

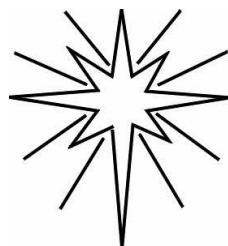
## Mission Statement

We the people of St. Paul are called and empowered by God-  
To **Witness** through Christ; To **Welcome** everyone through the Holy Spirit:  
To **Worship** with joy; and To **Work** with God to meet the needs of our community.

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**This month's newsletter is sponsored by the Sunshine Circle  
Praying you and your family have a blessed Christmas!**

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### Living Nativity

- +Sat. Dec. 5<sup>th</sup> 5:30-8pm
- +Mission Campus
- +Live Animals
- +Bring your family
- +Share the Good News!

### Limestone Concert

- +Sun. Dec 6<sup>th</sup> 3pm
- +Sanctuary
- +Reception Following
- +Bring a friend
- +God Loves You

### Christmas Eve

- +Thurs, Dec 24<sup>th</sup>
- +4pm – Children's Service
- +10:30pm- Candlelight Service
- +Bring Family and Friends
- +Everyone Needs to Know!

# **Book of Faith Activities for December 2009**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Bible Passages</b>	<b>Weekly Reading</b>
12/6	The Way	John 14:1-15	Philippians
12/13	Christian Joy	John 15:1-17	Romans 8
12/20	Christian Peace	Matthew 6:5-13	Colossians
12/24	Christ is Born	Luke 2	
12/27	The Magi	Matthew 2:1-18	Matthew 1-4

## **True or False**

- 1. There are many ways to heaven, but only one God. (John 14)
- 2. If following Christ changes us, it shows in the way we treat each other. (Ph.2)
- 3. Christian joy is found in material blessings through Jesus' love for us. (John 15)
- 4. The Spirit brings joy by assuring us of God's love for us sinners. (Romans 8)
- 5. We pray for the end of time to come in the Lord's Prayer. (Matthew 6)
- 6. Our wardrobe consists of our relationships with each other. (Colossians 3)
- 7. Joseph's family would not let Joseph and Mary stay with them. (Luke 2)
- 8. King Herod was excited about Jesus' birth. (Matthew 2)

## **Dates in B.C. and A.D. – *from the Learning Bible***

The initials B.C. (an abbreviation for "Before Christ") are applied to dates of events that occurred before the "Christian" (or Common) era. If the information Luke gives in his Gospel can be used as a guide (Luke 1:5; 2:1), then Jesus was born at least four years before the years known as A.D. began. (A.D. is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase *anno domini*, meaning "in the year of our Lord.") Numbering years based on the year of Jesus' birth was actually not used until A.D. 526 when the system was introduced by a monk named Dionysius Exiguus. He was given the job of creating a calendar for the feasts of the church. He fixed the birth of Jesus in the Roman year 754, which was selected as the first year of the Christian era beginning on January 1. Dionysius apparently misjudged Herod's reign by about five years. However, by the time his error was discovered, his system had already been widely adopted by church and civil authorities.

The initials B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (in the Common Era) are sometimes used for the more traditional B.C. and A.D.

## **Notes from our Community**

**Thank you** for helping us out with such a wonderful gift. Your help enabled my son to attend the Orientation Camp at West Point Military Academy last summer. And we just found out he was accepted at West Point to start this coming summer. Thank you for paying for his plane ticket last summer so he could have this opportunity. This is a dream come true! We are so grateful to St. Paul Lutheran Church. Again, thank you.

Angela Eaker – Maiden, NC

**Thank you** for having a Halloween party for the kids. My grandson is 5 years old. He said this was the best Halloween ever! He had lots of fun and so did my daughter and I. The food was good and so was the staff. Again, thanks for a great evening. Sincerely, Hellen Doucet, Newton ,NC

### **From Sr. Youth Mission Trip**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I admit I've procrastinated over writing this thank-you note. I was trying to think of something more to do. You see, words don't seem like they are enough. But please believe they are heart-felt! We sincerely thank you for your blood, sweat, and tears and for your great-big hearts! The ramp is wonderful for both of us. Mama doesn't have to climb the hill and there's a very good support for her to hold on to as she comes to the door. So many times I was afraid she would fall. We thank you for all your T-L-C. We will never forget you! Thank you again. Love in Christ – Mary Ann Moss & Mary Shook – Spindale, NC

### **Good Sam Assistance**

Thank you for helping my family with paying the power bill and for the Food Lion Gift Card. We were able to have a "warm" home for our "Thanksgiving Meal" all because you have helped us. Thank you from our whole family. Merry Christmas! - A Member

## **Leadership Ministry**

Council President: Otis Morton

Vice-president: Steve Bumgarner

Secretary: Gail Blackburn

Treasurer: Howard Reinhardt

Council: Dick Walker, Robin Rudisill, Glenn Hoke, Frank Moxham, Roger Frye, Scott Bowman, Martha Staley, Barbara Sloop, and Vivian Scott.

