

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER

Volume 6, Issue 01&02 – Jan&Feb, 2021 928-535-9575 2750 Mogollon Drive, Overgaard, AZ 85933

www.faithlutheranovergaard.org

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICES — 9:30 am

Pastor's Corner

A Navajo Christmas Story

Following is the true story of Christmas that I spoke to some Navajo friends on Christmas Eve.

In the beginning, before there was anything else, there was only God. One God. No other before him, nor after him. And yet, as he tells us, this one God is three persons; The Father who speaks, his Son who is spoken, and the Holy Spirit who makes to hear and believe what is spoken. These three persons are the one God who has spoken all things into existence.

The true story of Christmas begins and ends with this one God.

God spoke all of time, space, and matter into existence with his word. In six days he spoke into existence light, Sun, Moon, and stars to carry the light, Sky, water, and land, and all of the creatures to fill the sky, water, and land. And he looked at all that he had created and pronounced it "good". All that God had created was in perfect harmony and connection to him and the life that he gives.

The last and greatest of his creation on the sixth day was the Diné, who he made in his own shadow. The man, the very first of all Diné he formed out of the dust of the earth, and the woman from the rib of the man. And they, like all of the rest of his creation, were in perfect harmony with him, even more because they were made in his shadow, the shadow of perfection, holiness, and eternity of life of which he is the source.

Their names were Adam and Eve, though they would soon earn for them selves new names; Foolish Woman and Unfaithful Man.

God loved them with all of his heart and gave them all of his creation to use and enjoy. And so they walked a way of blessing in perfect harmony and love with God and his creation.

To remind them of the source of their blessing he withheld one thing of his creation from them. He explained to Adam that the tree in the middle of the garden had fruit that would break the harmony and bring death. They were not to eat of that fruit because on the day they did they would die. They were to trust God to give them what is good and protect them from what would harm them. Adam heard God's words and shared them with his wife.

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A Grateful Heart

One could look at 2020 and call it a year of loss. So many people lost so much. Many small businesses were shut down and couldn't generate income to pay bills or employees. Employees lost their jobs and couldn't pay rent or buy groceries. I know many musicians who lost all or most of their bookings, and much of their incomes for the year. Candidates lost their bids for election or re-election. Most national economies lost vibrancy and vitality, some dangerously so.

People lost their lives.

I nearly lost mine ... for the second time in four years. The year didn't start out so bad for me. I even set out to intentionally lose some things this year. I believe it's the first year I ever took a New Year's Resolution seriously as I began 2020 with the intention of "losing" 50 pounds and getting healthier. January through December I stuck with a healthy diet and exercise and eventually reached my goal. I not only lost the 50 pounds, but I also "lost" 5 inches off my belt size ... had to drill new holes in the belt!

But, like other musicians, I also lost most of my bookings for the year. I was more fortunate than a lot of my musician friends as I have a vocation to help finance my avocation. Nonetheless I lamented the loss of those opportunities to play music for live audiences. As things became more closed in response to COVID I also began to "lose track" of and contact with many musician and biker friends who were more and more staying home and staying away.

Then, somewhere around the middle of October, I began to lose vision in my left eye. Within two weeks, I was completely blind in that eye. The doctors finally figured out that a virus had destroyed my retina, and quickly gave me medicine to keep the virus out of the remaining eye (an expensive pile of horse pills that I remain on to this day). Then, in December, I was diagnosed with COVID. A few days later I was hospitalized as I was losing the ability to breathe on my own. The next day I was transferred to ICU as I lost almost all of my ability to squeeze oxygen out of the air. Each day after that for the next week I lost more of my lungs as they filled up with fluid. I lost the ability walk or even stand and found myself horizontal and pretty much immobile as they pumped 50 Liters per minute of 100% pure oxygen up my nose. (To put that into context, most of the oxygen concentrators that you see people using only go up to 5 or 6 Liters per minute ... this was ten times that amount) The High Flow Oxygen Concentrator was the only thing keeping me off a ventilator, and keeping me alive until the worst that COVID would do to me was past.

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MONTHLY MEETINGS & EVENTS



Feb 15 – Elders Meeting 9:00am
- Women's Ministry 1:00pm
Feb 17 – Ash Wednesday 6:00pm
Feb 23 – Council Meeting

*Lenten Midweek Services begin with
Ash Wednesday, February 17 at 6pm
and every Wednesday thereafter until
Holy Week.*



Women's Ministry

Open to ALL women who attend
Faith Lutheran Church!

- There were no meetings in December or January.

