

“For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” – Isaiah 9:6

Neighbors in Christ family and friends,

Grace and peace to you, as we enter the month of December and await the coming of the Newborn King! The final weeks of 2016 will bring fresh baked goodies from our kitchens, cool evenings and fresh new snow, reflections on a year that certainly has had its' ups and downs, and preparations to celebrate an infant born to us...again. By now, the turkey and all the trimmings are behind us as we look forward to Sugar Plum Fairies dancing in our heads. And we also look to the 'reason for the season' as we explore the Gospel of Matthew leading us to Christmas Day.

But first, before we go unpacking and ripping off the wrapping paper of the new gadget to make our lives a little bit better, we should also prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ. The season of Advent draws us closer to the newborn Messiah through expectant waiting and hope to celebrate Jesus' return. Advent is a time of deep reflection where Christians throughout the world share in the ancient longing for the coming of our Lord and are on alert, or watch, for Jesus' Second Coming.

Each Sunday, we will light a new candle on the wreaths in our churches and in our homes while hearing God's inspired Word through prophecy and promise. The first week surrounds a message of hope; the second makes way for Christ's birth in a manger; the third stirs up in our hearts a message from John the Baptist pointing to another greater than he; and the final week announces the annunciation of Christ's birth. Each week builds with excitement and joy as we then come to the arrival and celebration of our Lord and Savior, our Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

The importance of the birth of Jesus is where God comes to us and meets us where we are in this world today. We are filled with sin, suffering, and death. But God comes to us in this weakness: as a baby and as a crucified man. God's Son takes on all that we are and shares with us all that he is. God was made man and was fully human. God's promise was fulfilled, and in his birth, we enter a new era of possibility through the example of Jesus to love and serve our neighbor, just as God loves us. God and God's purpose for the world is the source of Jesus and everything he does...and continues to do in you.

This December, I invite you to share in the promises that our Lord offers us each day. Give the gift of love by telling someone else in your life about the wondrous gifts that you have received; share in the love that we as Neighbors in Christ share with one another. Share in this love during worship on Sunday mornings, during the Bible studies that are held weekly, during mid-week Advent services at Augustana, as you decorate your homes and the spaces we live in, or in your own special way. Be the love that we are called to be.

From my family (and soon to be two more) to yours, have a blessed holiday season and Merry Christmas!

Rev. Erik R. Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish