



The Mountain Top Messenger

December 2023

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
Elders: Dec. 3rd Randy 6th John P 10th Doug 13th Darryl 17th John P 20th John S Dec. 24th 9:00am John S. 4:00pm Randy, Andy Dec. 25th 9:00am Doug 27th none 31st Darryl Jan. 3rd John P						
December Altar Guild—Shannon Esala 715-292-0071					1	2
3 8:45 Sunday School 9:00am Service 10:15 Confirmants Review 2:00pm LGP	4 10:00am Bible Study	5	6 6:30pm Service	7	8	9
10 8:45 Sunday School 9:00am Service Confirmation	11 10:00am Bible Study	12 1:00pm Sewing Circle	13 6:30pm Service	14	15	16
17 8:45 Sunday School 9:00am Service 10:15am Bible Study 2:00pm LGP	18 10:00am Bible Study 5:30pm Council Mtg.	19	20 6:30pm Service	21	22	23
24 9:00am Advent 4 Service 4:00pm Christmas Eve Candlelight Service 31 9:00am Service 10:15am Bible Study	25 9:00am Christmas Morning Service	26 Offices Closed	27 No Service	28	29	30

Advent, Christmas, New Year – times 2. We have indeed entered the season of Advent; Advent, defined as “coming”. We are again preparing to celebrate the coming of the infant Jesus. God incarnate, coming into this world to free us from sin and death. What an amazing thing. It is in many ways beyond our comprehension and human understanding. God, in the form of His Son, leaving the bounds of Heaven to take on human form, enter into this fallen and sinful world, and die for us. Who would do that? I have a hard time giving up a parking place sometimes, or even my place in the grocery line, and Christ knowingly gave up his place in Heaven to come down to this place of sin and corruption to save a people who in no way shape or form could save themselves. Wow, just plain WOW!

What an amazing thing, and what do I have to do to receive the forgiveness that the Son of God achieved for me? Well, it seems almost too simple to be true. But the barebones of it is this. Recognize that I am a sinner and in need of forgiveness, and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and that He died and rose again from the dead to save me. That’s pretty much it. I’m a sinner, I can’t fix myself and I repent of my sins, and I believe that Jesus is who He is and that He did for me what I can’t do for myself. WOW. It’s really not hard, unless of course we want to make it hard, and unfortunately, we do that all too often.

We over think things, we want to try to do it ourselves, we want to believe that deep down we are really good and not really bad. But that is what the fallen sinful world and that old foe Satan are trying to convince us, we don’t need any help. I don’t know about you, but I have come to understand, particularly through all the experiences in my life, without God, without Jesus, without the Holy Spirit, I am nothing. There were times when I was younger and perhaps a bit more foolish, I thought I was something. But if there is one thing life has taught me that I cannot refute, it is that without the grace of God, I am nothing. Only through His grace am I able to truly be who I am meant to be and able to do the things I do.

So you might wonder where I am going with this, so I am going to get right down to the nitty gritty. Advent, not the first Advent, Christ entering into our world to save us; and not the second Advent, Christ returning to judge the living and the dead and bringing forth the New Heaven and the New Earth. Your Advent, the coming of Christ into your life. For some it may seem like He has always been there, instilled in your baptism, and perhaps that is so. But sometimes even following that sometimes, we wonder a bit, we stray, we don’t always feel connected, perhaps you were searching or feeling like something is missing. Hopefully that isn’t you now, and if it is please come see me.

I know I have been there perhaps more than a few times in life myself, but finally, and I can’t even tell you when it happened, for I know it happened over time, I had Advent, a “coming”, a coming to understanding of what it truly means to have God in my life. And it now leads my life. As I often say in

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prayer, that knowledge and love of God and His Grace, impacts how I live my life and is hopefully reflected in everything that I say and do and is something others are able to see in me. Have I got it all worked out? Nope! I'm still a work in progress, I still fall short, and I still have short comings, but when I do fall, I ask God to forgive me through His Son and I get back up, brush myself off and try again. And I understand, I will never get it right, at least not until that second Advent, but in the meantime, I will persevere. Oh, and by the way you know what they call it when you come to that realization? It's an Epiphany! But hey, that comes next month.

Please remember our Advent Midweek Services and remember our services for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Dec 24th 9:00 AM – 4th Sunday of Advent Service

Dec 24th 4:00 PM – Christmas Eve Candle Light Service

Dec 25th 9:00 AM – Christmas Day Service

The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace!



ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sunday Worship Service 9:00am in-church service and live streamed
Wednesday Advent Evening Service 6:30pm in-church service and live streamed
Pre-recorded Online Wednesday Prayer Study 6:30pm
Sunday School - 1st - 7th grade
Women's Group Thursdays 1st & 3rd monthly 6:30pm
Bible Studies— Sundays 10:15am Mondays 10:00am
Women's Bible Study 6:30AM

Pastor Rick Williams - 715-209-0479

Office Hours: M /T/Th 9-5 Wed. 12-8 Fri. off

Please call ahead if you need to speak with Pastor.