### **Highlights – November 12 Council Highlights**

- Approved contracting with Chad Kanipe for repairs to old scout building. Funds to be used have been reimbursed by insurance.
- Approved contracting with Wise Tree Service for removal of tree at parsonage for a cost of \$1350.
- Approved new job description for sexton
- Approval to purchase a washer & dryer for the parsonage at a cost of \$916.20
- Approved gift of \$300 to be used to purchase a new printer for the office
- Approved purchasing two (2) fast growing trees at a cost of up to \$150 to plant in parsonage yard
- Approved a special Advent offering for The Corner Table with monies sent applying toward the budgeted line item for The Corner Table
- Approval granted to allow three (3) speakers to attend and speak at the council retreat on 1/9/2010.
- Approved the motion that we, as council, affirm our position as stated in the 1990 St Paul Church Continuing Resolution regarding homosexuality, and are studying options before us regarding the ELCA decision.

# **Leadership Ministry**

## **Update on the ELCA National Assembly and St. Paul - Startown**

As most of you are aware, at the last ELCA National Assembly meeting there was a controversial motion passed allowing churches, who so desired, to call a practicing homosexual as their Pastor.

Although some few churches have taken immediate action as a result of the passage of this motion, the St. Paul Council has chosen to take the more deliberate approach of gathering additional information, further exploring known options, and allowing time for additional options to surface before recommending a course of action to the congregation. In-the-end, a congregational vote will determine the reaction that St. Paul-Startown takes regarding the action of the national assembly.

Information gathering so far has included reading data from the ELCA and various other sources, numerous council discussions, discussion at the annual congregational meeting, and a visit to a CORE (Coalition for Renewal) meeting. At the CORE meeting, in addition to the CORE material, there was also a presentation by the LCMC (Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ). So, there is data available from both of those synods.

More action was taken on this issue at the last church council meeting. At that meeting, the council took action to reaffirm the social statement on homosexuality adopted by the St. Paul congregation in 1990. Further, they approved inviting three speakers of differing opinions to speak at the Leadership(council and committee chairs) Retreat on January 9, 2010 in order to better understand each viewpoint. The intent is to invite those folks who worked on this issue for the North Carolina Synod or the next most qualified person if those folks are not available. The viewpoints represented would be: (1) a person who believes it best to stay in the ELCA and accept the motion that was passed, (2) another who believes it best to stay in the ELCA but become one of the churches disagreeing with the motion [a provision of the motion allows churches to go on record as disagreeing with the motion], and lastly (3) a person who believes it best to leave the ELCA and join the CORE Synod. After the retreat, the next intended step is to have one or maybe two forums with the congregation to both provide and to gather information. At present, it is anticipated that this or these forums would take place sometime in January.

Peace,  
Otis Morton, Council President

# Finance Ministry

Finance Committee Members are: Howard Reinhardt, Treasurer/Finance chair; Judy Hoke, Amanda Lowman, Martha Staley-Stewardship Chair, Jerry Sweet, and Dick Walker.

