



THE MESSENGER

ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH

December 2021

WEEKLY EVENTS

- Sunday Worship - 10:30 AM
- Sunday School - 9:30 AM (*adult & child*)
- NA Meeting - Wednesdays at 7:30 PM
- Spirituality Group - Thursdays at 7 PM
- AA Meeting - Saturdays at 10:00 AM
- Soccer Shots - Saturday mornings & Tuesday evenings (*Spring-Fall*)



2021 Ascension Church COUNCIL

Council Executives

- Jason Eager *president*
- Jeff Williams *vice-president*
- Clay Marnich *secretary*
- John Bielewicz *treasurer*

Council Liaisons

- Jerry Wessel *Christian Education*
- John Bielewicz *Youth*
- Jason Eager *Communications & Publications*
- Rudy Marnich *Social Ministry & Evangelism*
- Bob Thompson *Finance & Stewardship*
- Barbara Thompson *Worship & Music*
- Mark Thompson *Property*
- Jeff Williams *Mutual Ministry*
- Clay Marnich *Personnel*
- (Vacant) *Fellowship*

Next Council Meeting

Tuesday December 14 at 7:00 PM

It's all about the journey



From Pastor Murdy's Desk

Advent is a season of waiting, watching and expectation. I recently noticed pastors (not just Lutheran) posting encouragement to let Advent be Advent and let Christmas be Christmas. In the hustle and bustle of this magnificent season, it

can be easy to become distracted with the glitter and gold and forget about the muck and mire of Christ's crèche. If we think of Christmas as the destination, then during Advent we must be diligent, remain watchful and focus on the *journey*.

So, what's the journey all about? The word Advent comes from the Latin word *Adventus*, which means *coming*. With this in mind, the journey is all about the coming of Christ, the promised Messiah and our Jesus. Advent is also about our preparation as we anticipate greeting the Son of God.

Christmas is the perfect time to think about what it means to get ready. I know in our house getting ready can take a while. It's not just the presents, the decorating and the cookies. Our list is long with things ranging from hanging the lights to writing my Christmas Eve sermon. On top of all of that, we also have looming house projects that we desperately want to finish before Christmas. Just *thinking* about the holiday to-do list can be overwhelming.

Perhaps you are feeling the same sense of being overwhelmed. Or, perhaps this season there is less to do because there are less people to share it with. Both can be burdens which can weigh heavy on us. With so much weighing on us and distracting us, we can be tempted to forget the journey, where we are headed and who's coming. During this holiday season you are likely to hear someone say, "boy, I'm glad *that's* over," when Christmas does come and go. How sad this must be, to completely miss the true meaning of Christmas.

Along this Advent way there are things we can do to keep us focused on the coming of Christ and honor the opportunity to prepare that

continued on page 2

Celebrating St. Stephen

Commemorated December 26

Stephen was a deacon and the first martyr of the church. He was one of those seven upon whom the apostles laid hands after they had been chosen to serve widows and others in need. Later, Stephen's preaching angered the temple authorities, and they ordered him to be put to death by stoning, with Saul (later Paul) as one of the observers. As he died, he witnessed to his faith and spoke of a vision of heaven.



source: www.sundaysandseasons.com

“As the number of disciples continued to grow, the Greek-speaking Christians complained against the Hebrew-speaking Christians, saying that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. So the Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 6:1-5).

Acts of the Apostles says that Stephen was a man filled with grace and power, who worked great wonders among the people. Certain Jews debated with Stephen, but proved no match for the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke. They persuaded others to make the charge of blasphemy against him. Stephen was seized and carried before the Sanhedrin.

In his speech, Stephen recalled God's guidance through Israel's history, as well as Israel's idolatry and disobedience. Stephen's speech brought anger from the crowd. “But he, filled with the holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ ... They threw him out of the city, and began to stone him ... As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ ... ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them’” (Acts 7:55-56, 58a, 59, 60b).

St. Stephen is the Patron Saint of Deacons

source: www.franciscanmedia.org

From Pastor Murdy's Desk (continued from pg 1)

Advent gives us. Here are a few things I would encourage you to do as you wait with watchful eyes and prepare for the birth of our savior:

Find a way to honor Christ at home. Setting up a nativity scene, placing a picture of the holy family, or using an advent wreath or an advent calendar can all be ways to stay mindful of the season. Take time each day to reflect on the true purpose of this season of waiting.