Office Secretary Lynn Ladd 715-682-6075 Office Hours M/W/Th 8:30-2:30

Days and times may change.

Church President: John Pruss 715-292-4825 Head Elder: Darryl Warren 715-492-0488

Little Friends of Jesus Child Care Center: 715-682-5185

LFOJ Administrator: JoAnn Martkonis 715-682-6075

Website www.zionashland.org **E-mail** secretary@zionlutheranashland.com



Meaning Of The Christmas Tree Christian

When you think of Christmas Day, one of the first images that comes to mind is the Christmas tree. But what is the religious significance? While there is no overt reference to an evergreen tree in relation to the actual birth story of Christ, believers have attached religious meaning to the once pagan symbol.

The Choice of the Evergreen

The evergreen tree is a tree that maintains its color throughout the year. Even in the depths of winter, the evergreen tree shows its life. This characteristic of everlasting life represents the life we have in Christ ([John 3:16](#)).

The Shape of the tree

The triangular shape of the Christmas tree has often been used to reference the Holy Trinity ([Matthew 28:18-19](#)). The upward pointing branches often symbolize our praise to God.

The Lights on the tree

For many Christians, candles or lights on the tree signify how Jesus came as the light into the world. The star placed atop the tree represents the star the wise men followed to Bethlehem ([Matthew 2:9](#)).

Presents Under the tree

For some, presents under the tree represent the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus ([Matthew 2:11](#)). For others, the presents represent the gift of salvation we have through Jesus ([Romans 3:21-22](#)).

The Cutting of the Tree

When the evergreen tree is cut, it is struck down to its death, only to be raised to glory in splendor as a decorated Christmas tree. This transformation of the tree symbolizes how Jesus died on a tree and was raised to new life on the third day.

Should Christians Have Christmas Trees in Their Homes?

While most people never really think about the history or the practice of putting up a Christmas tree, some Christians do not celebrate the season with an evergreen. Here are a few reasons why.

[Jeremiah 10:1-5](#) – God, through Jeremiah, warns the Israelites not to follow the superstitious practices of the other nations or to be awed by signs in the sky. They shouldn't fear idols, which are crafted by human hands, adorned in silver and gold, and cannot speak or move.

Pagan Historical Associations – Some families do not place Christmas trees in their home because of the pagan origins. They instead opt for other decorations, such as a nativity to remind them of the birth of Christ.

Distraction from Jesus – Some Christians do not place a tree in their home because the gifts and glamour take away from the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

If we take an honest look at the tradition of the Christmas tree, the roots and religious symbolism is not overwhelmingly representative of the birth of Christ. Yet, the biblical arguments against it are not vast either. The principle derived from [Jeremiah 10:1-5](#) is to not participate in idolatry. The cultural practice of the passage happened to be the cutting and decorating of trees.

Ultimately, the choice to celebrate with a Christmas tree during the holidays is a personal one. While many people do focus more on the dazzling aspects of the celebration, there can be beauty in the symbolism. First Corinthians 10:31 states, "So, whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." This passage gives us freedom to choose to celebrate the birth of Christ in a way we will connect to God most intimately. Yet, as we choose in freedom how to celebrate, let us remember to offer grace to those who choose to celebrate differently.

Here's A Look At The History And True Meaning Of The Christmas Tree by Mel Johnson



Ancient Pagan Origin Of The Christmas Tree Tradition

In the ancient Egyptian tradition, many celebrations occurred around the time of the Winter Solstice, which is the shortest day and the longest night of the year. The Egyptians believed that this was when the sun god, Ra returned in strength. The solstice symbolized a time of renewal and hope. To celebrate, the people filled their homes with evergreen boughs. They chose the evergreen trees because they maintained their color throughout the harsh winter months. Other people groups, including Roman and Celtic cultures, hung evergreens during the Winter Solstice in celebration, and to keep away evil spirits and illness.

The Tradition Evolves

Most historians believe Christmas trees originated from a guild in Freiburg, Germany, who decorated evergreen trees with fruit, tinsel, wafers, and gingerbread to perform "Paradise Plays" on Christmas Eve. These plays celebrated the story of Adam and Eve. In the 16th century, the plays were banned from the public in many places. This corresponds with the time in which Christians first began to bring evergreen trees into their homes to celebrate Christ. Families who could not afford decorated trees simply stacked wood in celebration. These "Christmas pyramids" evolved into wooden shelves holding figurines, candles, and even a star. Eventually, the paradise tree and Christmas pyramid merged to become the modern Christmas tree. The tradition remained in Germany until the 19th century when people began emigrating from Germany.

