



December, 2019

St. John's Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN

What Child is This?

A Fortress Article for December 2019

Everything changes when you have a baby.

As I write this article, today is the 16th birthday of my oldest son, Josiah. Man, time has sure flown these past 16 years! I look back and think how different life was B.C. (before children)! Before Josiah was born, I'd never changed a diaper, never worried as much as I do as a parent, never felt the weight of responsibility for another person's soul the way I do now. And now, with four boys at home, paying for tuition, going through a gallon of milk per day, helping with homework, struggling with teenage angst, and sharing in the laughter and joy of having four boys, I can't imagine my life without any of them!

Everything changes when you have a baby. Sleeping through the night becomes a rare treat. The budget is completely different. It no longer takes five minutes to get out the door. In fact, your whole schedule changes. Everything changes when you have a baby! In fact, even if you have no kids of your own or not, this is still true: Everything changes when you have a baby. This month we focus on that one child who really does change everything: Our relationship with God, our purpose in life, our hope for our future. Literally everything is changed because this one baby was born.

You might ask, "What child is this?" But you already know. It's the baby lying in the manger. It's the God-man who took on flesh to save us. It's the one who has the power to help us, to forgive us, to take care of us and to bless us. It's the one who changes everything for you and for me. It's Jesus.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given... And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:2-3)

What child is this? He's Mighty God! And how we need a God who is mighty! As strong and tough as we often like to appear, we are weak. On our own, all we can do is sin. And there's nothing we could do about it. We couldn't un-think our egotistical thoughts, un-do our selfish actions, un-speak

our harsh and loveless words. By nature, we were dead in sin. We needed a miracle! And that's exactly what our Mighty God has given us all by that baby who changes everything!

In the miracle of the incarnation, Mighty God took on human flesh. And Jesus proved who he was by his mighty miracles. And then he showed his greatest might in taking on our greatest enemies: sin, the devil, death, and hell. And he shattered the yoke of guilt that lay across our shoulders. He broke the rod of our oppressors. He took the guilt of our sin on himself and paid the penalty it brought in full. Thank God for this baby born to us, who is our Mighty God!

What child is this? He is our Wonderful Counselor! A counselor gives advice, helps you with your problems, and gives you the encouragement you need to keep going. That's what this child born to us has done. He didn't just win the victory, but he delivered it right to us—and delivers it to us still!—in his Word and in his sacraments. He advises us how to be rid of sin and guilt—through faith in him and his work for us. He helps with our problems of living in this sin-filled world by the advice he gives in his Word. He gives the encouragement that we need to keep going as he offers us his body and blood. Thank God for this baby born to us, who is our Wonderful Counselor!

What child is this? He is the Prince of Peace! Though at times it may seem that life is anything but peaceful, when there is still fighting among countries, fighting among political parties, fighting among parents and kids, fighting among spouses... Yet, through this child born to us, we have peace *with God*. Forgiven of every sin, made perfect and holy in his sight, death and hell no longer have any claim on us. Heaven is our guaranteed inheritance. And no matter what struggles we go through in this life, we will always have this peace with God. Thank God for this baby born to us, who is our Prince of Peace!

What child is this? He is the Everlasting Father! We may fight a war and establish peace for a while, but as one cynic once said, "Peace is that moment in time when everyone stops shooting at each other... just long enough to reload." But not so with the peace we have through this child born to us. Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And so is the peace that our Mighty God won for us, that our Wonderful Counselor delivered to us, that our Everlasting Father promises will always be the same.

So in the midst of this busy holiday season of shopping, of parties, of special celebrations, and of packed schedules with extra worship services, make sure to take time to stop and reflect on why we do all these things. Make sure to stop and reflect on this baby born to you—a baby that changes everything! What child is this? He is Christ the Lord!

Your servant in Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Guenther', with a stylized, flowing script.

Pastor Rob Guenther

Church Library

We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. This month is full of many opportunities to praise God for his wonderful gift.

The church library has many children's books to tell the Christmas Story. Shepherds, angels, Wise Men, manger scenes, etc. Look for these books on the mobile shelf in the library. That's where the seasonal books are, where you should notice them first.

We also now have Part 1 and Part 2 books of On Giving Advice to God. Some of you may have your own copies. Prof. Daniel Deutschlander wrote devotions/ sermons on the church year and similar subjects. Part 1 covers Advent to Lent, and Part 2 covers the sacraments to Reformation and the End Times.

Good Reading and have a good December.

LeiLani Rahn,
Church Librarian

Staff Minister

Advent services begin on December 4th. Service times are 11 am, 4 pm and 6:30 pm.

