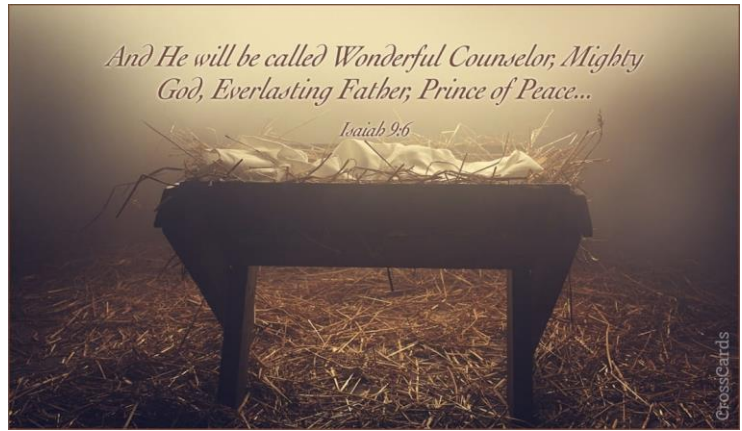


“While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” - Luke 2:6-7



Beloved Neighbors in Christ,

As we enter into the season of Advent, and look towards Christmas, I don't know exactly what each of you need to hear today. For some, this is the most wonderful time of the year. And for others, it is the most difficult time of the year. For some, the lights, the music, the traditions, the Christ child, the time with family and friends, the concerts and programs, the Christmas cards...fill your hearts with joy to the brim and overflowing. For some, the constant joy-filled music, the reminders that loved ones are missing from the table, continued sickness and weariness, the memories of Christmases past spent in hospitals or arguing with loved ones...fill your hearts with dread or sadness or regret.

Wherever you may be this season, we all can sink ourselves deep into the story of Christ coming to this earth. The trepidation and anticipation, the joy and fear, the trust and uncertainty. The Christ child comes in the midst of it all. God in flesh. Immanuel. God with us. Lean on that this Christmas season, and help others to do the same. Look to the manger scene for comfort and peace. I offer to you this devotional reading from the book *Our Family Christmas Devotional*:

“A Manger Spoken For”

“We might read that part of the Christmas story and wonder how that no-vacancy detail could have escaped God's attention. How could He have failed to make room at the inn for His Son and His family? But look again, and we'll see something else.

That manger wasn't an afterthought or backup plan if something else didn't work out. It was a gift, a tangible demonstration of God's focus and order, because there was room for only one Savior. And the gift from old is re-created each day in our hearts where, again, there is room for only one Savior.

Is your heart running low on peace or joy, trust or belief or eagerness to live your life? Whatever you need is wrapped perfectly in the gift of the living Christ-joy to the world at His birth and right now, too.

And as surely as He filled that manger designed only for Him, He fills your heart with the grace and will and power you need to live the life He's designed only for you, because you are no afterthought or backup plan either.

Because He is our greatest teacher and example, we learn to live this beautiful life as we make room in the manger of our hearts for the peace and joy He's created especially for us. And Christmas is a wonderful time to begin.”

Christmas Blessings to you all!
Pastor Erik