Be kind and generous. We all know that people are working extra hard this time of year and with the challenges of short staffing it can make working life hard. Give compliments, tip well, and be kind. Consider ways you might be more generous to others - not just to family. As you look at your Christmas list, what might you be willing to cross off so you can give to others?

Finally, listen to the story. Every Sunday we read the scriptures - both old and new - which tell us the story of God's people. In this story the people (us) are in need of a savior and God knows it. So, from the very beginning God knows that he will send his only Son to save God's people from their sins. Listen to the voices in these stories and let them resound in your own life.

My friends, the star shines bright and we know where we must go. Let us prepare and journey well so that we might honor him who saves us.

From my family to yours, I wish you a blessed Advent and a very Merry Christmas.

In Christ +

Pastor

“Remain watchful
and focus on the
JOURNEY”

~ PJ

Christmas Eve

Friday December 24, 2021

4 pm & 7 pm traditional Christmas Eve worship

5:30-6 p.m. fireside worship with hymns



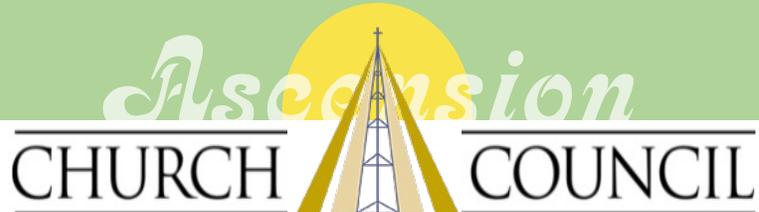
Traditional Christmas Eve worship with Holy Communion will be celebrated at Ascension Church on Friday, December 24 at 4:00 and 7:00 p.m.

Fireside service with hymn singing, a brief message and Silent Night at 5:30 p.m.

NOTE: This year you do not need to reserve a time. However, with Christmas Eve being highly attended services, the wearing of protective masks is strongly encouraged.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE . . .

The **Mount Calvary Cemetery board** is seeking to add a new board member who can help with the administration of Ascension Church's Mount Calvary Cemetery. The candidate should be a good listener and possess the analytical skills necessary for evaluating proposals and bids for equipment purchase/equipment repairs. Knowledge or basic understanding of heavy equipment would be helpful. The board meets 4 to 5 times annually. If you or someone you know may possess these qualifications, please consider serving in this fulfilling ministry.



ALC Council Meeting Highlights

Council meeting was held Tuesday Nov. 9, 2021

- Motion to accept new members Daniel Giza, Blair and Beth Varner (Brooks). All in favor.
- Merger update: The filing has been finalized
- Council members can bring “the next project” idea as well as estimates to the January meeting.
- Motion to accept sabbatical policy as written. All in favor.
- Constitutional revision review: Motion to present amended constitution to congregation at December meeting. 9 in favor, 1 opposed.

Next Council Meeting: Tuesday, December 14

Congregational meeting:
Sunday, December 19

got NEWS?

If you have pictures, articles, or ideas to submit for the **JANUARY 2022** Newsletter, please contact the office or Pastor, or email office@alcpgh.com.

Congregational Meeting Sunday DEC. 19

- 2022 Church Budget and 2022 Cemetery Budget are available in the church hallway. If you would like an electronic copy, please notify the office.
- Review of pastoral sabbatical policy
- Constitutional revisions: once approved, it will need to be ratified at the next annual meeting in January and then approved by Synod council before going into effect.
- Church council and cemetery board elections.

Best Wishes . . .

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS!

Date | Member/Friend

- 6 Travis McEwen
- 7 Ryan Bayer
- 12 Jeanne Rose
- 13 Natalie Rodriguez
- 14 Paxton Brown
- 16 Debora Whitfield
- 17 Kay Braisted
- 19 Dylan Siemons
Lauren Bayer
- 20 Katherine Neilson
- 21 Pat Summerhill
Rudy Marnich Sr.
- 22 Isabella Bryan
- 23 Joseph Neilson
- 24 Barbara Thompson
- 26 Phil Spano
- 29 Jake Zoltun



DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES!