History Of The Christmas Tree Legends


There are several legends involving how Christmas trees came into existence. The first comes from the English monk Boniface. In the eighth century, Germanic pagans were making sacrifices to the Greek god, Thor. The Benedictine monk cut down the oak tree where the sacrifices were taking place and converted the idolaters to Christianity. According to the legend, a fir tree grew from the fallen oak. The evergreen represented the image of God and new life in Christ.

Another legend of the Christmas tree stems from Martin Luther. Some believe the Protestant revolutionary started lighting candles in trees after walking through the woods on a snowy night. The sight of the moon hitting the snow-glistened trees reminded him of the light of Christ that came down from Heaven. It is also from this experience that inspired him to pen the lyrics to the 1535 Christmas hymn, "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come."

History Of The Christmas Tree Tradition In The U.S.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the Christmas tree was seen as a primarily pagan tradition in the United States. The early Puritan settlers did not accept the German tradition initially because of its cultic roots. In 1659, a law was established in Massachusetts outlawing the celebration of Christmas, with the exception of church attendance. Hanging decorations of any kind was outlawed, especially on Christmas trees. As more German immigrants entered America, the tradition became more accepted.

In 1848, the *London News* published an image of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert with their family celebrating around their decorated tree. This photo and its reprints in America popularized the modern idea of the Christmas tree, with its glistening lights, shiny bobbles, and awaiting presents.



Say a
prayer
for...

PRAY LIST

PRAYERS FOR HEALTH AND HEALING
For good test results, treatment, positive thinking, healing, and comfort during cancer treatments, for those suffering from addiction, mental illness and for healing, strength, comfort, and peace for family we pray for:

Brad Prill	Riley Bretting
Vi Basina	Mike Trimble
James Fletcher	Jamie Klema
Sheryl Hildebrandt	Mike Ariens
Harold Larson	Carol Schuelke
Diane Beiersdorff	Karen Piff
Linda Stenroos	Molly Colgrove
Steve Key	Linda Parrish
Tim Erickson	Cory Nyara
Patty Hmielewski	Chuck Sandor
Ruby	Dan

Please let us know if there are any names that can be removed from the list.

and those in our hearts

Immanuel, Mellen and Trinity, Ironwood Congregations while they seek for a new Pastor.

PRAYERS for Homebound, Assisted Living, Nursing Home
Those who aren't able to attend common worship, that they | would find comfort knowing that the Lord is with them.
Arlene Zimmerman Violet Basina Ingrid Pocernich

PRAYERS FOR PROTECTION
For our full-time troops and public servants, for travel, missionaries, and for peace and protection for families.
David Wright Jordan Thimm Andrew Pruss

Cryptic Christmas Card

A man sent his friend a cryptic Christmas card. It said: A B C D E F G H I J K M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z. The recipient puzzled over it for weeks, finally gave up and wrote asking for an explanation. In July he received the explanation on a postcard: "No L."

Charge It

The store's Santa Claus gave Jeanie a candy cane. Her mother says, "What do you say, Jeanie?" Jeanie looks up at Santa and says, "Charge it!"

Pontius Who?

At Sunday school, the younger children were drawing pictures illustrating Biblical stories. The teacher walked by and noticed one little boy was drawing an airplane! "Oh, what Bible story are you drawing?" she asked. "This is the Flight into Egypt," the little boy answered. "See, here is Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus. And this," he said, pointing to the front of the plane, "is Pontius. He's the Pilot."

Actual children's versions of Christmas Carols:

"...sleep in heavenly peas";
"Joy to the world, the Savior rains";
"Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plane";
"While shepherds washed their socks by night

None of Them Are Toys!

When my daughters were little I would always tell them around Christmas that this is Jesus' birthday and he only received 3 things so do not be disappointed in what lies under the tree. When it came time for worship on Christmas morning, I asked the children what they thought Jesus would think of Santa and all the hype. Would he ask Santa a question? My youngest daughter replied, "I think Jesus would ask how come I only got three things and none of them were toys?"

Going the wrong way in the "Advent Rush"

While a man had gone out driving to do some Christmas shopping, his wife had been watching TV when she heard the announcer say, "be very careful and watch driving on I5 today, there is a motorist driving the wrong way"! His wife got hold of him on the cell phone to warn him, and his reply was: "You tell me, there are hundreds of them here".

No Room In The Inn?

A boy wanted to be Joseph in the Sunday School pageant. He was cast as the landlord and objected loudly, but to no avail. When the pageant was presented, Mary and Joseph knocked on the door and asked him if he had a room for them. The boy smiled and said, "Yes, sure. Lots of room. Come on in!"