I thank God and you for letting me serve you as Staff Minister since June 1, 2011. It has been my pleasure to know you now and in the future in Eternity.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” (Lk 2:14)

Wish List

St. John's maintains a wish list of items that are not funded through the church budget, but which could still benefit our ministry. The current list of items and cost estimates that follows has received approval through the Church Council:

- Organ registration memory upgrade (~\$16,000) – This upgrade will help to accommodate our multiple organists in storing registration presets in a digital memory system.
- Handbells, Handchimes, and Accessories (~\$13,000) – This equipment is essential for establishing a handbell choir.
- Timpani (~\$8,000) – Three timpani (also called kettledrums) will eliminate the need to borrow and transport these instruments when needed.

The Stewardship Board encourages members to continue with their regular, proportionate, and joyful support of our ministry plan. We maintain and promote this wish list to provide direction for those who desire to make a special contribution beyond their planned offerings, and to provide suggestions for designation of memorial funds. Anyone who would like to propose an addition to the wish list can obtain a submission form at the church office.

Year End Contributions

All 2019 contributions must be received by St. John's by December 31.
Anything received January 1 or after will be included with 2020 contributions.

Women of St. John's

The Women of St. John's met on November 11, 2019. Pastor Guenther led a devotion based on Romans 3:19 and following verses. This scene is a courtroom where all our sins are laid before the judge. After all the evidence, we have no excuse. The Law has made us conscious of our sins. At that point, Jesus steps in and our sins are forgiven and forgotten due to His sacrifice. Through His atonement, we receive "at-one-ment" with God.

Our guest speaker was Austin Claflin. Austin is a MLC junior on the pastor track and a published author of 3 books with a 4th awaiting publishing. His books include Rebel and Roman and the Companion trilogy. He writes about ancient history with a focus on Alexander the Great. He told us about his writing process and how he self-published. A spirited question and answer session followed.

The MLC Library has three of his books available.

Ruth Aufderheide,
Secretary

Council Digest

The Church Council met on November 19. A summary of reports and action from the meeting not reported elsewhere in the Fortress follows:

Membership changes approved

Profession of Faith

Paul Schroer

Paul Wessel

Transfer Out

Eleanor Runke

Elder's chair Bill Dinse reported that a retirement recognition open house for staff minister Kelly Emde will be held after the New Year's Eve service. Arrangements have been made to have our communion ware repaired.

A generous donor has agreed to cover the costs.

The St. Paul's School Support Formula Review Committee continues to meet. A report on the most recent meeting was provided by committee member Jim Grunwald. The purpose of the joint St. John's-St. Paul's committee is to review the current formula used to determine the amount of financial support provided by St. John's for the school.

The Endowment Committee met recently under the direction of chairman Bruce Savoy. Since Bruce's term of service concludes at the close of the calendar year, the committee reorganized by electing newly-appointed member Mark Bauer as chair. We thank Bruce for his service to the committee and congregation. The second order of business was to arrange for a 2019 distribution. With earnings of almost \$30,000 this past year, the committee decided on a distribution of \$14,200 (5%). The Board of Stewardship was charged with the responsibility of bringing a recommendation in December for the disposition of those funds.

Board of Stewardship chair Dan Borgwardt shared a draft of an organizational chart for the congregation. The chart will be reviewed and refined before it is adopted.

President Thiesfeldt continues to seek a new congregational archivist to replace Prof. emeritus Robert Krueger when he retires from the work at the end of the year. The formation of a support committee is also being considered. Please contact President Thiesfeldt if you have interest in this work.

Board of Trustees chair Scott Deters reported that the lawn sprinkler system was serviced before it was shut down for the winter. The annual elevator inspection showed that everything is in good operating condition. The Trustees have developed a punch list of winter projects.

The Church Council will conduct a ministry review over the next 7 months. President Thiesfeldt provided an orientation to the process. The study is designated as Ministry Review 2020 and will serve as a comprehensive evaluation of the work of the congregation in the light of its mission statement:

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, a Christian congregation gathered around the Word of God and his Sacraments, resolves to:

Proclaim the clear Word of Life, the Gospel: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16)

Teach that Jesus Christ alone is "the Way and the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6)

"Love one another" even as God "first loved us" (1 John 4)

Worship God who is "worthy to receive honor and glory and praise" (Revelation 5)

Reach out with the Gospel to "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 7)

The goals of the study follow:

1. Review the structure and function of each congregational board/committee as a prelude to examining the broader perspective of how the congregation carries out gospel ministry.
2. Gather constituent feedback through surveys, interviews, focus groups, cottage meetings, etc.
3. Coordinate with and gather input from the Campus Facilities Task Force, aka “Charting the Congregation’s Future.”
4. Review all staffing levels for appropriate structure, function, and efficiency.
5. Review the structure and function of the church office.
6. Review the relationship of St. John’s with other cooperating ministries (St. Paul’s, MVL, WELS, etc.).
7. Identify up to five future ministry goals and present them to the voter’s assembly for consideration and approval at the July 2020 voters’ meeting.