Date | Members/Friends

- 2 Jerry & Paula Wessel
- 4 Jeff & Debra Williams



. . . and Blessings to ALL!

LECTOR SCHEDULE

DEC. 5

Jennifer Burkholder

DEC. 12

Jason Eager

DEC. 19

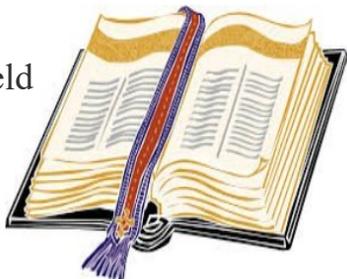
Debbie Whitfield

DEC. 24

To Be Announced

DEC. 26

Mark Thompson



THANK YOU!

Thanks to everyone who participated in our LifeTouch picture directory project.

We had an amazing turnout, and from the few pictures I saw, they look equally amazing! If you ordered pictures, you should have them before Christmas. We should have our new directory at the beginning of the new year.

Thank YOU to each of our volunteers who signed people in, made phone calls, answered questions and so much more.

We couldn't have done it without you!

Our new Ascension Church directory surely will be the best yet!

+PJ

Lunch Bunch



A monthly gathering of members and friends of Ascension Church

Join the LUNCH BUNCH at the Thompson House - Thursday December 16

A record number of Ascension Lunch Bunchers – 22 of them – met at Downey's House on Nov. 18 for their monthly get-together and feast. An added bonus was that Downey's House was close to home! Speaking of close to Home, the group has been invited to Mark and Barb Thompson's home for a pre-Christmas get-together on **Thursday Dec. 16 at 11:30 AM**. Maps to their Crafton residence at 14 Bell Ave. will be available in the church office. Please phone Mark or Barb (412-922-6055), Jerry Wessel (412-787-1213) or Nancy Schreiber (412-859-3969) by Dec. 14 if you plan to attend. Many thanks to Mark and Barb for graciously hosting the December Lunch Bunch in their home!

Times & Traditions Light the Way

by Gertrud Mueller Nelson

Anticipating, preparing, creating, making — all can be a prayer that leads us through the darkness into the new light.

There are dozens of hymns and Advent carols that speak to our longing, our fears, our cheer in these waiting days:

People, look east. The time is near of the crowing of the year. Make your house fair as you are able, trim the hearth and set the table. People look east, and sing today — Love, the Guest, is on the way (“People, Look East,” *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 248).

Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in thee (“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus,” *ELW*, 254).

Rejoice, then, you sad-hearted, who sit in deepest gloom, who mourn your joys departed and tremble at your doom. All hail the Lord’s appearing! O glorious Sun, now come, send forth your beams so cheering and guide us safely home (“O Lord, How Shall I Meet You,” *ELW*, 241).

Advent hymns such as these keep us focused. These and other traditions — in the church and in our homes — are stepping-stones that carry us through the season. They allow us to celebrate the darkness, lending us courage and joy in our longing.

Advent isn’t dour. Each festivity points from itself to the mystery ahead.

Congregational life should be the “first responder” to our basic human need for time out, time taken, time returned to us loaded with grace and joy and appreciation of simple things glorified. Parishes can bring members

