



# Reformation Lutheran Church

**“Come and See, Learn and Rejoice, Go and Tell!”  
December 2023**

*“But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.” - Isaiah 64:8*

George Carlin did a monologue about the difference between football and baseball. He included such clever insights as the fact that baseball takes place on a diamond in a park while football is played out on the gridiron in a stadium. He said that in football you wear a helmet, in baseball a cap. Baseball has a seventh inning stretch and football has the two-minute warning. “Football has hitting, clipping, spearing, blocking, piling on, late hitting, unnecessary roughness and personal fouls. Baseball has the sacrifice,” he said. He finished the monologue with this insight: “And finally the objectives of the two games are totally different. In Football... with short bullet passes and long bombs, he (the quarterback) marches his troops into enemy territory, balancing his aerial assault with a sustained ground attack, which punches holes in the forward wall of the enemies’ defensive line. In Baseball, the object is to go home, and to be safe. I hope I’ll be safe at home, safe at home.”

Isaiah changed his attitude in today’s passage very quickly. At first, he cried out to God, “Do something!” He wanted God to make His presence known in a powerful way. “Hit our enemies, clip them, spear them, block them so that they will know that you are our God and that you will continue to protect your people.” Isaiah knew, however, that even God’s chosen people sin. We are sinners and we don’t deserve anything better than we want for our enemies.

In the end Isaiah knew that God will never abandon His people. God is always ready to save us from our foolishness. Isaiah asked God to have mercy, to remember His promises, to lay His hands on His people so that they will be conformed to His will. He is the potter and we are His work. We may come to our God with a football attitude wanting Him to fight for us so that we can win on the field, but He calls us to have a baseball attitude. We needed sacrifice not battle. In Christ our goal is not to dominate but to safe at home; the lesson of Advent is that the baby for whom we wait is the assurance of His promise that we will make it home. Pr.

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*And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.<sup>10</sup> And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.<sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.<sup>12</sup> And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.<sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,<sup>14</sup> Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Luke 2:9-14*

Good news! Great joy! Don’t we need that right about now? The world seems more chaotic by the day and we have our own share of struggles – whether with finances, health, family, or work. “Sore afraid” might be exactly how we feel. We need some good news! We want to feel that great joy! My friends, look no further than the manger. That humble scene is a reminder of how very much God loves us. The gift of His son is for us. For our peace. For our great joy. Let’s continue to encourage one another and look ahead together – all the while praising God for His good will toward us all. Fear not!

Christmas Blessings, Gabi



**December 10<sup>th</sup> – Chuck Hunsaker**

**December 11<sup>th</sup> – Jarrod Ervin**

**December 11<sup>th</sup> – Dick Donovan**

<b>DECEMBER CALENDAR</b>
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**Sunday – December 3<sup>rd</sup> – Bible Study – 9:30 a.m.; Service – 10:30 a.m.**

**Wednesday – December 6<sup>th</sup> – Advent Meal 6:00 p.m.; Service 7:00 p.m.**

**Sunday – December 10<sup>th</sup> – Bible Study – 9:30 a.m.; Service – 10:30 a.m.; Annual Business Meeting and Council elections following service.**

**Wednesday – December 13<sup>th</sup> – Advent Meal 6:00 p.m.; Service 7:00 p.m.**

**Sunday – December 17<sup>th</sup> – Service – 10:30 a.m.**

**Wednesday – December 20<sup>th</sup> – Advent Meal 6:00 p.m.; Service 7:00 p.m.**

**Sunday – December 24<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Eve Services: 10:30 a.m. and Candlelight Service 7:00 p.m. (No Christmas Day service on the 25<sup>th</sup>.)**

**Saturday - December 30<sup>th</sup> – Clean-up Day – 9:00 a.m.**

	<b>Dec 3</b>	<b>Dec 10</b>	<b>Dec 17</b>	<b>Dec 24</b>	<b>Dec 31</b>
<b>Altar Guild</b>	Junior	Wayne	Tammy	Carolyn	Junior
<b>Usher</b>	Wayne	Junior	Carolyn	Wayne	Junior
<b>Lector</b>	Wayne	Dick	Junior	Amy	Wayne
<b>Sermon</b>	Pastor	Gabi	Pastor	Pastor	Pastor
<b>Thrive</b>	Wayne	Gabi	Wayne	Pastor	Gabi
<b>Oaks</b>	Chuck				Chuck

**Property:** Our December clean-up day will be Saturday, the 30<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 a.m. Helping hands are always welcome!

**Fellowship:** Our Advent meals and services will begin on Wednesday, December 6th. Look for a sign-up sheet if you would like to contribute to a meal. (Looking way ahead – I think we should have a New Year’s potluck sometime in January – just a time to slow down and fellowship and start the year off nicely. (I really wanted to think about a Christmas “party” potluck where we could sing Christmas carols, play games and such, but I thought we might all be too busy.....)