## Treasurer's Report for October 2009

### GENERAL FUND

	<u>October Budgeted</u>	<u>October Actual</u>	<u>YTD Budgeted</u>	<u>YTD Actual</u>
<b>INCOME</b>				
Contributions	\$26,149.83	\$21,016.43	\$261,498.30	\$216,502.40
<b>MAJOR ACCOUNT AREAS EXPENSES</b>				
Benevolence	\$25,542.67	\$3,401.00	\$25,426.70	\$23,460.00
Pastoral Support	\$9,487.00	\$7,421.87	\$94,870.00	\$80,840.69
Finance Ministry	\$129.17	\$112.90	\$1,291.70	\$1,070.66
Support Ministry	\$8,764.76	\$6,540.12	\$87,647.60	\$79,168.68
Property Ministry	\$2,859.16	\$1,775.48	\$28,591.60	\$26,748.15
Learning Ministry	\$715.41	-\$38.00	\$7,154.10	\$4,810.87
Worship Ministry	\$512.07	-\$27.61	\$5,120.70	\$1,322.22
Witness Ministry	\$322.90	\$128.75	\$3,229.00	\$1,189.34
Communications	\$250.00	\$0.00	\$2,500.00	\$0.00
Welcome Ministry	\$166.66	\$19.87	\$1,666.60	\$310.83
<u>Youth Ministry</u>	<u>\$400.02</u>	<u>\$0.00</u>	<u>\$4,000.20</u>	<u>\$421.29</u>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	\$26,149.82	\$19,334.38	\$261,498.20	\$219,342.73
<b><u>INCOME - EXPENSES</u></b>		<b><u>\$1,682.05</u></b>		<b><u>-\$2,840.33</u></b>
October 31 Checkbook balance:.....		\$3,520.58		
<b><u>GOOD SAMARITAN</u></b>	\$2,676.22			
<b><u>FUND</u></b>	\$ 925.00			
	\$ 391.00			
	<b>\$3,210.22</b>			

**The Loan from the Gift/Memorial fund of \$2000 has been paid back. And we have been able to pay 1/2 of our budgeted amt. to the Corner Table and ECCCM. A Big THANK YOU to all those who have been able to give more.**

# MAKE IT SIMPLE

## Stewardship 2009

William Randolph Hearst lived in Hearst Castle. It was 90,000 square feet sitting on 265,000 acres. At one time he owned 50 miles of California coastline. And he collected stuff for 88 years. He had 3500-year-old Egyptian statues, medieval Flemish tapestries, centuries-old hand-carved ceilings, and some of the greatest works of art of all time. After eight decades of collecting stuff William Hearst died. Now people go through his house by the thousands and they all say the same thing: "Wow, he sure had a lot of stuff."

We go through life, get stuff, then die, leaving all our stuff behind. And what happens to it? Our kids, who haven't died yet, argue over it and go through our stuff like vultures and decide which stuff they want to take to their houses. They say to themselves, "Now this is my stuff," then they die and new vultures come to get it. Nations go to war over stuff, families are split apart over stuff. Husbands and wives argue more about stuff than any other single issue. Prisons are full of street thugs and CEO's who committed crimes to acquire stuff. Why? It's only stuff.

This is what Jesus was addressing when He said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:16-21 NIV). Now having read those words, ask yourself the question, "Where's my heart?"



# Learning Ministry

The Learning Committee is staffed by Robin Fincannon, Linda Lutz, Linda Morton, Reba Reinhardt, Barbara Sloop, Sharron Scronce, and Pastor Chris.

## Pastor's Honor Roll

Congratulations to **Joseph Duncan, Gracen Hoyle, Rachel Hoyle, Faith Kanipe, Natalie Lail, Caroline Morton, Mikaela Simmons, and "Kit-Kat" Stulpin** for working hard and making the October's Pastor's Honor Roll. They grew in their knowledge of Scripture and relationship with the Lord, and earned a gift card to **Udderly Delicious Ice Cream** for their efforts.

To make the Honor Roll, they must accumulate 90 or more points each month. They earn points by: Sunday School Attendance, Worship Attendance, Bible Story reading and completion of a weekly worksheet, memory work, and Youth Group attendance. Pray for them and give thanks for their parents who help and support their efforts to **Grow in the Lord and His Word.**

## Christmas Pageant Practice

Christmas Pageant Practice will be held during the Sunday School Hour each week through December 20<sup>th</sup>. They will also have a dress rehearsal on Saturday, December 19<sup>th</sup>. The Pageant is held for the Children's Christmas Eve Service at 4pm. If your child would like to be a part of this wonderful ministry, please call Pastor Chris or Sara Scronce to let them know. Your child must come to the remaining rehearsals to be a part.

## KFC Retreat on New Year's Eve – All Elementary Ages 1-5<sup>th</sup> grades!

Calling all Kids! You are invited to a day-long Retreat on Thursday, December 31<sup>st</sup>. We will play games, do a servant project, and learn a few Bible stories. It will begin at 9am and last until 5pm. We might even go bowling! And if you want to be part of the **90- Day CHALLENGE** to read the BIBLE, this will be just what will help you get started. Watch your mail for more info. Questions - Ask Pastor Chris.