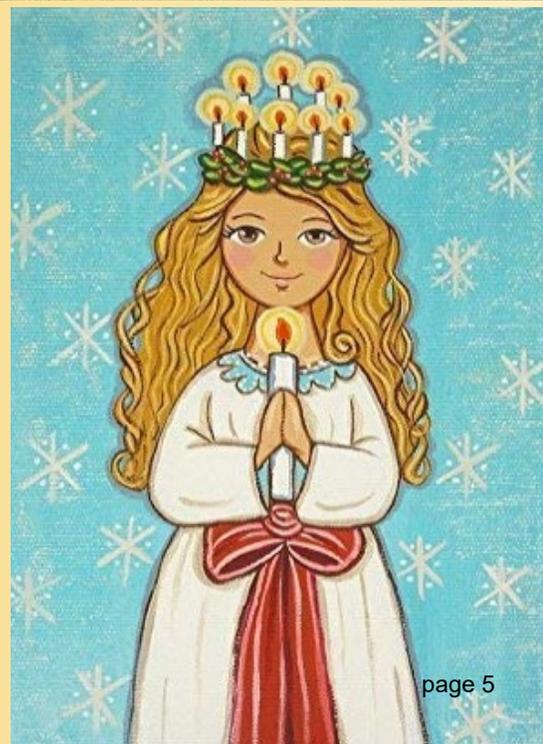


through this collective celebration of darkness-before-dawn, to the dawning of Emmanuel, God-with-us, to a great manifestation in the feast of Epiphany.

Save children’s pageants, choir concerts and staff parties for the 12 days of Christmas. Instead, consider how you might celebrate, or help families celebrate St. Nicholas Day or St. Lucia, for instance.

Our country is a fine ethnic salad full of customs that could add richness to our December.

*Excerpted from “Wait, it’s Advent”
by Gertrud Mueller Nelson
Living Lutheran - November 27, 2014*





A Special
CHRISTMAS
Remembrance

For the past nine years Ascension Church has received a generous donation for the purchase of our Christmas tree. Sandra Schane, the sister of Sheila Sima,

was a beloved member of Ascension who passed away nine years ago. She is lovingly memorialized via this thoughtful gift. Her sister Sheila writes:

“Seasons Greetings from Sheila Sima. I am Sandra Schane’s sister who each year donates the Ascension Lutheran Church Christmas tree in memory of Sandy. This year again I am donating \$300 to continue that tradition . . . As you may recall, Sandy passed away unexpectedly February 3, 2012. She was a dedicated and beloved member of Ascension Lutheran Church. She sang in the choir, was on church council, and participated in the women’s bible study circle group. Sandy loved her Ascension family dearly. Wishing a happy holiday season to everyone at Ascension.”

– *Sheila Sima*

O Chrismon Tree . . .



Symbolizing eternal life in Jesus Christ, the Chrismon tree is an evergreen tree often placed in the chancel or nave of a church during Advent and Christmastide.

Chrismons are white and gold ornaments fashioned in the forms of centuries-old religious symbols. First developed in 1957 by Frances Kipps Spencer at Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia, Chrismons were conceived as Mrs. Spencer had been contemplating a way to decorate the Christmas tree in her church that would be more suitable for a Sanctuary. She believed that traditional bright ornaments were not appropriate for placement in a worship setting and began looking for something that would reflect the Christian faith.

Correlating the practice of decorating a birthday cake with the honoree’s name, Mrs. Spencer decided to place the name of Jesus and his title, Christ, on the tree in various forms. Rather than using English, however, she used Greek monograms. Thus, "Chrismon" is a combination of the words "Christ" and "monogram," and therefore means "symbols of Christ." Chrismons are gold and white, representing majesty and purity. Ideas for fashioning them are developed from early Christian symbols, the Bible and church histories. The Greek “*Chi Rho*” became one of the earliest Chrismons because the symbols are monograms for *Christos*, the Greek word for Christ. These simple monograms and some crosses decorated the first Chrismon Tree.

Over the years, Frances Spencer added other designs using signs and symbols utilized by early Christians. As these designs increased in number, they included references to Jesus’ life, ministry, and teachings. Chrismons are traditionally white, gold, and/or silver. White is the Church color for Christmas and symbolizes God’s Majesty and Glory. Chrismons can be made from anything, but paper and embroideries are the most widely used.

HOLDEN EVENING PRAYER

Join us for midweek Advent services

7 p.m. Thursdays December 2nd, 9th & 16th
 During the season of Advent the church gathers to celebrate a time of anticipation and preparation for the coming of Christ.
You are invited to worship with us on Thursday evenings during Advent December 2nd, 9th and 16th at 7 p.m.
 for a service of Holden Evening Prayer. This brief and contemplative service will be **followed by dessert & fellowship.** Following fellowship, the choir will rehearse. Anyone who is interested in singing for Christmas services or in seeing what it's all about is welcome to attend.

