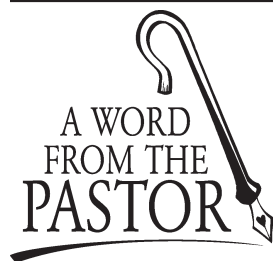


SALEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

Malone, Texas

December 2005



Grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus, God Incarnate!

“God Incarnate”—that is, ‘God in flesh.’

What a solemn mystery we celebrate at this time!
How is it that the infinite, eternal Son of God
became Man at a fixed moment in time, and,
in humility, endured all things—even death—

for us?

As Christians, we are raised in this sacred truth and we almost take it for granted. The world grinds on around us, fascinated with its own things as it seeks to cheapen this time of celebration into a time for the marketeers and hucksters to sell things to us. But Christmas is *always* about the Gift—the gift of the Holy Trinity—that the Son of God took on flesh in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that He could redeem us.

The world agrees that the season of Advent is a time of preparation—but preparation in the sense of gifts to be purchase, parties to plan, and so forth. For the Church, it is a time for confession, for reflection on sin and grace, for hymn, prayer, and receiving God’s Word.

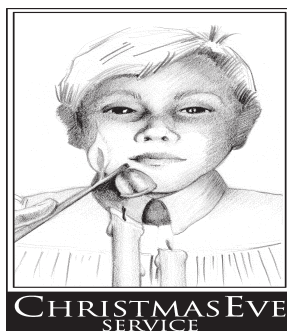
In these fleeting days of Advent, ask yourself day by day: “Is what I’m doing right now preparing for the world’s ‘Christmas’ or Christ’s?” As we do so reflect, we will find grounds to once again repent, and rejoice in the Savior who came to set us free.

Make use of the gifts of God which are set before you—come and hear; come and eat and drink! The only gift that truly matters *now* or *ever* is the Gift which the Holy Trinity gives to us.

Yours in Christ, *Pastor Heiser*

2005 Christmas Program—

Our first practice for the program was on November 27th, but it's not too late to get involved! Practice starts at 2 p.m., and last until 3:30 on December 4th and 11th. We anticipate finishing a little earlier on the 18th. It is very important that all children who wish to participate in the program come to practice.



Advent Vespers Services Begins November 30th

Advent always begins on the Sunday nearest St. Andrew's Day (Nov. 30th), thus beginning this year on November 27th. Our midweek Vespers services will begin November 30th, at 7:30 p.m.

November 30 th	St. Andrew, Apostle—"Come and See"
December 8 th	Christ's Gift to His Church—Baptism
December 15 th	Christ's Gift to His Church—Communion
December 21 st	St. Thomas, Apostle—"Seeing and Believing"

This year's emphasis is on the 'gifts' which the Lord gives to His Church. At a time when so many people think of the gifts we give to each other at ChristMass, this is a helpful (and necessary) correction to our way of thinking!



Please Help Beautify the Church for Christmas!

Beginning December 4th, there will be a sign-up sheet for poinsettias in the narthex. The price this year will be only \$7.50 per plant. If possible, please pay when you place your order—this will make it easier for us when we pick them up. (If you are getting the poinsettias in memory of someone, please let us know in the sign-up sheet.)



Women's Fellowship

News from the Women's Guild

Friday, December 16th at 7 p.m. we will be having our annual Christmas party. This year we are making a few changes... instead of a "white elephant" gift we will be exchanging gifts costing no more than \$5.00 **OR** something homemade. It might be an apron or scarf that you've sewn or knitted, pickles, fruit or jellies that you have canned or candy, cookies or bread that you have made. We hope you get the idea. If you have any questions, just ask one of us. Just one gift per person or we'll be here all night. Bring your favorite Christmas snacks to share. We're going to have a great time!

Saturday, December 17th, we will be at the Craft Sale in College Park Mall in Corsicana. Hope to see you there.

Thank you for all your help and support this year. God bless you all.

Donna

THANK YOU! to everyone who helped decorate the Church for the Advent and Christmas seasons! As always, everything is beautiful and 'feels like Christmas.'

—Pastor

PLEASE NOTE: Christmas Day Service—Please note that Christmas falls on a Sunday this year. Because of this, we will make a small adjustment to our Sunday schedule: we will follow our annual practice of having the **Christmas service at 10 a.m.**—*not* 10:30 a.m. Also: we will *not* have Sunday School on Christmas morning. Please do not neglect the divine service on this Feast Day. **The whole point of the Christ-Mass is for the Church to gather on this great day in the Church's Calendar.** The world despises the *meaning* of Christmas; let's hold fast to our confession of Christ Jesus as Immanuel—"God with us"—and join together to worship Him on this day celebrating His birth at Bethlehem.

