life, by possessions, we feel that we must make decisions not just for today but also for retirement, for a spouse’s security, for the future of real or anticipated children and grandchildren. We don’t travel light like Jesus did. We have possessions to take care of and protect, worldly responsibilities that demand priority in our lives.

Jesus said, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” (Matt. 6:25). But we do worry. We worry about the past, what we did, what people thought of us, mistakes we made, old hurts we experienced or inflicted upon others. We worry about the future, what we will do or say, how we will cope. We worry about our job, family, church, and spiritual life. We are bound by worry.

The God of the captives sent Jesus to set us free from our captivity. Christ frees us from expectations and worry, from the bondage of status and possessions. God calls us to be fully present in the only time we have – in this moment. Let us turn our expectations and worries into prayers to God. Let us release our status and possessions, for God, the source of all, has provided these things for us.

*Set me free, Loving God, so that I may better serve you, so that I may better show your love through my words and deeds and actions, that my life might be a reflection of your power and grace and love in the world. Amen.*

(Richardson, Beth A. *Child of the Light: Walking Through Advent & Christmas.* Nashville, Tennessee: The Upper Room, 2005)

**December 17, 2014**

**Christmas Eve**

Virginia Adams

When did we start Christmas Eve Services at The Federated Church?

The year is buried in my memory. I remember a few people put together a very simple group of hymns and scripture and one soloist. We talked afterward and agreed we needed more substance to the planning. The next year, I recruited senior choir members willing to form a small choir.  This was considerate of them as it flew in the face of the local Scandinavian tradition of “EVERYTHING HAPPENS ON CHRISTMAS EVE” and everyone stays at home.

We started in a modest way and gradually added more elements until it was a full service with the children’s choirs involved. One year we had 98 children in Tuesday school (baby boomers) which meant enough children sang on Christmas Eve so they filled the choir loft the church had built for them on the south side of the church. Everyone (except the fire department) loved lighting candles from the one Jesus Candle to light the whole world. Eventually people began planning ahead for an early supper and the church was full. (Hint - Meat balls work well for that night).



**December 18, 2014**

**Christmas in Goa -** A Birthday Party for Jesus

Tim & Desta Hunt

Flashing neon lights; loud, happy music; warm breezes; dancing, joyous people; Christmas songs to a beat with drums and guitar; paper lanterns on poles; groups and families around bonfires; buffets of traditional delicacies, barbecues and seafood of all kinds; along with a bevy of sweet treats…all spread out along an endless silver beach. This was one of our family’s most memorable Christmases.

Our family of six were living in India while on assignment with the American Embassy and traveled to the State of Goa for the Christmas holiday celebration. Goa is a former Portuguese colony and primarily Catholic Christian. Like many countries which have been proselytized by missionaries and converted to Christianity, they have incorporated much of their long-time traditions into the Western Christianity traditions. Goa is most assuredly one of those. Churches were decorated with garishly colored lights (to a Westerner’s eyes) and statues and they truly CELEBRATE the birth of Christ. Christmas is the biggest and the main birthday party of the year in Goa and a party they make of it.

Our stone cottage was right on the beach, which, for our four teenage sons, was nothing short of a piece of heaven on earth. This all started between the hours of 5PM and midnight. We were all amazed at the atmosphere of joy and celebration. There was, of course, a bit of joy juice, produced from the cashew tree (*feni*), to heighten the celebrations.

At about 11:45PM, everyone began the procession to the huge church, two blocks up on the other side of the square. Everyone vacated the beach and we all went up to the Christmas Mass. It, too, was celebratory, but very heartfelt and passionate. Following the 1 ½ hour service, most everyone headed back down for continuation of the parties on the glorious moonlit beach, some of which lasted until dawn. We will never forget Christmas in Goa.

**December 19, 2014**

**Christmas Comes**

A poem by Ann Weems

Christmas comes every time we see God in other persons.

The human and the holy meet in Bethlehem

 Or In Times Square.

For Christmas comes like a golden storm on its way

 To Jerusalem –

Determinedly, inevitably…

Even now it comes

 In the face or hatred and warring –

 No atrocity too terrible to stop it,

 No Herod strong enough,

 No hurt deep enough,

 No curse shocking enough,

 No disaster shattering enough.

For someone on earth will see the star,

 Someone will hear the angel voices,

 Someone will run to Bethlehem,

Someone will know peace and good will:

The Christ will be born!

**December 20, 2014**

**Long Walk Part of Gift**

Doug Dent

An African boy listened carefully as his teacher explained why Christians were such giving people. She said, Jesus taught us that giving is an expression of our love and friendship for Him and each other. Jesus said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ (Acts 20:35).



A couple of days later the boy brought the teacher a seashell of lustrous beauty. “Where did you ever find such a beautiful shell?” the teacher asked. The boy told her that there was only one spot where such extraordinary shells could be found. When he named the place, a certain bay several miles away, the teacher was speechless. She knew that it would have taken the young man hours to walk to the bay and back. Also, he would have faced many dangers from the jungle and rocky cliffs of the seacoast along the way. “You shouldn’t have gone all that way to get the gift for me,” the teacher joyfully explained. His eyes brightening, the boy answered, “Long walk part of gift.”

