

THE GIFT

**A CHRISTIAN PUBLICATION BY ST. JOHN
LUTHERAN**

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Like most of you, I intend to send out Christmas Cards to my friends and family this year. And, if I am even luckier, I will get them out before Christmas! One of the problems I often have is finding a Christmas card that has a suitable message. There are always secular Christmas cards, and I have no problem with secular Christmas cards suggesting that Christmas is about good will, or the joy of children, or Santa Claus, but as a member of the clergy, I generally send out a Christian Christmas card. This presents another whole set of problems. First, in many places, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a Christian Christmas card. Then, when one does find a Christian Christmas card, the vast majority of the time the card's author has completely missed the point of Christmas. Most Christian Christmas cards confuse Christmas and Easter, referring to Jesus as the savior of the world (which he is – but that is not the point of Christmas). Some of the cards get part of the way there by describing the birth of Jesus, which is an important part of the Christmas story, but the birth of a baby is not what Christmas is all about. Other cards take the sneaky way out by simply printing a passage from scripture on the inside, believing, I suppose, that if they reproduce a verse or two of the scripture from the nativity story, that they must have somehow captured the true meaning of Christmas. Yet, neither Shepherds tending their flocks nor the gifts of the Magi have a lot to do with the miracle of Christmas, even if it sounds nice.

The Christmas miracle is that Jesus, God made flesh, came to earth to live among us, to take on our lot in life, as one of us. That is unique among the world's religions. Think of any god of any other faith on earth and you will not be able to find a single one who took human form and lived among humans as a human - not Vishnu, not Zeus, and certainly not Baal. The miracle of Christmas is that the boy in the manger is fully human, and yet fully God. Emmanuel, God with us.

Long Live The King!
Pastor Andersen

REFLECTIONS ON STEWARDSHIP

There are some wonderful principles in the Old Testament which apply to present-day Christians. One of these is in Deuteronomy 8:10-18. Stated in contemporary language, it says, "When you have eaten and are full, when your cars, houses and bank accounts multiply, don't forget where it came from: Remember the Lord your God."

In truth, all that we have comes from God. He determines what we will receive, whether it be money, gold, silver, houses, land, bank accounts, stocks, bonds, etc. It all belongs to Him in the first place, and He entrusts it to us. According to David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29, riches, honor, power, and wealth all come from God.

That's why there is no such thing as a self-made man or woman. Oh, we have to do our part. God's plan is not that we just sit around praying and reading the Bible all day long so that what we need to survive will miraculously drop into our hands. We're not just to pray for "our daily bread," but we're also to get up each day and work for it! That's why the Apostle Paul stated clearly, "Anyone unwilling to work should not eat" (2 Thes. 3:10). But in reality, the amount of money and wealth which we receive is determined by God. According to His divine will and knowledge, He entrusts to each of us the amounts which He knows will be best for us.

What should be our reaction to our financial state? Some might pray, "Dear Lord, you must have made a mistake concerning me and my finances. Please give me more money." Others might try to circumvent God's design for their lives by trying to win the lottery or to obtain large sums of money through some other means. Mature Christians, however, will realize God's infinite wisdom far surpasses their limited perspective. They will accept with a thankful spirit what God has entrusted to them and seek to honor God by their living and by their giving.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

What: St. John's Christmas Potluck

When: Sunday, December 14th

Time: Noon

What To Bring: Dish To Pass and Table Service

What's Provided: Chicken, Ham, and Drink

See You There!

PAY IT FORWARD!

Let's UN-decorate the tree! The Jane Adams giving tree is up in the narthex and waiting for you to take a name, or two! All gifts need to be returned by Sunday, December 14th so that they can be delivered prior to Christmas. Along with the person's name and wish list, more information can be found on the opposite side of the tag in regards to other people living in the home. With this information, those wishing to include a small gift for others in the home may also do so. Any questions? See Charlotte Blackburn.

SAVE YOUR RECEIPTS

Sullivan's Foods is once again offering our congregation an opportunity to earn extra cash. Save your Sullivan's receipts dated November 22-26th and place them in the designated basket in the narthex

by Sunday, December 7th. Thanks for your cooperation!

EXPO OPPORTUNITY

The Stockton Chamber of Commerce has asked St. John's to provide the food at the 2009 Expo. If you are interested in being a chairperson or co-chairperson for this event, please see Pastor Andersen.

LEND A HAND, PLEASE!

Volunteers are still needed to help with light cleaning and snow shoveling at the church this winter. Please take time out to help us care for God's creation by signing up in the narthex!

PRAYER CONCERNS

Cindy Paisley, Kyle Baltierra, Kelly Nadig, Delma Bartch, Ella Hoffman, Joe Dvorak Sr., Jack Reel, Kevin Meiners, Warren Parker, Dan Koester, and the men and women serving in the armed forces

LAST MINUTE GIFT IDEAS

Trying to complete that Christmas list? Don't forget about St. John's 150th commemorative items that are still available - Mugs for \$5,

Cookbooks for \$12, and DVDs for \$15!

DID YOU FORGET?

Maximize those opportunities available to you –

- ✓ Pastor Andersen's Office Hours on Wednesdays at 3 PM or by appointment
- ✓ Individual Confession and Absolution on Wednesdays at 5 PM
- ✓ Adultfirmation on Wednesday nights at 7:30 PM
- ✓ Pastor's Book Club on Thursday nights at 7:30 PM
- ✓ Dubuque Soup Kitchen Visits on the last Saturday of every month at 4 PM

DECEMBER DISCIPLES

<i>Date</i>	<i>Lector</i>	<i>Acolyte</i>	<i>Greeters</i>
December 7 th	Vicki Wurster	Matthew Carroll	Pam Staver and Joan Beyer
December 14 th	Jen Johnson		Calvin and Jan Klopff
December 21 st	Rene Albrecht	Paige Paisley	Marv and Charlotte Blackbourn
December 24 th	Connie Carroll		Jody Carroll Family
December 25 th	Pam Staver		Ernie and Minnie Lieb
December 28 th	Julie Yuswak		Gloria Endress and Donna Albrecht

Ushers: Jody, Michael, and Matthew Carroll; Tim Eden

Treasurer's Assistant: Cindy Paisley

Sunday School Teachers: Ashley Randecker, Amy Smith, Daylon Scheele

Happy Holidays!