LESSER FESTIVALS & commemorations

December 3 - Francis Xavier, missionary to Asia d. 1552

Francis Xavier (SAYV-yehr) was born in the Basque region of northern Spain, later becoming a missionary to India, Southeast Asia, Japan, and the Philippines. At each point he learned the local language and, like Martin Luther, wrote catechisms for the instruction of new converts. Together with Ignatius Loyola and five others, Francis formed the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Francis spoke out against the Spanish and Portuguese colonists when he discovered their oppression of the indigenous people to whom he was sent as a missionary.

December 4 - John of Damascus, theologian and hymnwriter d. ca. 749

Born to a wealthy family in Damascus and well educated, John left a career in finance and government to become a monk in an abbey near Jerusalem. He wrote many hymns as well as theological works. Foremost among the latter is a work called *The Fount of Wisdom*, which touches on philosophy, heresy, and the orthodox faith. This summary of patristic theology remained influential for centuries.

December 6 - Nicholas, Bishop of Myra d. ca. 342

Though Nicholas is one of the church's most beloved saints, little is known about his life. In the fourth century he was a bishop in what is now Turkey. Legends that surround Nicholas tell of his love for God and neighbor, especially the poor. One famous story tells of Nicholas secretly giving bags of gold to the three daughters of a father who was going to sell them into prostitution because he could not provide dowries for them. Nicholas has become a symbol of anonymous gift giving.

December 7 - Ambrose, Bishop of Milan d. 397

Ambrose was a governor of northern Italy and a catechumen when he was elected bishop of Milan. He was baptized, ordained, and consecrated a bishop all on the same day. While bishop he gave away his wealth and lived in simplicity. He was a famous preacher and is largely responsible for the conversion of Augustine. He is also well known for writing hymns. On one occasion, Ambrose led people in a hymn he wrote while the church in which they were secluded was threatened by attack from Gothic soldiers. The soldiers turned away, unwilling to attack a congregation that was singing a hymn. Ambrose is credited with authorship of three hymns in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, including "Savior of the Nations, Come" (ELW 263).

December 13 - Lucy, Martyr d. 304

Lucy was a young Christian of Sicily who was martyred during the persecutions under Emperor Diocletian. Apparently she had decided to devote her life to God and her possessions to the poor. Beyond that, however, little is known for certain about Lucy. However, her celebration became particularly important in Sweden and Norway, perhaps because the feast of Lucia (the name means "light") originally fell on the shortest day of the year. A tradition arose of a girl in the household, wearing a crown of candles, bringing saffron rolls to her family early in the morning on the day of Lucia.

December 14 - John of the Cross, renewer of the church d. 1591

John was a monk of the Carmelite religious order who met Teresa of Ávila when she was working to reform the Carmelite Order and return it to a stricter observance of its rules. He followed Teresa's lead and encouraged others to follow her reform. He was imprisoned when he encountered opposition to the reform. His writings, like Teresa's, reflect a deep interest in mystical thought and meditation. In one of John's poems, "The Spiritual Canticle," he cried, "Oh, that my griefs would end! Come, grant me thy fruition full and free!"

December 20 - Katharina von Bora Luther, renewer of the church d. 1552

Born to an impoverished nobleman, when Katharina (Katie) was five her mother died and she was sent to live in a convent. She later took vows as a nun, but around age twenty-four she and several other nuns who were influenced by the writings of Martin Luther left the convent. Six children were born to Katie and Martin. Though initially Luther felt little affection for Katie, she proved herself a gifted household manager and became a trusted partner. She was so influential that Luther took to calling her "my lord Katie."

December 26 - Stephen, Deacon and Martyr (See feature about St. Stephen on page 2 of this issue)