This story brings to mind the long walk that was part of God’s gift to humankind. 1 Peter 1:20-21 states that Jesus was chosen before the foundation of the world, but made manifest in these last times for us. Through him we believe in God, who raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, in order that our faith and hope might be in God.

Christ’s long walk began in the mind of God before the foundation of the world and was proclaimed by the prophets of the Old Testament. He then voyaged from heaven to earth, being born among us to show us the way to heaven. He walked upon the earth and then went to a shameful cross to pay humanity’s debt of sin, journeyed from the cross to the tomb, was resurrected on the third day, and finally completed the journey by returning to heaven.

Hebrews 4:15-16 reminds us that Jesus sympathizes with us in our weakness; even though he was tempted (as we are), he remained sinless to the end. We may, therefore, because of Christ approach the throne of grace, obtain mercy, and find help in our time of need.

And we may ask, Why all this trouble, God?

And God would say to us, “Long walk part of gift.”

**December 21, 2014**

**Shine in My Heart**

Beth A. Richardson

This simple phrase represents both a deep-felt longing and an invitation to a way to liv during Advent. “Shine in my heart,” the place where I experience God, the heart where I experience the God-hunger. I long for the light of Christ to shine in my heart, nurturing and sustaining my spirit.

“Shine in my heart” – illuminate the dark places in my heart: the sadness, grief, anger. Illuminate the dark places in my mind: the resentments, the frustrations. Illuminate the dark places of my spirit: the depression, the anxiety, the fear. Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus, and lighten the heaviness that paralyzes my action. Heal the wounds and sins that keep me separated from God.

“Shine in my heart” – show me the way through the confusing paths I may take, the choices too numerous, the infinite options of postmodern life. Shine in my heart as a beacon of guidance, leading me through the chaos of these days.

“Shine in my heart” – so that my life may mirror Christ’s heart and mind and hands in the world. May my heart be filled with God’s love so that I may be the heart and hand and words of Christ in the world. May God guide me to acts of love, compassion, and understanding in my thoughts, words, and deeds.

“Shine in my heart” – so that I may prepare my life for the coming of the Christ child.

Note: December 21st is the longest night of the year.

**December 22, 2014**

**Christmas Memories**

Al Seltz

This was when my Dad, a Missouri Synod Lutheran pastor, was serving Bethlehem Lutheran in Frazee. I must have been at least six years old, but not as old as eleven, when we moved to Alexandria. Our family tradition – I was born in 1931, the third of five children – was that on Christmas Eve, we’d have to wait until after the Christmas Eve service to open our presents.

I’m sure you can imagine the anticipation building in my mind while I was supposed to be paying attention to the service. The service had little competition; not even TV had been invented. The choir sang at least two sophisticated anthems; the whole congregation – perhaps 150 sturdy pioneers crowded into a 100-seat church – sang traditional Christmas carols everyone knew. Even our precious 1st graders sang a brief tribute to Baby Jesus.

And from the lectern, a carefully selected cadre of older children took turns reading the Story of Christ’s birth from a large Bible. As they read, from the center stage others kept pace with the imaginary, yet purposeful movements of Mary, Joseph, the Wise Men…And, of course, Baby Jesus. Needless to say, this was quite a production for Bethlehem Lutheran and Frazee. Rarely did it last less than an hour-and-a-half, and I suppose once or twice in my time it extended past the 2-hour mark. But, surprisingly, I was not too resentful. In fact, I think I rather enjoyed it.

But I did have my reasons. First, it was traditional that the Elders stand in the vestibule and pass out little bags of hard candy & peanuts to the children as they left the building. Second, I was enormously excited because I knew what came next…



Passing out gifts from under the tree at home.

**December 23, 2014**

**Christmas Eve**

A Poem by Christina Rossetti

Christmas has a darkness

 Brighter than the blazing noon,

Christmas has a chillness

 Warmer than the heat of June,

Christmas has a beauty

 Lovelier than the world can show:

For Christmas brings us Jesus,

 Brought for us so low.

Earth strike up your music,

 Birds that sing and bells that ring;

Heaven has answering music

 For all angels soon to sing:

Earth put on your whitest

 Bridal robe of spotless snow:

For Christmas brings us Jesus,

 Brought for us so low.

**December 24, 2014**

**O Holy Night**

Carol Andstrom

As I reflect on Christmas Eve Services, I remember my mother and I used to play piano and organ duets at the Augustana Lutheran Church (the church I grew up in) located on Mill Street. I recall singing ‘O Holy Night’ at the 11:00 PM service which became a tradition.

Laurel Udden, pastor at that time, said: “It isn’t Christmas Eve without ‘O Holy Night’.” When Lauren Youngdale was pastor, after the church moved to Douglas Avenue, I also sang ‘O Holy Night.’ I was also the organist there until 1981.

At Bethlehem Lutheran (the next church I served) I was organist for 30 years. I remember when Larry Gedde was pastor; his wife Evelyn and I sang together almost every Christmas Eve. She sang ‘He Shall Feed His Flock’ and I sang ‘Come Unto Him’ from Handel’s *Messiah*. Every Christmas is special and I have been playing the organ since 1956 – so I have played for quite a few Christmas services.

Since I started as organist at The Federated Church the Christmas Eve services have been inspiring. I am blessed to be a part of the Federated Family.

Musically yours,

Carol Andstrom