

HIGHWOOD HIGHLIGHTS

December 2024

The Newsletter of Highwood Lutheran Church



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1340591 PW: highwood

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Meeting ID: 411 134 0591 #

Passcode: 592794 #

Pastor's Message

We stand on the threshold of a new year. If any theme has been emphasised during this Advent, it has been the theme of new: a new year, new life, new opportunities, new growth, and new life.

Christian faith invites us to pause and reflect on the past while looking ahead to fresh opportunities and beginnings. This year, in particular, I hear a message of transition from one year to the next, symbolising more than a mere change in the calendar—it is a chance to renew commitments and set meaningful goals as we embrace God's gift of possibilities for growth and transformation.

The Reformation was also a time of great upheaval. Martin Luther provided timeless insights into the nature of renewal, resilience, and faith that remain profoundly relevant today. His words challenge us to navigate life's complexities with hope, trust, and purpose. Luther's perspective on new beginnings shines through his famous quote, "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree."

These words convey an unyielding commitment to hope and proactive living, regardless of external circumstances. Even in the face of apparent doom, planting an apple tree symbolises faith, courage, and the belief in a better future. It reminds us that ideal conditions do not bind new beginnings; instead, they arise from deliberate choices to persevere and act in hope, empowering us into the new year.

As we enter a new year, Luther's sentiment invites us to consider the symbolic "apple trees" in our lives—our aspirations, relationships, and endeavours that require action and nurturing. Despite uncertainties, challenges, or fears, we are called to engage with the things that matter and to take small yet meaningful steps toward a brighter tomorrow. Our acts of hope are an expression of our faith and a testament to the resilience of the human Spirit.

In Luther's words, "This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness; not health, but healing; not being, but becoming; not rest, but exercise," he emphasises that life is a dynamic process of growth and transformation. This emphasis on faith in our sanctification is what we need to appreciate how we are indeed saved and can be reassured and hopeful in whatever the new year brings.

With thankfulness, we gain a perspective that encourages us to approach our life with humility and purpose, recognising that perfection is neither attainable nor required for God to claim us and love us as his children. Instead, the focus lies on the progress of the Holy Spirit guiding us through intentional steps to become better, wiser, more compassionate, and fully human. Advent looks to a new year with a reminder to embrace the Spirit's ongoing process for us to become the saints we are meant to be and allow room for grace as we learn and grow.

Reading Scripture, we see God's emphasis on progress over perfection. The message of grace is intended to encourage and motivate us for the New Kingdom of God, which is present for us now and in the new year.

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Today's world is fraught with challenges, from social unrest, war, famine, and environmental crises to economic uncertainty, political division, and the damage to our souls from (anti)social media. These global issues can feel overwhelming, leaving many questioning one's ability to make a meaningful impact. Again, I look to Luther's words, "If you want to change the world, pick up your pen and write." Such a small thing carries optimism, offering a powerful reminder of God's sharing of his creative energy and the impact of individual agency for a ripple effect on the present and into the future.

Active faith is also a call to action that encourages us to use our unique gifts and talents to address the problems we encounter through advocacy, creativity, service and prayer. Writing symbolises thoughtful engagement—contributing ideas, sharing perspectives, and fostering dialogue. By actively participating in the world's transformation, we align our actions with hope and become agents of grace in the face of adversity.

As we navigate personal and global challenges, Martin Luther's unwavering faith in Christ provides comfort and strength. In his declaration, "So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell... His name is Jesus Christ." Luther underscores the assurance in Christ's redemptive love. As Christians, we trust in Christ's sacrifice, which invites us to approach life's trials confidently, knowing that our faith is anchored in the hope that transcends earthly circumstances. As we face uncertainties, trusting in Christ allows us to experience peace, resilience, and a sense of purpose not dictated by the challenges around us.

As we embark on a new year brimming with promise and unpredictability, Martin Luther's teachings serve as a source of wisdom and inspiration. His reflections urge us to embrace new beginnings with hope and determination, engage thoughtfully with the world's challenges, and root our lives in unwavering trust in Christ's love and grace. By carrying these lessons into the days ahead, we can step boldly into the future, assured that faith equips us to face life's ever-changing landscape with strength, purpose, and joy.