Pastor's Office Hours

Mondays - 10am - 4pm *In the Office*
Tuesdays - 10am - 12pm *In the Office*
Wednesdays - Visitation Day
Thursdays - 10am - 12 pm *In the Office*

**Call for appointment -
928-535-9575 or 323-717-4390
revnwirtz@yahoo.com,
or just drop in, or call anytime**



CHURCH COUNCIL UPDATE

- Met January 26 via Zoom
- Ratified congregational vote (previous Sunday before Service by members present) to send "Yes" to Synodical motion to postpone the 2022 Convention by one year to allow Districts opportunity to address Synodical business.



Birthdays

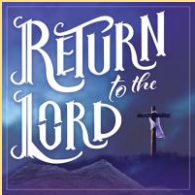
Feb 2 Tom Mills

Feb 22 Paul Voigtman

Feb 24 Lin Rose

Anniversaries

Feb 10 Bill & Karen Cassels



In the Book of Joel, the prophet paints a vivid picture of the coming judgment of God, the Day of the Lord. The imagery is bold and terrifying: hordes of locusts swarming over the land and decimating everything. Joel's prophecy has teeth even today as wars rage, natural disasters threaten and destroy, and our culture seems to be unraveling. But right in the middle of this frightening portent, we find a tender invitation from the Lord: "Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and He relents over disaster" (Joel 2:13). God's invitation and promise finds its fullness in Jesus Christ, who personifies and accomplishes all that God declares. During this season of Lent, we will consider the theme "Return to the Lord" and examine how the call to return played out in practical ways for the people who walked alongside Christ as He demonstrated and carried out God's grace and mercy on our behalf, taking God's wrath upon Himself, setting the stage for God to "turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him" (Joel 2:14).

Bible Studies & Sunday Services

Bible Studies

Sundays – 8:00 am: Revelation
– 10:45 am: Youth Confirmation

Mondays – 3:00 pm Adult Confirmation

Thursdays – 9:30 am: 1 Kings

Sunday Services

9:30 am

Sunday Services can be listened to on the website

www.faithlutheran.org/worship

(audio usually posts by 1:00pm Sunday)

Lenten Midweek Services -

Wednesdays 6:00pm

Feb 17 – Ash Wednesday Service 6:00pm

Apr 01 – Maundy Thursday Service 6:00am

Apr 02 – Good Friday Service 6:00 pm

("Christmas" cont.)

One day, the serpent deceived the woman. He got her to doubt God's wisdom and protection. He made her forget that she was made in God's shadow. He gave her desire for poison. And so she ate... and became "Foolish Woman".

But what is worse is that her husband was standing right beside her and did not stop her. He did not warn her again. He did not protect her. He even joined her in eating the poisonous fruit. He was an unfaithful husband. He was also unfaithful to his creator. And so, he became "Unfaithful Man".

At that moment all perfect Harmony was broken. All time space and matter was broken. All of creation could no longer see the face of God. Connection to God had been severed and all of creation was dying. No matter how many generations came from Foolish Woman and Unfaithful Man they would all inherit the same death sickness. There would never again be perfect harmony for the Diné. They could never again know God's face or the joy of being his shadow. Foolish Woman and Unfaithful Man had broken creation... they had broken God's heart.

But God the Creator, knew there was one way of hope, one way of rescue. If there was One whose harmony was intact, One who was still holy and alive, he could give his harmony to the Diné... and they could see God's face again... and they could live. The cost of such a gift would be beyond the ability to measure. All of the brokenness, death, and the crushing weight of being completely separated from the face of the Creator Father who speaks would fall upon this One and swallow him up in death.

So great was God's love for the Diné that he spoke, "I will send the One, the Holy One, my chosen One (Christ) to do this thing. I will send my Son, who is spoken, to become one with the Diné, to give them back harmony and life ... even HIS life. His name shall be Yé shua (Salvation from God) for he shall save his people."

So, two thousand twenty years ago, in a barn for animals, a little baby boy was born and given the name Yéshua, the name we know as "Jesus". One of us. One of the Diné... yet more. Because he had also another name, Emmanuel (which means "God with us").

That little baby, born to die in your place, was truly Diné, but even more, truly God who loves you and would do everything necessary to restore the Diné to perfect harmony and life with their creator.

And so, this story of "Christmas", the celebration of God sending his "Christ" (One chosen to do this hard work of saving the Diné) begins and ends with God. Emmanuel. God with us.

Yet this story is not the end of THE story. How that baby grew to become the "Faithful Man" who would completely restore harmony for the Diné and even swallow up death forever for them is the next and even greater story of his love for us.

Who told this long ago?

Who declared it of old?

Was it not I, the LORD?

*And there is no other god besides me,
a righteous God and a Savior;
there is none besides me.*

*"Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!*

For I am God, and there is no other.