2005 Officers

President: Larry Markwardt
Elders: Gary Kelm, Carl Payne, Weldon Reinke, Don Schnell
Secretary: Penny Payne
Treasurer: Kay Watson
Financial Sec.: Lori Youngblood
Trustees: Lee Boortz, Alvin Ender, Sean Fant, Morris Kruger
Cemetery Secretary/Treasurer: Cliff Krumvieda
Education: Denise Heiser, Shannon Henkel, Terri Kelm, Pam Krumvieda, Alton Markwardt, Tina Schnell, Kay Watson
Finance: Ronald Banik, Kenny Kelm, Dana Krueger, Greg Markwardt, Dorothy Markwardt, Penny Payne, Eric Rachut, Linda Rachut, Lana Schulz, Sue Schulz, Todd Schulz, Patsy Williams
(Names marked in *italics* are serving the second year of a two-year term in 2006.)

2005 Budget

Pastor's Salary/Housing Allowance	\$37,200. (unchanged)
Car Allowance	\$ 4,500. (+\$500)
Health & Retirement	\$14,000. (-\$1,000)
Mowing	\$ 1,200. (unchanged)
Sunday School	\$ 500. (unchanged)
Evangelism	\$ 1,000. (new item)
Church Insurance	\$ 5,000. (unchanged)
Utilities	\$ 7,000. (-\$2,000)
Office Supplies/I.T.	\$ 2,500. (unchanged)
Copier	\$ 3,000. (unchanged)
Repairs/Upkeep	\$ 1,700. (unchanged)
Guest Preacher	\$ 0. (-\$400)
Conference/Convention	\$ 1,000. (+\$400)
Organists	\$ 1,100. (new item)
TOTAL	\$79,700.,
	or \$1532.69 a week

Julie Martinez Resigns from LCMS Board of Directors

Reclaim News reports that Ms. Julie Martinez has resigned from both the LCMS Board of Directors and is leaving congregational membership in the LCMS as well...

“LCMS Director Resigns: Says President Places Bylaws over Bible”

Julie Martinez, elected to the LCMS Board of Directors in 2004, handed in her resignation letter at the LCMS Board of Directors meeting in Palm Springs CA on Thursday, November 17-19, 2005. Reclaim News is publishing her resignation letter as follows:

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Like most of us in this room, God called me to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, through the Word and Sacrament ministry of a faithful pastor in the LC-MS. My heart and soul was captured by this message, and through the faithful proclamation of the Word by my pastor, I was being fed the pure doctrine of Christ on a regular basis, being assured of the absolution of my sins before God. God also worked through me in congregational service, in evangelism, music, publications, etc.

I have tried to serve faithfully and to the best of my abilities in what I have been asked to do in my congregation, and as a member of this Board of Directors. However, I have been extremely disappointed with the political in-fighting that seems to color everything at the Synodical level.

Upon studying the history of the Synod, it appears to be a sad fact that this political infighting is nothing new, and has been going on for generations.

The casualty of all this is that the doctrine that was once precious to the LC-MS, the beautiful, pure, saving doctrine of Christ Jesus for sinners like you and like me, while still officially taught, is no longer faithfully practiced.

As many Lutheran theologians have written, our doctrine defines our practice, and our practice reflects our doctrine. When our practice is compromised, then our doctrine suffers as well. While there are some remarkably faithful pastors and lay individuals in the Synod, it has become heartbreakingly clear that, for the most part, the congregations of the LC-MS no longer practice the orthodox Lutheran faith. If a congregation does stand firm in the faith, it inevitably has factions within it that are actively campaigning to change those practices in a direction that is not a reflection of our doctrine.

Indeed, it appears obvious that the more faithful the pastor and/or the congregation, the more active and vicious the dissident faction becomes.

Pastors and congregational leaders who defend the faith are often attacked from within, and these faithful men and women who stand for what they believe are spiritually, emotionally, and sometimes even physically harmed. Congregations are torn apart, relationships are damaged, some irreparably, and some people even leave the faith. In his essay on Communion Fellowship¹, C.F.W. Walther writes that “the true visible church is the one in which the Word of God is preached purely and the holy Sacraments are administered according to Christ’s institution..Every person is obligated to stand up for the visible church, and given the opportunity, to join it”.

In the congregations I have visited recently, these marks, sadly, have not been unambiguously present. Many LC-MS congregations today practice open communion, and many encourage women to act in ways that are contrary to their vocations, such as being readers and communion assistants in the Divine Service.

In the congregations where I have visited recently, many sermons do not even proclaim the gospel of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins, and instead speak of Him as nothing more than a good teacher and example for us. Yet these things begin at the Synodical level.