**Education:** Our Sunday Bible classes continue, starting at 9:30 a.m. It is based on the book, *The Sword and The Mask – Building an Antifragile Approach to Spiritual Warfare* by The Rev. Dr. Jon C. Furgeson. Also, a prerequisite for the class was to read or listen to the YouTube audio of *This Present Darkness* by Frank Peretti. *“For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness...”* Ephesians 6:12

**Mission and Ministry:** We’re wrapping up our final projects for the year by providing more food for FOCUS and painting/building supplies for House of Heroes.

**Worship and Music:** HAPPY NEW YEAR...we have now begun a new church year and are in the season of Advent. Advent is a season observed in most Christian denominations as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for both the celebration of the Nativity of Christ at Christmas and the return of Christ at the Second Coming. For the past few Sundays, we have been looking at the second coming of Jesus and the need to be prepared. We now begin to focus on expectation and think it serves as an anticipation of Christ’s birth in the season leading up to Christmas.

During this season of Advent, we will also have Wednesday night soup suppers and an Advent service. There are many people who only attend church on Easter Sunday and Christmas Day. This would be a great time to reach out to friends or neighbors, get them to come to these services and help them prepare not only for the birth of Jesus but also for weekly church attendance.

How many of us really remember the “what does this mean” from our days in catechism class? Here is this month’s review.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT – You shall not commit adultery.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN – We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other.

## **WE CONTINUE OUR STUDY OF LUTHERAN HISTORY WITH “Thea Ronning: One Life Among Many.”**

What can one person do or accomplish in the short time that is allotted to humans on earth? Millions of people are born, live, and die; grieved by family and friends, they quickly become only a memory. Thea Ronning was one such person. She lived at the end of the nineteenth century for only thirty-two years, and now, except for the patient research of a historian, would be totally forgotten. But the story of Thea’s brief life needs to be remembered, especially as an example of the thousands of other young American Lutherans who heard the call of God.

Thea Ronning was born into a pious farming family in Norway in 1865. She received a limited education and was confirmed in 1880. Greatly influenced by the Pietist revivals of her day, in 1887 Thea discovered that God had work for her, although the exact nature of her call only gradually unfolded. Together with her brother, Nils, and other young Norwegians, Thea immigrated to the United States in 1887, settling in southern Minnesota. The voyage to the new world was rough and exhausting, and

the United States was a strange and disconcerting place. But Thea and Nils soon located their older brother, Halvor, and found themselves a home among the Norwegian-American community.

At this time, many Christians in Europe and North America were gripped by the call to take the Christian gospel to the people of Africa and Asia. Thousands of young

Christians left everything behind to go to the mission fields, and not a few of them died tragically young in this calling. The call to mission work swept through the congregations, Ladies Aid societies, mission societies, Sunday schools, academies, and colleges of Norwegian America. Young people heard God's call to go to places like Madagascar, South Africa, India, and China. Thea and Halvor discovered their call to China, made possible by the newly formed China Mission Society. In 1891, brother and sister joined a larger group headed to the mission field and, after another arduous journey, arrived in China on December 1, 1891.

Objectively, they had no business going to China. They were poor, they knew no Chinese at all, and it was a very dangerous place, with its rampant disease and starvation, not to mention the political instability and violence. But they had a deep love and confidence in their Savior, a trust in God's Thea and Halvor Renning providence (in life and in death), and immense concern for the spiritual and physical welfare of the Chinese people. Thea and Halvor eventually settled with other missionaries in Fancheng, an inland area of northern China. They learned Chinese and made contact with local people. Women missionaries such as Thea were very important, for the initial approach toward many Chinese families was through the women, to whom only they could gain access. Although Thea was personally used to poverty, the wretched condition of many of the Chinese women appalled her; grinding poverty and disease were combined with brutality, including female infanticide and foot-binding. Thea sent letters back to her sponsoring communities. In one from 1895 she described her work:

I have been stronger this winter than before. It is very difficult to be sick and to study this difficult language. We have forty girls in our girls' school. ... Now we have started to make house calls and then we really discover need. We talk to the women and children about God. It is so new they cannot fathom it, but God's Spirit has power and can open the heathen heart.

Life on the mission field was not all trial, however, and in some letters she describes her joys and successes, as well as the challenges. She found her own personal joy through her marriage to another missionary, Carl Landahl, in late 1896.

This missionary work often came at quite a personal sacrifice, and too many of them paid the ultimate cost, dying on the mission field. Thea herself suffered several life-threatening illnesses, and on March 23, 1898, she died at the age of thirty-two.

Despite wars, upheavals, and persecution, Western Christian missionaries continued their work in China through the first half of the twentieth century, but after the Chinese communists came to power in 1949, they were expelled. For the next forty years very little was known about the fate of Christianity in China and whether it would survive at all. With the opening up of China in the past thirty years, there has been a remarkable resurgence of indigenous Chinese Christianity. Estimates now range between 50 and 150 million Chinese Christians, with a substantial rate of growth. Even with all the trauma, Christianity has taken root and is growing. None of this could have happened without the efforts of Thea and thousands of others who risked all to answer God's call. Thea's was a life well lived.

**“THIS IS MOST CERTAINLY TRUE”**