Pastor Mike



**10 months ended October 31,
2024**

October current offerings were \$11,807 and church rental receipts were \$3,100. Synod benevolence receipts were \$100 and non-budget benevolence receipt consisted of \$300 for the Calgary Foodbank, \$300 for Lutheran Campus Ministries and \$250 for CLWR. Total October 2024 offerings and church rentals of \$14,907 were \$1,242 greater than last year.

October expenses of \$14,341 were \$664 under budget.

Highwood had a surplus of \$566 for October 2024 compared to a surplus of \$500 last year. Year to date, Highwood had a shortfall of \$8,918 compared to a shortfall of \$2,383 last year. Church receipts for 2024 are \$5,565 greater than last year (\$1,714 higher on Offerings and \$3,851 higher on church rentals) but church expenses are \$12,101 higher than last year. Year to date expenses are \$5,679 over budget because of higher repairs and maintenance (\$3,296), compensation costs (\$912), worship supplies (\$862) and conventions/conferences (\$638).

Capital Fund – \$81 was donated to the Highwood Ladies group (current balance - \$1,588) and \$50 to the Building Fund and \$100 to the Organ Fund. The balance in the Accumulated operating surplus account at the end of October was \$25,888.

Memorial Fund – No changes. The balance at the end of October was \$12,000

CHRISTMAS WORSHIP AT HIGHWOOD



CHRISTMAS EVE

24 December 2024 at 6:00 PM

A joint service with the Calgary Filipino Methodist Church

CHRISTMAS DAY

25 December 2024 at 10:30 AM

Festival Holy Communion

OUR HIGHWOOD FAMILY

TANYA WELLMAN



I was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, the oldest of three, with a younger sister and brother. My father was a Professor of Crop Science, and my mother was a homemaker and a landscape artist. Both of their parents were farmers, and we visited their farms often. I was baptized and confirmed at St. Francis Xavier RC Church which had an Ursuline Convent across the street. As a result of Vatican 2, in Grade 8, my girlfriends and I became the first female ushers!

In high school, I enjoyed singing in the church choir, and alto in the school choir. There an Ursuline Sister teacher encouraged me to attend a TEC (Teens Encounter Christ) weekend retreat which focuses on Christ's Paschal Mystery (dying, rising, and going forth).

Canadian/Modern History and English were my university majors at St. Thomas More College. Here I became active in student government, and in the Campus Catholic Newman Centre where I prepared and served meals at the student cafe, sang in the STM choir, and helped with the many social activities.

TEC weekends continued to be important where I helped cook in the background, was a small group leader and presented some talks.

Vocation weekends with various Convents such as the Ursulines (OSU), the Filles de la Providence (FDLP), and the Sisters of Mission Service(SMS) discerning whether we were called to be single, married, a religious vocation, to be teachers, nurses, doctors, farmers, accountants etc. Like my mother, I did not have the call to be a nun. As Frederick Buechne wrote: "Your vocation in life is where *your greatest joy meets* the world's greatest need."

In 1982, a group of us booked a bus to go to Winnipeg to see Mother Teresa accept an award. Her presence, her humility, and her praying the rosary throughout the ceremony has had a profound influence on me including her words: "*The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved*." Later, one of the Oblate priests took a few of young women to spend a weekend in Winnipeg with her order – the Missionaries of Charity.

Their women's shelter needed a new fridge, the sisters decided to pray and one was donated! I was paired with a sister, and between our visits, we walked and prayed the rosary for the community.

In my mid-twenties, I joined a new Catholic community, Emmaus House, which focused on youth ministry in Saskatoon and area. Here, two Oblate priests, a married couple that worked with street girls, and 4 single young people lived and prayed together in an old farmhouse near St. Paul's Hospital. More youth retreats including graduations (elementary and high school) and some for a younger age group called Youth Encounter Christ (YEC). I also worked nights and weekends at the group home for the street girls, where I was reminded "*there but for the grace of God go I*". My parents had separated in my mid-teens, and had life been a bit worse, that could have been me.

