



## Finding Peace during Advent

Christmas is quickly approaching, ready or not!

This season of Advent, when we prepare for Christ's "coming," can be a very hectic time. During this so-called "holiday season" it is easy to be rushed, stressed and overwhelmed. As Christmas nears, we worry about buying gifts, fighting the crowds and making complicated plans with extended, and often distant family members. Sometimes, it feels like more than we can handle.

Maybe that's why the church celebrates this season differently. Advent, for us, is a reminder to focus on what's really important—to wait with sacred expectation for what God has done and is doing in our world and lives. In contrast to the rushed atmosphere of the marketplace, we instead slow down in an effort to cultivate peace in our hearts and provide room for an appreciation of the ever-present love of God that has been given to us.

Here are some well-worn practices that may help us make this Advent season more meaningful as we await the coming of the Christ child.

1. **Pray.** Find some time to read a devotional or pray each day. Before the many demands of the day overwhelm you, slow down, take a deep breath and reconnect with God.
2. **Say "no".** Don't over commit or pressure yourself to do more than is healthy or helpful. Give yourself permission to say "no" and prioritize the best use of your time and energy.
3. **Limit social media.** Rather than constantly checking your notifications, think about actually connecting with a friend in person. Give them a call, or write them a note. Or if you're feeling overwhelmed, go outside for a walk; notice the sights, smells and sounds around you.
4. **Focus on presence, not presents.** One of the themes of Advent is that Jesus is

literally “Emmanuel—God with us”. Remind yourself of the real gift of love that is ours and comes from God. This gift wasn’t wrapped up in fancy paper with a bow on top. It came in a manger and on a cross. And He is with us still. That’s the Christmas presence that really matters!

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# CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES:

3:30 & 5:30 PM-

Live Nativity & Candlelight

8:00 & 10:30 PM-

Candlelight



## Oh Christmas Tree, Oh Christmas Tree

Thanksgiving is over and the trees are popping up everywhere. Of course, the first arrived at Home Depot and Target months ago. With several Christmas trees in our narthex and one in the sanctuary, by now most members have a least one Christmas tree adorning their home.

As a child, the Christmas tree offered a promise of soon-to-be fulfilled wish lists. When I was a young parent, my back started to ache as we put up the tree and planned vigorously for gifts to buy, wrap and send, social events and concerts to attend and eventually the January Visa bill to bravely address.



Christmas offers a time to both give and to receive. Personally, I’m not so good at receiving; in part because my family says I’m hard to buy for (picky and unclear). I know many of you likely spend more time trying to think of a needed gift than it takes to purchase it. So many of us just don’t need anything. Or if we do, we already bought it. Our membership as a whole is fortunate and abundant. The trees in the narthex are but a fraction of the giving opportunities we embrace throughout the year. Annually, we surpass most requests for giving to those in need, which is something we can be proud of (it’s okay, that Pastors say Lutherans can be proud of that!)

As we submit our commitments of giving to the operating budget for 2019. I know

for many of you, salaries, utilities and other routine costs may not resonate with the joy of giving to the needy. Well this Christmas, I would like to ask for something! I would really like you to prayerfully consider raising your regular giving.

Our church and its core structure is the anchor for our entire mission. Our operating budget is the launchpad for all the mission we deploy. As we are collectively abundant, we are also unique in the ability to dream about where church might go. We have immense time, passion, commitment and wealth. Our Council is good stewards of your gifts which will sustain our shared passion to further energize our membership to Follow Christ, Grow in Faith and Share God's Love.

To date, we are tracking a bit behind on operating giving. Consider a surprise gift this year and setting next year's giving even higher than you committed. Please receive this as a joyful opportunity and not a guilt trip. I offer you the joy of giving to your church, which makes an impact in our world.