# Read the Bible in 90 Days... Are you CRAZY?

Have you ever tried to read the Bible from cover to cover? Most Christians want to, but are hardly ever successful. Join with your friends and neighbors as we read through it together. We will encourage each other, discuss it together, and St. Paul's will help us each week prepare for what is coming up next. We will start on Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup> and finish on April 1<sup>st</sup>. It takes an average reader about 45 minutes a day. We also have plans for children, youth, and young families. We will distribute reading plans, commitment cards, and other additional information by mail the week after Christmas. Pray about this! Make this a New Year's Resolution that "we will help you KEEP!" Give yourself this gift. It will make a difference for YOU!

We have some resources at the Church if you do not like to read, but are interested in participating. If you have questions, please see Pastor Chris.

## **Some examples of how St. Paul will help you achieve your commitment:**

- We will furnish you with daily reading guides to help you know how much to read each day.
- The Fellowship Sunday School Class is going to be teaching lessons on upcoming readings for the coming week. Join them for this Challenge!
- The Sermons each Sunday will focus on characters and events in the upcoming week's reading.
- Families with young children have a reading guide that follows our Children's Story Bible – read that with them each day!
- Upper Elementary, Middle School, and Sr High Youth have reading guides that follow the "100 Favorite Bible Stories", and takes about 5-10 minutes a day.
- The Learning Committee will transform the Fellowship Hall into a Weekly Learning Center, with Timelines, Maps, Drawings, Pictures, Short Articles and Wooden Models of each week's reading. The Display will be added to each week, until at the end, we will have a visual model of the Characters, places, and events of the Bible.

## Women of the ELCA - (WELCA)

### **Limestone College Choir Christmas Concert**

The annual congregation gathering will be hosted by our St. Paul WELCA Circles on December 6, 2009. We invite everyone to join us for a performance by the Limestone College Choir conducted by our own Dr. Gena Poovey and her colleague Dr. David Thompson. The choir consists of 25 young men and women eager to entertain you with several classical Christmas anthems, winter songs and some fun Christmas tunes. The performance will begin at 3:00 in the sanctuary and last approximately one hour. Following the concert you will have an opportunity to meet and greet these young singers and enjoy some refreshments in the Fellowship Hall. We look forward to seeing you and for the opportunity to fellowship with everyone.

Sunshine and Sisters In Spirit Circles

## Senior Citizen's Meeting

**The Startown Senior Citizens** meeting will be held on Monday, December 7<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm. We will meet in the Fellowship Hall. Please plan on attending and bring a friend. Merry Christmas!

## Welcome Ministry

The Welcome Committee is chaired by Jane Bumgarner. Those on the committee are: Rita Bass, Steve Bumgarner, Jeanette Coulter, Kristi Grimes, Judy Hoke, Gloria Lentz, Laura Lutz, Glenda Shook, and Linda Sweet.

- **The Living Nativity** is Dec. 5 at the Mission Campus from 5-8:00 pm. Committee members will be working to purchase and serve a hot beverage and cookies for those attending. Committee members are to bring their coffee makers or urns to help in preparing the hot beverage.
- The **Church Council and Committee Chair Retreat** will be held Jan. 9 at Hospice.

# Special Events and Communications

Keith Frye chairs the Special Events Sub-Committee of the Witness Committee  
Frank Moxham chairs the Communications Sub-Committee.

## **Living Nativity – Saturday, Dec. 5<sup>th</sup>.**

Walk in the brisk evening air on Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup> at our Mission Campus, while taking in different scenes that tell the story of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The event begins at 5:30pm, with each walking tour taking about 20 mins. We will have golf carts available for those unable to walk well. This is a great event for all ages. Invite your family, friends, and neighbors and come join us!

## **Limestone College Choir Christmas Concert – Sunday, Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>.**

Enjoy an afternoon concert by the Limestone College Concert Choir as they perform carols and songs that lead us joyfully into the Christmas Season. The concert, on Sunday, Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>, begins at 3pm and will be followed with a reception hosted by our WELCA Circles. Invite all the music lovers you know and join us for a wonderful afternoon of great music.

## **100 Toboggans, Gloves, and Scarves Challenge**

Our Annual Challenge to help the poorest of the poor of eastern Catawba County kicks off on Sunday, Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>. We will be collecting Toboggans, gloves, and scarves for visitors to the Corner Table Soup Kitchen. There will be collection boxes in the Narthex, and in the hallway outside the office. We will deliver your gifts on Monday morning, December 21<sup>st</sup>. Thank you for your generosity!