We have witnessed an elected leader openly engage in syncretistic, public worship, a situation that is clearly in violation of the first commandment and thus an insult to God’s Holy Name, and is not only encouraged to do so, but is protected by his ecclesiastical supervisor, thereby confirming him in his unrepentant sin, which sin we each share to some degree by virtue of our fellowship relationship. Some would say that these matters are adiaphora and should all be permitted under Christian freedom.

However, these things are all in direct opposition to the very clear words of Scripture, yet they continue without any kind of ecclesiastical supervision being exercised.

Additionally, the Scriptures, as well as our Lutheran Confessions, state quite clearly that, in matters which cause disunity and are harmful to the faith of our weaker brothers, nothing is adiaphora, for “true believers are grieved, offended, and weakened in the faith.” (SD X:5-16, Romans 14:1-6) In the fourth century, Gregory of Nazianzus writes, “As then the straightness or crookedness of the course of the body depends upon the clearness or dullness of the eye, so must the church necessarily share the peril or safety

brought by the conduct of its chief.”² At the Synodical level, the Scriptures and Confessions are no longer the norm of our relationship with each other, but they have been replaced by the Constitution and Bylaws of the corporation that calls itself “LC-MS, Inc.” Indeed, during a recent Board of Directors conference call, the comment was made that “the highest authority in our Synod is the Constitution and Bylaws.”

This statement was not challenged by anyone on the board because it is, regrettably, true. Frankly, I think that, in an orthodox church body, the highest authority should be the Scriptures and Confessions, not the Constitution and Bylaws. In an orthodox church body, the President of Synod should be a theologian, not a self-proclaimed “bylaws kind of a guy”.

In an orthodox church body, ecclesiastical supervision should mean something and be exercised. If it were, we would indeed be “walking together in unity”, and our practice would once again reflect our doctrine.

In sad fact, the doctrinal disunity in our congregations is a direct consequence of the noted lack of these essential things in our Synod. As He has all Christians, God has called me to faith in Christ for a reason. That reason is to give me forgiveness of my sin through His death, to feed me with His precious Word and Sacraments throughout my life, and to give me eternal life with Him when I die through His resurrection.

Unfortunately, what has actually happened since my election to the Board of Directors is that I am fed more and more frequently on conflict, compromise, and political one-up-manship, and less and less often with the gifts God intends to give to each of us, His precious Word and Sacraments. That must change. These circumstances have been detrimental to my faith, as I have watched the focus in our Synod turning further from Christ and more and more to political agendas and quests for personal glory.

I will be the first to admit that I am one of the “weaker brothers” of whom Paul spoke, in that I need constant refreshment and reassurance through solid Word and Sacrament ministry. I do not believe that I am alone in this, but rather, that many others, like myself, are also suffering doubts and questions of faith as a direct result of the doctrinal compromises that are prevalent in our Synod. This is surely not God’s wish for His children, as we read in Matthew 18:6. C.F.W. Walther also writes, in his same essay, that “Everyone is obligated to avoid heterodox churches, and if one belongs to one like that, he is obligated to renounce it and leave it.” A decision such as this is one that can only come through much anguish, and also much prayer.

My conscience, under Holy Scripture, has now made the decision for me, for the clear Word of God has led me to the sad conclusion that the LC-MS, the Synod of my own birth and baptism in Christ, has become the heterodox church body of which Walther writes. Therefore, I now share with you my intent to renounce and leave what I believe to be this heterodox church body, the LC-MS. (Romans 16:17-18).

It is therefore incumbent upon me to inform you that I hereby resign my position on the Board of Directors, effective immediately. I have come to this meeting so that I could inform my colleagues on this board face to face, for it would be cowardly to do otherwise. Additionally, it would be unethical for me to participate having so announced my intent.

I shall therefore absent myself from the remainder of this meeting. Let the record also show that I have abstained from any and all votes at this meeting prior to being given the floor in this matter. For those faithful men and women who find yourselves in the same quandary and have chosen to stay and fight for the truth within the LC-MS a little longer, in spite of the heterodox practices, I respect you for your decision, and I wish you God's peace.

God has also granted me peace and a clear conscience with my decision, and I would ask only that you consider carefully what I have said here. David writes, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit." (Psalm 51:12) I speak not for myself alone, but also for those many others in the church, from whom the joy of God's salvation has been stolen. I join with David in that prayer, that God restores us to Himself, and keeps us firm in the unity of His doctrine and in His true faith.

Respectfully yours, in Christ's service,
Julie Martinez

FESTIVAL OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS—We will have our annual service on **December 28th**, celebrating a **7:30 p.m. spoken Vespers**. It is fitting that we remember this first New Testament martyrs for the Christ Child and remember the Lord's mercy toward little ones which once came through Circumcision, and which we now receive in Holy Baptism.