I can't wait to see what's under the tree!  
Glenn

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## You Belong by: Janet Smith



You  
Belong

Everyone wants to belong; to fit in, to be accepted, to have a home. Having a church home is important in the life of a Christian. It is a place where you love to go to worship and learn about God with fellow believers. Good Shepherd is such a place for us and we want to grow our family. The "You Belong" committee was formed to study how we might do that as a congregation. We are largely a white middle-class congregation. That's who has felt most comfortable here so far. Does this reflect the makeup of all God's children? The committee was made aware of member families who were not feeling supported or accepted here at Good Shepherd because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. These members were not worshipping here because of their discomfort. Here was an opportunity to look at our welcome statement and our policies to see if there was a need for clarification. Our web site says "all are welcome" yet here were current members who did not always feel welcome.

Within the ELCA there is a program called "Reconciling in Christ". This program recognizes congregations and Lutheran organizations that declare themselves welcoming to all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. There are over 750 Lutheran faith communities that specifically welcome LGBTQ people. At the center of this process is an opportunity to engage in loving conversation with each other and learn more about those who we share this space with already as well as those who are not yet represented here. This is an important process designed to knit the many colors of our community more closely together, rather than merely a one-time decision. There are many factors to be considered in welcoming any group, such as accessibility, resources for support, activities that are all inclusive and perhaps help for specific needs. In welcoming potential members, it is important to get to know them. What are their likes, dislikes, needs, talents and hobbies? In knowing these things, it is easier to welcome them into our

many ministries for the growth and improvement of Good Shepherd. The "You Belong" committee has hosted a talk by Dr. Sarah Garwood on issues faced by gay and transgender youth and how the church could make a difference in their lives. There has also been an Adult Ed class on homosexuality and the Bible. November saw a video and discussion session where we got the chance to hear first-hand experiences of LGBTQ people from inside and outside our community here. There will be more opportunities to learn and discuss the issue of LGBTQ people here at Good Shepherd in the coming months. These are some of the issues that we can consider as we shape the future of our church. We hope you find a way to participate in this church-wide conversation that is comfortable for you.

All are welcome. How does Good Shepherd define 'welcome'? How much of God's family should feel belonging at Good Shepherd? Only we as members can make our answers a reality.

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## A "Wink" from the Welcome Ministry Team by: Elliott Haugen



**Merry Christmas!** Even though Thanksgiving has barely past, the excitement of Christmas is already here. For some, the arrival of snow signaled the approaching Christmas. Or maybe it is the Christmas carols playing on the radio or the display of Christmas-related items in stores. For us the messages of Advent help prepare us for the celebration of Jesus' birth.



For many of us, memories of past Christmas' are rooted in our childhoods. And the joy, expectations, and innocence of children bring smiles to our faces and warmth to our hearts. Matthew 19:14 reminds us to "Let the little children come to me". Thankfully Good Shepherd values this by providing worship, educational, musical, and service opportunities for children throughout the year. The accompanying photo shows some children responded to the music by rejoicing in the aisle at a recent worship service.

Please check out the Welcome Team's "Welcome Children" pew insert that suggests other ways we can include children in our worship services. You are also welcome to take a "You Are Loved" prayer patch from the Welcome Center table to share with a child, yourself, or others.

Child-like excitement about the birth of Jesus is certainly appropriate for adults too. The words of baptism remind us that we are each a "Child of God". And John 1:12 states "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God". So take time this Christmas season to welcome, watch, love, appreciate and support the children in your life, neighborhood, and at Good Shepherd. Have a merry Child of God Christmas!

*Note: A "wink" is a brief form of communications that implies a hello or friendly greeting. Watch for future Winks with thoughts and information about Good Shepherd's welcoming ministry.*

## Stewardship Team Advent's Joy

The holidays offer so many opportunities to share the love of Jesus with others. From spending time with friends and loved ones, to helping those in need through one of the organization we partner with, the joy around us continues to grow.

Thank you to everyone who has returned their 2019 pledge card. While returning your pledge card may not seem as exciting as bringing in a new hat and scarf for the mitten tree, it helps the church prepare for the coming year and how to support the multiple ministry areas we offer. If you have not returned your pledge card yet, we encourage you to prayerfully consider how you can give to the church in 2019 through your time, talent, and treasure. Together we can continue to expand the joy at Good Shepherd.

Yours in Christ,  
The GSLC Stewardship Team

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STAY CONNECTED