## **Operation Christmas Child – The Shoebox Ministry**

Congratulations St. Paul, we collected 64 boxes for the Samaritan's Purse "Operation Christmas Child" Ministry this year. Your generosity will help bring the hope of Christ to 64 children this Christmas.

## **Red Cross Blood Drive**

St. Paul hosted another Red Cross Blood Drive on Saturday, November 21<sup>st</sup>. Our goal was 30 units of blood, and we exceeded the goal, collecting 35 units. Way to go, St. Paul.

## **January Newsletter deadline**

The deadline for newsletter articles or calendar information for the December Newsletter is December 20<sup>th</sup>. Email your copy to Pastor Chris **and** Cheryl for inclusion in the newsletter. Please honor this deadline so the office staff and volunteers can communicate the news in a complete and timely manner.

# Worship Ministry

The Worship Ministry is chaired by Karen Bowman. Members include: Kathy Frye, Jan Mitchem, Sissy Moxham, Charlene Scott, Vivian Scott, Trish Scronce, Denise Sigmon, Kathy Simmons, and Nancy Walker.

## Wednesday Night Advent Services – Dec, 2,9,16.

- We will host our traditional Wednesday evening Advent Services, exploring the themes of Advent: Hope, The Way, Peace, and Joy, with Scripture and an illustrating story. Join us for a **free** soup and sandwich dinner at 6pm (but come when you can), and worship at 7pm.

## Upcoming Worship Opportunities

- **Limestone College chorus** will present an afternoon of Christmas music on Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup> at 3:00. WELCA will sponsor a reception following the musical presentation. Prepare your hearts and minds to receive the Christ child.
- ***The Chancel choir will present a service of lessons and carols “Sing the Songs of Bethlehem” Sunday, December 20<sup>th</sup> at the morning worship service.***
- **Christmas Eve Services** – A Family Service at 4 pm will feature the Children’s Nativity Pageant at the Sermon, with Special Music by the Children beginning at 3:45. Our Traditional Candlelight Service will be held at 10:30pm. Special Music will begin at 10pm.

## Opportunities to Help

- The Fellowship Sunday Class will be appointing the sanctuary Thursday evening, December 3<sup>rd</sup>. This is your opportunity to help decorate our Christmas tree and windows for Christmas. It’s a big job, come help them!
- The Worship Committee will meet Monday December 7<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 to “spruce up” the candle boards. You are welcome to join us.
- Check with members of the Seekers Sunday School class to help them with the placement of the candle boards.

***In this holy season, may every one experience the true meaning of  
Christmas in your hearts  
and in your homes!***

# Youth Ministry

The Youth Committee is chaired by Steve and Amy Morton. The members are: Marty Coulter, Adam Fincannon, Robin Fincannon, Judy Herman, Chantae Lail, Amanda McKinney, Michelle Potter, Christine Price, Trinity Price, Robin Rudisill, and Charity Stewart.

## **Sr. Youth Schedule (Pastor Chris – advisor)**

<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Activities</u></b>	<b><u>Time</u></b>	<b><u>Meeting Place</u></b>
Sunday, 12/6	Lunch & a Concert	2-5pm	Fellowship Hall
Sunday, 12/13	Santa's Helpers	12 noon – 4pm	Fellowship Hall
Sunday, 12/20	Caroling/McAdenville	3pm – 9pm	Fellowship Hall
Sunday, 12/27	Progressive Dinner	6-8:30pm	Fellowship Hall

## **All-Youth Christmas Activities**

- **On Sunday, Dec. 13<sup>th</sup>**, the Sr. Youth will take our TLC and Jr. Youth Christmas shopping for the afternoon, and then return to St. Paul to wrap the presents and watch “A Charlie Brown Christmas” together. We will eat lunch here before leaving for shopping, and have snacks when we return. Parents may pick their children up at 4pm. The children will need to bring their own money for shopping, but lunch and snacks will be provided.
- **Christmas Caroling on Sunday, Dec. 20**  
All youth are invited to go Christmas Caroling together, visiting some of our Senior members here in the Startown area. We will take “pokes”, tell the Christmas story, and sing our favorite Carols. When we return, we will have hot chocolate and cookies! 3-5pm.

**Your Youth Group leaders** will be contacting you regarding safety and transportation needs for both events.

## **Jr. Youth (grades 5-8) –Michelle Potter, leader**

The Junior Youth will hold a Lock-In on Dec 11-12<sup>th</sup>. They will travel to Carrilon Retirement Community to visit and play games with the residents on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

## **TLC – The Little Christians (grades 1-4)- Amy Morton, leader**

Come dressed warm and ready to sing. Sunday, December 20, 2009 – We will go Christmas caroling to Shut-ins. Parents we will need drivers. Meet at the church at 3pm. We will return around 4:30 for hot chocolate and cookies.

