



# Reformation Lutheran Church

“Come and See, Learn and Rejoice, Go and Tell!”

December 2020

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*But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. - 2 Peter 3:8–9*

When you were little, did it seem like it took forever to be Christmas morning? I remember clearly thinking how slowly time passed, leading up to Christmas. The excitement of Christmas morning, of opening gifts, and having a special breakfast, made it seem like time inched along like a snail on a leaf. As the years have passed, I have been amazed at how time flies. As every season changes I say to myself, “I can’t believe it’s December,” or “I can’t believe it’s almost the end of another year!” Perhaps this is because I have more time under my belt. Does time go faster because we have lived more days? As children we have lived less of life and proportionately a day seems like it takes longer. But as we age, we have more days that have passed and so comparatively, time goes quicker. If my theory is correct about the ratio of time lived versus how fast or slow time seems to move, then it’s no wonder St. Peter said, “With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Time for the Eternal One is relative to God’s eternal existence. I mention this because I hear many believers ask about the timing of Christ’s return and the timing of the future resurrection. Many wonder if when a loved one dies, “Is she in heaven right now? Or does she have to wait for the final resurrection?” It is a normal human thought to ponder our own, and our loved one’s whereabouts after death. But time is relative. It may be a thousand years to us, but the blink of an eye to God - or vice versa. What we really want to know is, “Is my loved one with God?” The answer to that is easy: Yes! We need not worry about the timing of the resurrection or Christ’s return. What we need to focus on is what Paul said in Romans 8, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The Lord is not slow or delaying working out his will for us. He is perfectly able, capable, and willing, to fulfill his promises. It’s just that our time is not his time, and his time is certainly not ours. May we patiently pass time. Amen

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I love Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*. Such a great story! In the final paragraphs he says that Scrooge “knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge.” To this Dickens adds, “May that be truly said of us, and all of us!”

Keeping Christmas well. Hmmmm. What does that mean? Buying the latest, greatest presents and having them beautifully wrapped? Having the best decorations up before Thanksgiving leftovers are finished? Oh no. It means more. So much more. The only reason for Christmas is to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus. This little baby, born in a manger and wrapped in swaddling cloths, is God brought down to us in human flesh and blood. Blood that will later be shed for each one of us. Keeping Christmas well means paying close attention, not only to what happened at Christmas, but especially to its meaning. Its truth for us. Christmas changes everything, including how you and I might live each day. It should be a time for us to consider how we might honor Christmas each day of the year, not only in our hearts, but also in daily activities: in our work, in our relationships, and in our service to others. Emmanuel. **God with us.** If we remember **He is with us**, how might we live differently? I invite you to join me in the adventure of discovering how we might keep Christmas all throughout 2021 and beyond!

Peace be with you, Gabi

**Treasurer's Report:** As we come to the end of the year, all is looking pretty good. Thanks to all who are keeping up with their tithes, whether in person or by mail! We are starting to make a small slide backwards, but are holding our own. We continue to be thankful for our generous landlord and those congregations and businesses that are also so generous to us. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Blessings to all,  
Judy

**Fellowship:** By the time this newsletter comes out, we will have had one Wednesday night Advent meal and service. There will be two more. Thanks to those who have signed up to provide meals!

**Property:** Our new carpet is done and it looks nice! Thanks to all those who helped move the furniture out and then back in. Our next work day will be December 19<sup>th</sup>. We'll get everything looking good for Christmas!

**Education** — Our in person Bible study will resume at some point in life. 😊 Thanks to Chuck for sending our regular email studies.

**Worship and Music:** I sincerely look forward to the day when I can write something in the newsletter other than we continue to function with the shadow of Covid hanging over us. Hopefully, the news that a vaccine is on the horizon will allow that. Until then, we continue holding Sunday services each week with social distancing as the rule. Everyone has been wearing a mask which has enabled us to begin having more people attend. We continue to send the service and Pastor Jon's audio sermons to everyone who doesn't make the Sunday morning service. Let me know if there is someone you feel would like to receive our Sunday service, and I will gladly add them to the distribution list.

Beginning on Wednesday, December 2, we began our Wednesday Advent service. As in the past, we have a dinner at 6:00 with the service following at 7:00. If you are concerned about a dinner in the midst of Covid, just come to the service.

We have recently received the January-March 2021 edition of Portals of Prayer. For the past few weeks our sermons have stressed Staying Awake and Preparation. There is a Bible verse, a short devotion and a prayer. These only take a few minutes out of your day and make a great daily personal or family devotion. They are available for everyone to pick up on the table in the back of the sanctuary. We are continuing with our review of the sacraments in our daily devotion each Monday. We are part way through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.

**Mission and Ministry:** We currently have two Thrivent projects in the works and are applying for a third. The first two involve making food baskets for the needy in our area. Sheriff Jolley and his department will deliver them as they did last year. The third card will be for much needed school supplies for children currently without all they need.