The Postman Lifted Us From Depression

My parents, at the height of the Depression, were forced to go on home relief, which is known as welfare today. It was 1935, when I was 10 years old, and we lived on the first floor a walk-up apartment on 43rd Street, in Brooklyn, New York.

A few days before [Christmas](#), I looked out a kitchen window see my father sitting on the stoop, dejected and depressed, with tears in his eyes. The mailman was approaching our building and asked my father what was wrong.

I heard my father say that he had used up his food vouchers and that the rent was past due. He had tried to work as a laborer through the Works Progress Administration, but he wasn't a very strong man, and the work had been too hard for him. I was scared, having seen newspaper pictures of people being put out on the street with all their belongings.

"Ike, how much do you need?" the mailman asked. My dad said he needed \$33 for the rent, and without hesitation, the mailman took \$50 from his wallet and handed it to my father.

My dad said, "I don't know when I'll be able to pay you back." The mailman put an arm around my father and said it would be okay if he paid him back or he didn't pay him back.

The mailman noticed me looking through the window and said, "Isaac, things will not be this way forever. If you or your son will remember this day, there will be times in the future when someone needs your help. Help them within your means and tell them what happened this day. This will be my payback. Merry Christmas and Happy Chanukah."

As long as he lived, my father helped others when he could, and I've done my best to do my part in paying his generosity back. —*Martin Klapper, Longmont, Colorado*



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to

Strangers Carried Us Home

I joined the Army on Dec. 15, 1959, when I was 17. Five days later, I had the choice of going home for Christmas or staying at Fort Carson, Colorado, and pulling KP duty for 15 days.

A fellow recruit and I wanted to go home, but we didn't have enough money for bus fare. So we decided to hitchhike some 1,100 miles to San Antonio, Texas. From there, we could get bus tickets home. He was going to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and I was going to Aransas Pass, Texas.

That first day, we got as far as Trinidad, Colorado, where we spent the night drinking coffee in a small cafe. The



next day and night, we went all the way to Amarillo, Texas, in a semi-tractor rig. From there, we had to walk across town to where we could hitchhike.

It was late afternoon, and we were getting hungrier and colder. On top of that, it had started to snow. Our chances of getting a ride out of town were getting mighty slim.

Then our saving angel came by in a VW Bug, offering us a ride all the way to San Antonio.

In the Bug were the young driver, his wife, an infant, a toddler and a big shaggy dog. The backseat had been removed to accommodate a sort of bed. With the dad and two tired, cold, hungry young soldiers in the front seat, we were going home for Christmas.

This family went out of its way to help us, buying us dinner and breakfast. They not only took us to the bus station, they even paid for our tickets. I will forever remember these people and their kindness. May God still bless them. —*Rafael Villalobos, Fulton, Mississippi*

Candance Colby



Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.
Isaiah 40, verses 30-31

Parents: Andrew and Maria Wickman
Grandparents: Jean Wickman Terry and Elsa Beth Pumala
Godparents: Mike and Laura Maki

Eli Wickman



Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, Hebrew 12:1

Parents: Bryan Colby and Danielle Colby
Grandparent's: Robert Colby Susan Hiler Darrell Smith
Godparent: Randy Spangle

Jeffrey Guski



Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.
Psalms 25:5

Parents: Lisa Guski, Robert Guski
Grandparents: Chuck and Lynn Ladd Tom and Angie Guski
Godparents: John Paul Damico Kristina Aschenbrenner

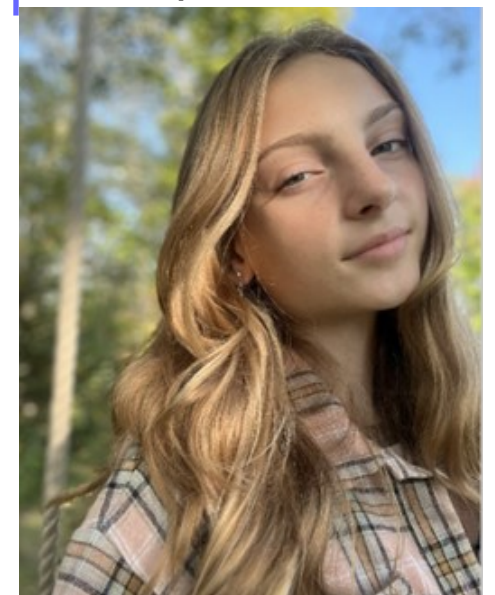
John Truchon



Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:0

Parents: Bill and Jodi Truchon
Grandparents Margaret Truchon Daniel and Carla Schwantes
Godparents: Randy and Pat Klimmer Chad Schwantes

Sophia Truchon



Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
John 8:12

Parents: Bill and Jodi Truchon
Grandparents: Margaret Truchon Daniel and Carla Schwantes
Godparents: Nick and Julie Denardis

Confirmation Sunday, December 10, 2023
9:00am Service