After a few years, I needed a job that paid, so I started a job as a dietary aide at the Salvation Army Eventide Nursing Home, where I enjoyed the seniors especially the ones with Alzheimer's. The Home offered a free Special Care Aide (SCA) course in which I fortunately was enrolled in when they decided to downsize the kitchen staff. Because I had a union, I was able to bump into a SCA position and keep my full-time hours. So, I became involved in my union, Service Employees International Union (SEIU 333), where I was chairperson for my site, on the negotiating team for five provincial contracts, then Local Treasurer, and eventually became a Union Representative. Meantime, my nursing home was closed, and I bumped into the Neurology / Neurological Surgery unit at Royal University Hospital as a SCA. 12-hour shifts were long, but patients did get better and go home!

Then one January, I went to a friend's birthday party, whom I had known for 20 years since university, and a handsome man followed me into the kitchen. He passed my two tests: my dog loved him, and he answered the Walmart question correctly. And the rest you know.



DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Darcy Anderson
Walter Anderson Jr.
Jennifer Hanson
Donna Harbour
Lydia McTavish
Barbara Patychuk
Helen Sandau
Sam Sandau
Audrey Sribney
Helga Weissenberger
Rick Woycenko

MARTIN LUTHER'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Martin Luther's love for Christmas was profound and multifaceted, deeply ingrained in his theological outlook, sermons, and hymns. Luther's writings, rich with references to Advent and Christmas and his hymns, reflect his heartfelt connection to the season and its significance, as he expressed a passion for this festive season. Evident in his numerous Christmas sermons, which go beyond the themes of joy, are elaborations of hope and explorations of the depths of faith, humility, and the miraculous nature of the Nativity.

The centrality of Christ is a noticeable element in the Christmas sermons as he often emphasises the challenge of putting Christ before exploring the beauty of faith. One of his most renowned sermons, preached on Christmas Day in 1530, delves into the miraculous nature of Christ's birth. Luther spoke of the angel's message to the shepherds, "To you is born this day in the City of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." He highlighted the difficulty of believing in such a profound and divine event, noting that it was no easier for Mary and the shepherds than for us today.

For Luther, faith was a sacred gift, a light in the darkness of doubt, and the essence of Christmas was this act of faith in God's incredible promise. When he came to discuss Mary, the mother of God, he focused on her humility and simplicity.

Luther's emphasis often drew inspiration from the humble circumstances of Christ's birth—the manger, the swaddling clothes, and the modest surroundings. In his sermon on Luke 2, delivered in 1544, Luther marvelled at the incarnation. The paradox of the Almighty God choosing such a humble entry into the world by emphasising that true greatness lies in humility and simplicity, a stark contrast to the pomp and ceremony often associated with power and divinity. Such reverence for the incarnation is a recurring theme in his writings. He frequently reflected on the mystery of God becoming man, the Word made flesh, and the significance of this miracle for humanity. This theological cornerstone focused his thinking on doctrine. It grounded a source of wonder and inspiration, profoundly shaping his Christmas sermons and hymns.

With Luther's intentional focus on Christ, the proclamation of God's love and grace remained central to his Christmas message. He frequently reminded the congregation that Christ's birth was an expression of divine love and grace available to everyone, regardless of status or wealth. Luther's 1522 sermon vividly described the "precious and sacred things of all nations" coming together in Christ's birth, emphasising this event's universal nature and that Christmas was a time to reflect on God's boundless love and the gift of salvation brought by Christ.

Music was another vital element of Luther's love for Christmas. His hymns, such as "Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her" (From Heaven on High, I Come) and "To Shepherds as They Watched by Night," are enduring legacies of his musical contributions. These hymns, filled with joy and wonder, were not merely liturgical pieces but expressions of Luther's deep love for the season, inspiring a similar sense of awe and wonder in his audience. "Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her" captures the essence of Christmas, narrating the angelic announcement and the shepherds' journey to see the newborn Christ.

Luther's personal experiences during Christmas profoundly influenced his writings and hymns. He was known to cherish the festive season, seeing it as a time to celebrate the coming of the Saviour with joy and music. His family traditions and the simple yet profound celebrations in his household often found echoes in his public messages. The warmth and intimacy of these personal experiences gave his Christmas sermons a relatable and heartfelt touch, resonating deeply with his congregation and fostering a sense of shared experience. This emphasis on shared experience fosters a sense of connection and understanding among his audience.