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10<sup>th</sup> – Chuck Hunsaker

11<sup>th</sup> – Jarrod Ervin

# December



**Sunday – December 6<sup>th</sup> – executive council**

**Wednesday – December 9<sup>th</sup> – Advent - meal 6:00 – service 7:00**

**Sunday – December 13<sup>th</sup> – Annual Meeting and council elections**

**Wednesday – December 16<sup>th</sup> – Advent – meal 6:00 – service 7:00**

**Saturday – December 19<sup>th</sup>– clean up day starting at 9:00**

**Thursday – December 24<sup>th</sup> – Candlelight Christmas Eve Service 7:00**

**Friday – December 25<sup>th</sup> – Merry Christmas and, “God bless us, every one!”**

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	<u>Dec. 6</u>	<u>Dec. 13</u>	<u>Dec. 20</u>	<u>Dec. 24</u>	<u>Dec. 27</u>
<b>Altar Guild</b>	Wayne	Junior	Carolyn	Judy	Wayne
<b>Comm. Asst.</b>	none needed as we are currently using intinction during communion				
<b>Usher</b>	Junior	Judy	Wayne	Carolyn	Junior
<b>Lector</b>	Lynne	Junior	Chuck	Gabi	Wayne
<b>Sermon</b>	Pastor	Pastor	Pastor	Pastor	Gabi

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## **WE CONTINUE OUR STUDY OF LUTHERAN HISTORY WITH “CONCORDIA: A FORMULA FOR PEACE”**

Most religious movements are initially focused on a particular individual, a visionary and inspiring leader around whom people can gather. It certainly was that way for the Lutheran movement in the sixteenth century; it was a theological movement gathered around the ideas of Martin Luther, and he was the one who gave it direction and purpose. (Even if he'd have preferred that it not be named after him!) Luther was much more than just Lutheranism's originator; during his long career he trained hundreds of its pastors and theologians, and served as the arbiter of its theological debates. It was his personal leadership that established this reforming movement in Germany and Scandinavia, and his ideas radiated much farther.

Yet, Luther could not live forever, and his death in 1546 came at a very critical time for the new reforming movement. Yes, the Lutheran (or Evangelical) churches were beginning to be established in Europe, supported by the German and Scandinavian countries, but in addition the counter-pressure from the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire was intensifying. The imperial (Catholic) forces were finally being turned against the new Protestants, and in 1547, the year after Luther's death, the imperial forces decisively defeated the Protestant forces in Germany. This defeat smashed the Protestant alliance and left the Lutherans weak and open to the forced imposition of papal authority in the Protestant territories in Germany.

Worse than this, after Luther's death the Lutherans were internally divided, and there was no one to take Luther's position of leadership. Luther's colleague, Philip Melancthon, was not forceful in dealing with the Imperial threat, and was identified with one of the two theological parties within Lutheranism that had developed during the 1540s. The so-called "Philippists" were those who sought to compromise with the Catholics and make the best of the situation. They were also (some thought) too close theologically to the other Protestant group, the Reformed (or Calvinists). The second Lutheran group, the so-called "Gnesio" (old) Lutherans saw themselves as the true heirs of Martin Luther and urged stiff resistance against the Catholic forces, politically and theologically. It was a very dangerous time for the Lutherans to be leaderless and divided.

However, as often happens, the situation was soon reversed. Protestant forces turned back imperial forces, and with the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 the Lutherans were finally granted legal political status within the Holy Roman Empire. This peace gave the Lutherans some breathing room, politically and militarily, but it did not solve the internal theological problems within Lutheranism. In fact, the peace of Augsburg actually intensified these theological battles; with the external (military) threat eased, the need for unity was lessened, and theologians began debates that threatened to tear Lutheranism apart. On top of this, many of the Gnesio Lutherans had suffered personally from their stiff resistance to the Catholic forces, and they deeply resented the Philippists for their alleged "collusion" with the Catholic and Imperial authorities. (It is interesting that internal struggle continues today with the Missouri Synod, ELCA, LCMC and NALC – CH)

The theological battles between the two parties centered on issues such as justification, good works, sin, the nature of the human person, and other similar matter. But more deeply, it was a question of which group would define and direct the legacy of Luther, now that he was gone. One problem was Luther himself, who had written a huge amount of theological works over nearly thirty years, and not always consistently. Both sides could find many passages in Luther's writing that could be made to support their own claims.

It was left to a number of moderate Lutheran theologians to attempt to find a middle ground between the two warring parties, and to develop theological compromise. Led by Jacob Andreae, Nicolas Selnecker, David Chytraeus, Martin Chemnitz, and others, this moderate groups labored through the 1560s and 1570s to forge a document that would achieve theological peace, and define Lutheranism. In 1577 they accomplished their goal in a document entitled the "Formula of Concord," which carefully laid out the boundaries of Lutheran theology and practice; it was accepted and signed by over eight thousand Lutheran leaders in Germany. In 1580 this document, along with seven other documents, were gathered into the Book of Concord, which is the "constitution" of Lutheranism. Concord means "peace;" in Latin it is "*concordia*."

The Formula of Concord can be a tough document, and some do not like it for its harsh language against the Catholics and other Protestants. But it was written at a tough time, when Lutheranism was under siege from outside and facing dangerous dissention from within, and the Formula needed to clearly define Lutheranism in the midst of these problems. The Formula of Concord has continued to serve Lutheranism well over almost 450 years. It does not always solve theological issues, but it does define the boundaries of how theological debates should be carried out. Concord, indeed.

**“THIS IS MOST CERTAINLY TRUE”**