(Isaiah 45:21b-22)

("Grateful Heart" continued)

After about a week and a half in ICU things began to level out somewhat, but the "losing" wasn't done yet. I began to lose muscle mass as my muscles atrophied lying in bed and as COVID attacked them. I also began to lose more weight, no matter what I ate. My legs became so weak that I could barely stand and could not walk. The muscle loss also affected my heart which now had to work harder to compensate.

If all of that were not enough, in ICU I realized a loss I would never have anticipated. I lost the last illusion of any decorum of modesty that I could have clung to. When my bowels finally alerted me (rather urgently) that they needed to move, I informed the patient technician. There was no restroom to which to retreat (not that I could have if I had wanted to). She brought me a bed pan. I thought I could do better, so she rolled over a little commode. It's a toilet seat with a little bucket underneath on wheels. She insisted on helping me out of bed and on to it. Then she walked over to the computer terminal in the room and informed me, "I'll chart while you take care of business." It was then that I had my "hospital thought for the day" which I used to give myself some sarcastic consolation,

*All old men look the same
from the back
while taking a crap.*

It was also then that I permitted myself to utter my last words of despondence; "2020 sucks!"

After the leveling out of symptoms, things slowly began to turn around. A week and a half in, they began backing off on the High-Flow Oxygen Concentrator a little bit every day or three. My lungs also began to clear a little more each day as the pneumonia began to subside. The staff and I began to look forward to the day when I would become "the least sick person on ICU".

And that brings me to the real point of my final consideration of 2020. It began to be evident to me, in the midst of all my personal loss and suffering, that I actually had a lot for which to be thankful; not the least of which was the tireless, selfless, and sacrificial hospital staff that tended to my every need and beyond while I "couldn't do for myself". I remembered the letter to the Hebrews 13:2 "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Of course, that scripture is an exhortation on how Christians should treat "strangers", yet it DID get me thinking about how God serves us through the ministrations of others. And these nurses, doctors, and specialty technicians WERE winsome, encouraging, and gracious servants . . . in the midst of being understaffed and overworked. They were also all too familiar with loss. They lost patients to death on a weekly basis . . . and yet they hid their loss, discouragement, and utter fatigue from patients like me, who needed their positivity of spirit as much as their medicines and ministrations. To me, they were truly noble, ministering angels sent from God.

And so, in 2020, I gave them thanks for all of their sacrifice and loving care . . . even as I gave, and continue to give, thanks to God for giving them their ministering gifts and caring hearts. From my bed in ICU I began to look around and actually see much for which to give thanks to God. I began by giving thanks for the good eye He gave me and kept for me. I gave Him thanks for the gift of music. I gave Him thanks for my job and vocation; the privilege and honor to serve as one of His under-shepherds. I gave thanks that I was able to share the Christmas message with the staff working to serve me instead of being at home with their families ... even as I couldn't share that message personally with my congregation. I gave thanks for the noisy and uncomfortable machine that saved my life and was keeping me alive.

And as I continued to look even farther away from my bed in ICU, I gave thanks for the good things that were done in 2020 through the leaders of our country; more protection and respect for life in our country and abroad from conception to natural death; the creation of a vaccine for this pandemic in less than a year; energy independence for the US; greater movement toward peace in the middle east than any time in history; the lowest black unemployment rate in US history. So, as much as we like to complain about and lament our elected leaders, God was still able to work good through them.

Of course, in my personal life I have much to be thankful for; my wonderful wife and beloved children and grandchildren. God even added another grandchild in 2020 . . . and he, close enough to visit in Tucson.

And now, in 2021, I continue to give God thanks; thanks for the recovery that He is giving me day by day; for strengthening legs and lungs enabling me to walk and climb stairs; for oxygen delivery devices enabling me to be at home, at church, in the community, and drive my truck (even as my motorcycle continues to beckon to me). I also give Him thanks for our new government officials and pray, with confidence, the God work good through them as He has done in the past. Finally, I give Him thanks for new hearts and new lives that He continues to give birth to through His Word; hearts and lives that can finally see Him and trust Him as the source of all good gifts and blessings, the greatest of which Christ; THE sacrificial "angel" sent to minister to us with His perfect life and sacrificial death for the forgiveness of our sin and adoption into His kingdom of Life.

In this I join my "thankful heart" with the whole company of thankful hearts around the world and throughout time whose eyes have been opened to the depth of God's love and provision in our lives and can take comfort in the fact that, no matter what, God is in control and wants only the best for us. That comfort, I believe, is much better than my previous "consolation". I'm pretty sure I feel much better with a "thankful heart" than I do with a "despondent heart". I hope you can too.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

*The LORD is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts, and I am helped;
my heart exults,
and with my song I give thanks to him. (Psalm 28:7)*

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights ... (James 1:17a)