The work will be conducted according to the following timeline:

December and January

Each board/committee

1. conducts an internal review of its work in the light of the St. John’s Constitution and the congregational mission statement.
2. prepares a list of survey questions to gather constituent feedback.
3. submits a report of its findings to the Church Council.

February and March

1. The Church Council reviews the board/committee reports and prepares for one or more member surveys, interviews, focus groups, cottage meetings, etc.
2. Pastor Guenther leads a Sunday Morning Bible study on our mission statement.

April

1. A member survey is disseminated and additional input sessions are scheduled.
2. The Church Council reviews the congregational mission statement and develops an accompanying vision statement.

May and June

The Church Council analyzes the congregational feedback and identifies up to five ministry goals for consideration by the voters’ assembly.

July

A completed Ministry Plan is presented to the voters for consideration.

October

A budget reflecting the approved Ministry Plan is adopted.

January 2021

Implementation of the adopted Ministry Plan begins.

The council looks forward to your participation in the development of this plan. May God bless our efforts to the glory of his name!

The next Church Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 17, at 7:00 p.m.

The annual voters’ meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 28, at 7:00 p.m.

Steven R. Thiesfeldt
Congregational chairman

Our Synod at Work

Commission on Inter-Church Relations

The Commission on Inter-Church Relations serves under the Conference of Presidents. They represent the synod in doctrinal discussions with other church bodies that are, or are not, in fellowship with the synod. They also keep themselves informed on the doctrinal trends in other church bodies. The Commission meets twice each year for regular meetings

WELS continues to receive more and more inquiries from established and emerging churches around the globe that are looking for fellowship with the WELS and for assistance in educating pastors in their countries.

WELS is a member of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, which consists of 32 confessional Lutheran church bodies throughout the world that are in fellowship with each other. The tenth triennial convention of the organization will be held May 29-June, 2020, in Seoul, South Korea. This convention will be hosted by Seoul Lutheran Church. The Planning Committee has asked the Commission on Inter-Church Relations to work with them to urge church bodies within our fellowship who have not joined the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference to become members, and several churches are expected to be applying for membership.

Although the emphasis is world-wide, the Commission on Inter-Church Relations works with church bodies in North America as well:

1. Evangelical Lutheran Synod is our sister synod in America and we have been in fellowship since its organization in 1918. The Commission interacts with the ELS on a regular basis in order to foster the unity of faith that we have with this church body.
2. Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The Commission continues to monitor development in the Missouri Synod, with whom WELS suspended fellowship in 1961. The latest in a series of informal meetings between leaders was held in November, 2018, in which discussion was held on creation and fellowship. While fellowship is not imminent, agreement was made that there is benefit in continuing the informal talks.
3. Church of the Lutheran Confession. In 2015 a document was drafted entitled “Joint Statement Regarding Termination of Fellowship.” The Church of the Lutheran Confession’s General Pastoral Conference in 2017 recommended that their convention not adopt the statement. The CLC neither formally accepted nor rejected the statement but instead resolved to make a final decision on the statement at its 2020 convention. There is hope that discussions would continue in the meantime.

Looking ahead, Professor James Danell was elected to serve at the new chairman of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations, replacing Dr. John Brenner, who finished his term on July 1.

We will continue our discussion on the Commission on Inter-Church Relations next month by looking at its activities in South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Gerald Woodley

St. Paul's Lutheran School

BOCD Actions – Although the BOCD met this month and is working on a number of things, there were no points of action taken or moved on to the SP council. Two Calls were reported on this month. Steve Biedenbender returned a call to Faith, Antioch for 5/6 teacher and church music. The call from St. John's congregation to Mrs. Christine Baganz for teaching Kindergarten and director for K-4 music has been accepted. We thank God for providing teachers for our school according to his will.

MVL Visits – Grades 3-4 students visited MVL on November 1st to watch parts of their drama department's Fall play productions. Grades 5-8 observed Veterans Day by attending the MVL Veterans' Service on Wednesday, Nov. 7th.

Parent/Teacher Consultations – Consultation periods took place during the evenings of November 12-14. Parents had the opportunity to visit with teachers about the progress of their children, ask questions, and make plans to help.

Activities – Basketball season started with practices for all teams during the week of November 11th. Forty-nine participants were involved in Forensics with a large meet at MLC on November 21st and also presented their pieces at a Forensic Fair at St. Paul's School on Friday, Nov. 22nd.