THE JOURNEY TO  
BETHLEHEM  
“LIVING NATIVITY”

PRESENTED BY ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
/ STARTOWN

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2009  
5:30-8 PM  
ST. PAUL MISSION CAMPUS

**Walk the path to Bethlehem where you will encounter Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the Innkeepers Wife, Gabriel, live animals and baby Jesus. The walk takes less than 30 minutes. Golf carts will be available for those who have trouble walking. Hot Refreshments and sweets will be served.**

**Special Offering for the Corner Table**

Coin Boxes will be available for you this Advent Season to make your gifts to the Corner Table Soup Kitchen. They will be in the Narthex and the Office Hallway. Please help the poorest of the poor of Catawba County. You may return them on Dec 20<sup>th</sup>, Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> or Dec. 27<sup>th</sup>. Your gifts will be given as part of our annual Ministry Spending Plan(budget) for 2009.

# *Limestone College Concert Choir*

## *Christmas Concert*

*Sunday, December 6 at 3pm*  
*St Paul Lutheran Church - Startown*  
*Reception to follow the concert*

**Invite your family, friends, and neighbors to a wonderful concert by a regionally renown choir that is sure to set the mood for the Season.**

### **The Limestone College and Community Chorus:**

The Limestone College and Community Chorus is the primary choral ensemble at Limestone College, a small, private, liberal arts institution located in Gaffney, South Carolina, an hour south of Charlotte, NC. The Chorus has a total membership of over thirty. The singers include students majoring in music or music education with a concentration in voice, non-music major members of the Limestone student body who have choral experience from high school and church choirs, and several talented, devoted members of the community.

In addition to concerts given each semester, the ensemble is featured in local settings such as the library's "Music Sandwiched In" series, churches, schools, and the College's annual Christmas on Campus *Sounds of the Season* concert. The director is Dr. Gena E. Poovey, Professor of Choral/Vocal Music Education at Limestone. Dr. David B. Thompson, Professor Music, is the accompanist.

## **Pastor's Advent & Christmas Letter**

How hopeful I feel today! The sun is out. My visits today have gone well, although I am still lagging far behind in seeing some of my needful sheep. It has been a difficult few months, but today, I feel hopeful. I am listening to one of those radio stations that play "continuous Christmas Music" and am catching myself singing along. Some of the songs are secular, catchy tunes about winter wonderlands and snowmen and sleigh rides... songs that bring about a certain nostalgia, a feeling of a long ago happiness. But every once in awhile, there will come a song about Jesus. It will just pop in there and catch me off-guard. And there comes that sense of hope, that there is something hiding within all of the "memories" that this season brings out. And that is what I yearn for, that is what I cling to.

I have been reading a lot of Luther's writings lately. It has been much more exciting to read him now, after 15 years as a pastor, than when in seminary. Luther was first and foremost, a pastor. His passion was to bring his flock into the joy and the comfort of the Gospel, of God's promises in Jesus Christ. He understood the trials of living and dying. He struggled as he pastored his people, as sickness and unexpected death entered their lives. He knew the turmoil of controversy, and the hurt of disagreements.

But today, "O Little Town of Bethlehem" sung by Perry Como(I think) snuck in amidst the noise, I was reading one of Luther's Christmas sermons. Allow me to share:

"Behold Christ lying in the lap of his young mother... What can be sweeter than the Babe, more lovely than the mother! Watch him in his mother's lap. Laugh with him, look upon this Lord of Peace and your spirit will be at peace. See how God invites you in so many ways. He places before you a Babe in whom you may take refuge. You cannot fear him, for nothing is more appealing to a person than a baby. Are you terrified? Then come to him, behold him lying in the lap of his sweet mother. You will see how great is the divine goodness, which seeks above all else, that you should not despair. Trust him! Trust him! Here is the Child in whom is salvation. To me there is no greater consolation given to us than this, that Christ became a man, a child, a babe, playing in the lap of his most gracious mother. Who is there whom this sight would not comfort? Now is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience, and guilt, if you come to this gurgling Babe and believe that he is come, not to judge you, but to save you"

May your Advent waiting bring the Babe into your life and fill you with all hope. Merry Christmas! Pastor Chris