While the theological debates of his time often focused on abstract doctrines, such as the nature of Christ and the role of faith in salvation, Luther brought the narrative of the virgin birth to the forefront of his teachings. Regularly expressing his views on the Nativity set him apart from many of his contemporaries, as he emphasised the tangible, relatable aspects of the Nativity—the humble stable, the simple shepherds, and the tender image of the newborn Christ. By focusing on the humanity and humility of the Nativity, Luther deliberately presented the divine as more accessible, highlighting God's action and willingness to enter the human condition fully.

Moreover, Luther's insistence on Christmas celebrations having personal and communal aspects was a departure from his day's more austere religious observances. He encouraged joyous, heartfelt worship filled with song and community spirit, reflecting his belief that Christmas was a time to rejoice in God's love and grace. Luther saw Christmas as a time for families and communities to come together, to share in the joy of Christ's birth, and to express their faith through shared experiences and traditions.

Luther's love of the Nativity shaped his teachings and made the story of Christ's birth accessible and meaningful to his listeners. This approach resonated with ordinary people, making Christmas a theological concept to be lived as a joyful reality. Finally, his love for Christmas was deeply embedded in his sermons, hymns, and writings. He explored the themes of faith, humility, and divine love, emphasising the profound mystery of the incarnation making a legacy that continues to inspire, reminding us of the meaning of Christmas and the joy and reverence with which we celebrate.



THE FIVE ALONES (SOLAS)

The five solas of the Reformation—Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone), Solus Christus (Christ alone), Sola Fide (faith alone), Sola Gratia (grace alone), and Soli Deo Gloria (glory to God alone)—are foundational principles that distinguish Reformed theology.

Sola Scriptura asserts that Scripture is the ultimate authority in matters of faith, rejecting the authority of tradition or church leaders.

Solus Christus emphasizes that salvation is found solely in Christ, negating any reliance on human efforts or intermediaries.

Sola Fide teaches that faith, not works, is the means by which believers are justified before God.

Sola Gratia highlights that salvation is a gift of grace from God, not something earned by merit.

Soli Deo Gloria encapsulates the purpose of all things: to glorify God alone, reinforcing the centrality of divine sovereignty in salvation.

Together, these solas provide a clear framework for understanding the gospel and its implications for faith and practice.

Pastor Mike

ADOPT-A-FAMILY DRIVE 2024

We are excited to announce our participation in the Christmas Adopt-A-Family Program. This year, we had the wonderful opportunity to sponsor a family in need—comprising of a dedicated dad, a loving mom, and their two precious daughters, aged 7 and 5 years. We have been able to purchase all the gifts. Thank you for those who have supported this endeavor. This is a very worthwhile cause and outreach, and your support is much appreciated. Thank you to Walter Anderson for arranging this endeavour.

SCARVES, MITTENS, HATS, AND SOCKS



“Thank You” to all who have helped fill the boxes and the Mitten Tree. There’s still room for more items. The last day for donations is Sunday, 15 December 2024.

HIGHWOOD LUTHERAN WOMEN’S BIBLE STUDY

Our program will begin again on Tuesday 7 January 2024 at 1:00 PM downstairs. All ladies are welcome to join us.

CHRISTMAS FLOWERS



Donations are gratefully accepted and can be added to your offering envelope.



END OF YEAR DONATIONS

2024 is quickly coming to an end. It’s time to consider those year-end donations, which in turn benefit you on your income taxes. Thank you for your generosity in supporting our church throughout the year.