A Band Concert is planned for Thursday, December 12th at 7:00pm.

Teachers and children have begun preparing for the Christmas Eve Children's Service, entitled "*Saints and Angel Hosts Rejoice*". There will be rehearsals at church on the mornings of Dec. 19-20, and 23 from 8:00 until 10:00. Children should get dropped off at church each morning (Buses will be dropping them off at church on the 19-20th.) The children will be dismissed from church on Monday, the 23rd at 10:00 and parents should pick their children up at church and not from school on that day. The Children's Christmas Eve service will be at 4:00 on the 24th. Christmas break begins after the Christmas Eve Service. School will resume on Monday, January 6th.

Building Project – The new entrance opened for school use on November 11th. It was celebrated with Donut-holes and balloons. It also marked the opening of the school offices and the new traffic flow through the parking lot. Traffic now flows only from the Payne Street entrance to Garden Street. Drop-off and pick-up directions were sent out to parents. If you are picking up students, please park until children are present in pick-up area, then move into the line for pick-up.

The Stem-Art rooms are complete with furniture but their use was delayed until work on the elevator was completed. Although the elevator is now complete, it can't be used until it is inspected. A limited number of inspectors in the state has delayed the inspection. Work continues in the PreK wing, but is on schedule to finish during December. The plan is to move the PreK from its current temporary classroom in the upper level to its permanent home in the new wing over the Christmas Break. Watch for details on changes in the bulletin. Parents of PreK students will be sent emails with updates. Praise God for the blessings that have come with this project as well as the continued blessing of Christian Education that is available to our member children within these doors.

Calendar

Dec 12 Band Concert

Dec 14 St. Paul's School Tip-Off

Dec 20-21 Christmas Rehearsal at Church

Dec 23 Christmas Rehearsal at Church
Dec 23 Dismiss from church at 10 am
Dec 24 Christmas Service at 4 pm
Jan 6 School resumes

splnewulm.org/school

Respectfully submitted,
James L. Dretske, Administrative Teacher
jdretske@splnewulm.org

Youth Group

Please come to the church on Friday, December 6 at 4:30 pm to decorate for Christmas for Kids!

Sign up in the narthex (or email me ali3b2g@gmail.com) to let me know which area you would like to help with for Christmas for Kids. You

can choose between **Crafts, Games, Snacks, Lessons or Music.**

On Sunday, December 15 we will be decorating Gingerbread Houses from 1 - 3 pm!

See you there!

Archives

Stewardship over the Years

As in past years the December Archives article is about stewardship. For a Christian congregation it's the management of God's gifts for the purpose of preaching and teaching the gospel message of salvation in our own community and beyond, and that brings us to budgets, financial resources, contributions and expenditures. A proposed budget for 2020 was presented and passed at the quarterly voters' meeting in October. By looking at budgets and financial reports of years past we can document evidence of God's blessing in meeting and making planned commitments to that purpose. Budget and expenditure categories are not exactly the same for all years but should offer a good comparison.

1959, Pastor was Frederic Nitz. Budgetary and other expenses were close to actual expenditures. Total expenditures were \$25,565. Synod-related disbursements were \$4,382. For St. Paul's School \$661.

1969, Pastor was Frederic Nitz. Total budgetary expenses were \$51,722. Special items: St. Paul's School support, \$ 8, 610; Synod support and related items \$1,142.

1994, Pastor was David Kolander; Director of Christian Education was David Zabel. The total operating budget for 1994 was \$280,765. Not included in that amount were Synod support of \$43,000 and contributions to MVL general and capital funds of \$33,840. Included were education support for St. Paul's school, teachers' (4) salaries, and related items totaling \$158,514.

2009, Pastors were Jeffrey Bovee and Wayne Laitinen; Administrative Teacher was James Dretske. The total "Operating" budget for 2020 was listed at \$532,245. That included educational expenses of \$227,215 which included salaries of 4 teachers plus \$33,000 of additional support for St. Paul's School. Under "Non-budget" were goals for support of WELS Missions (\$78,650), MVL general (\$55,300) and MVL Capital (\$10,000). Grand total: \$688,856. In addition there was a Building Fund Budget of \$99,552 for interest and payments on mortgage principal.

2019-2020. Detailed comparison figures for these years may be found in the Budget Worksheet prepared for the congregational budget meeting. Copies are available in the church narthex and will be printed in the coming 2019 annual report.

Reasons for the changes vary from year to year. Certainly inflation has played a part. Membership increased over the years: Budget categories and report formats have also changed. Yet the figures do reflect increasing activity in preaching and teaching the Christian Gospel and are evidence of God's continued blessing and fruits of faith.

Bob Krueger