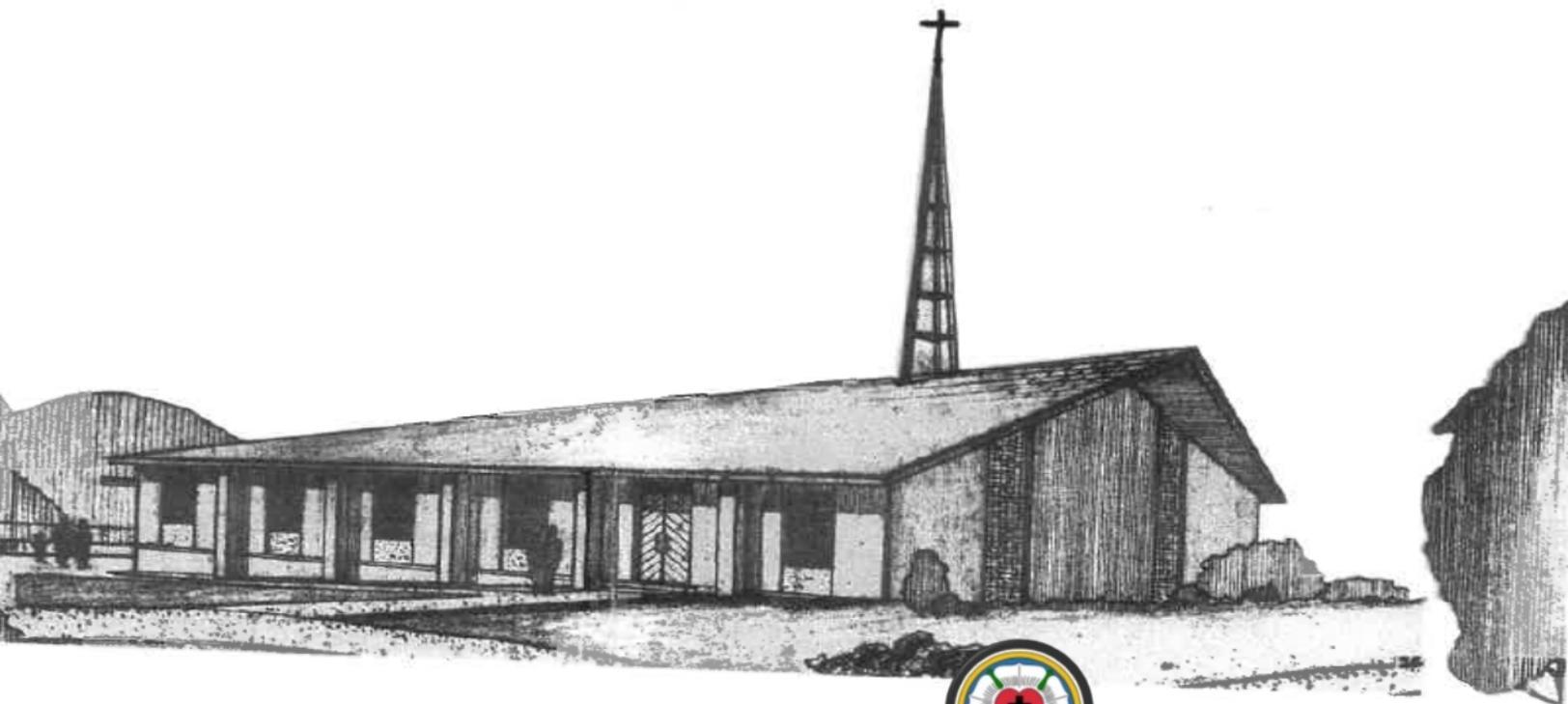
December 27 - John, Apostle and Evangelist

John, the son of Zebedee, was a fisherman and one of the Twelve. John, his brother James, and Peter were the three who witnessed the light of the transfiguration. John and James once made known their desire to hold positions of power in the kingdom of God. Jesus' response showed them that service to others was the sign of God's reign in the world. Tradition has attributed authorship of the gospel and the three epistles bearing his name to the apostle John, as well as Revelation. John is a saint for Christmas through his proclamation that the Word became flesh and lived among us, that the light of God shines in the darkness, and that we are called to love one another as Christ has loved us.

December 28 - The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

The infant martyrs commemorated on this day were the children of Bethlehem, two years old and younger, who were killed by Herod, who worried that his reign was threatened by the birth of a new king. Augustine called these innocents "buds, killed by the frost of persecution the moment they showed themselves." Those linked to Jesus through their youth and innocence encounter the same hostility Jesus encounters later in his ministry.

Source: www.sundaysandseasons.com



*To be Christ's Disciples,
nurture our faith, serve God,
welcome our neighbors,
and joyfully share in His love.*

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PLACE
STAMP
HERE