ON THE WEB

BEYOND OUR WEBSITE

The bishop’s message for December can be [here](#)

These are the resource articles from the last chapter retreat from the Society of the Holy Trinity. (Pr. Mike’s light reading)

https://www.firstthings.com/article/2024/12/ready-for-weirdness?fbclid=IwY2xjawGksGhleHRuA2FibQlxMQABH_ZPKdw7mqV4VcabW1Fypio7bKUPM8ykTXFNqz1O2u-8fjWpcOfZYrMZ9xg_aem_zEFSQfZ8CIXtmwWM-6T7sQ

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2010/03/how-the-world-lost-its-story>

Minding Time: Chronos, Kairos, and Aion in an Archetypal Cosmos: <https://footnotes2plato.com/2015/05/15/minding-time-chronos-kairos-and-aion-in-an-archetypal-cosmos/>

Luther’s Commentary on the letter to the Galatians is one of the central writings of Lutheran’s theology. This link is to the YouTube audio book from librevox.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukZLJdp9Z9E&t=1s>

James Choi of Yale University explains why he is a Christian <https://faculty.som.yale.edu/jameschoi/whychrist/>

SOME CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

FROM AROUND THE WORLD

THE ADVENT CALENDAR



In the 19th century, German Protestants counted down the days to Christmas by marking 24 chalk lines on a door and rubbing one off every day in December. Paper Advent calendars became popular in Germany in the early 20th century. Gerhard Lang is thought to have been the first to mass-

produce them, inspired by a calendar his mother had made for him as a child. He later came up with the idea for cardboard calendars with doors that could be opened.

DECORATING TREES

Pagan Europeans would bring a fir tree into the home during the winter solstice. Tree worship was common, and they would also decorate a living tree outdoors with candles and ornaments symbolizing the sun, moon and stars on the tree of life. In Scandinavia, people decorated their homes and barns with greenery for New Year to ward off evil. Since evergreens symbolize eternal life, greenery helped Europeans visualize the spring to come. It's not known exactly when Christians began to use fir trees as Christmas trees, but the cities of Tallinn in Estonia and Riga in Latvia lay claim to the first documented use of a public tree at Christmas and New Year celebrations. Today, Christmas trees around the world are usually fir, spruce or pine trees.



NIGHT OF THE LITTLE CANDLES



On December 7, Colombia honors Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception with Noche de las Velitas (Night of the Little Candles), an enchanting celebration that marks the start of the holiday season. Colombians light up their homes and streets with millions of white and colored *velas* (candles) in patterned paper lanterns. The Night of the Little Candles was once a small-scale, family-centric affair, but over the years the decorations have become more creative and sophisticated, and electric lights are often used. Celebrations have become increasingly public too, with music and fireworks as well as food markets.

CHRISTMAS IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopian Christmas is celebrated on 7 January (Tahsas 29 in the Ethiopian calendar) as the day of Jesus' birth, alongside the Russian, Greek, Eritrean and Serbian Orthodox Churches. It is also celebrated by Protestant and Catholic denominations in the country. On Christmas Day, a thin white cotton garment called netela is worn. On the Christmas Eve, Ethiopian Christians attend an overnight church service, usually starting around 6:00 PM and finishing at 3:00 AM. People line up surrounding a church and begin a long, looping procession around the circumference of the church. The festivities are a communal experience and a commitment of faith. The holiday attracts pilgrimages to the Lalibela Churches.



(Source: Wikipedia)

MIDNIGHT MASS ON CHRISTMAS EVE



(Midnight Mass from Bethlehem)

Many theologians believe the tradition known as midnight mass originated with pilgrims to what is now Israel. In the late Fourth century, a pilgrim from Rome joined a group of Christians in a vigil in Bethlehem on the night of January 5th Christmas Eve in the Eastern tradition. The vigil was followed by a torchlight procession to Jerusalem, culminating with a dawn gathering. When the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore was built in the 5th century, Pope Sixtus III introduced midnight mass on Christmas Eve in the chapel, a tradition that has since spread to many Christian countries worldwide.

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Poinsettias, which bloom in winter, are indigenous to Central America, specifically to southern Mexico around Taxco del Alarcon and the state of Oaxaca. A Mexican legend tells of a girl who had nothing but a bunch of weeds to offer the baby Jesus at a Christmas Eve service. When she knelt to place the weeds by the nativity, the bouquet burst into bright red flowers. Ever since then, the flowers, whose leaves are said to be shaped like the star of Bethlehem, have been known as the Flores de Noche Buena, or Flowers of the Holy Night, and have become synonymous with Christmas.

