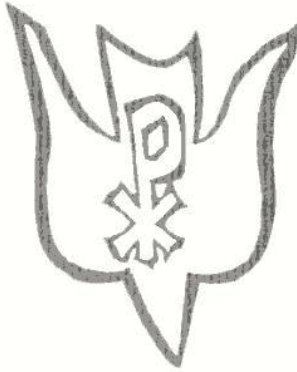


# Focus

*on Spirit of Christ*



*Newsletter of*  
**Spirit of Christ Lutheran Church**

2749 Bunker Lake Blvd NE  
Ham Lake, MN 55304

***December 2016***

A Member of  
The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod

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[www.soclc.org](http://www.soclc.org)

**Our Mission is to live in love for God and one another, reaching out to all people proclaiming and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.**

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## *From our Pastor*

*"And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest."*

O. Henry, "The Gift of the Magi"

Saints,

I have a distinct childhood memory from about the age of 10. My family was returning home from an 11pm Christmas Eve service. My father had the radio tuned to St. Louis' news network, and according to annual tradition they were broadcasting a dramatic reading of "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry. If you're not familiar with this story, please take a few minutes to read it – it's printed in the following pages of your newsletter.

I remember feeling very sad when I first heard the story. The tragedy was apparent to me; after all, wasn't it for nothing that these two spouses had sacrificed what was most precious to them? I was not old or mature enough to recognize that this was no tragedy. It was the sheer beauty of the Greek word *agape* – self-sacrificial love.

At this point in my life, I can't read the story without seeing Jesus. And as I think about it, I shouldn't be surprised, because it's Jesus – or, perhaps, the Spirit of Christ – who has really taught me what *agape* is. John says as much in his first epistle. In the third chapter he says:

*"This is how we know what agape is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."*

And again in the fourth chapter:

*"Whoever does not agape does not know God, because God is agape. This is how God showed his agape among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is agape: not that we agaped God, but that God agaped us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice*

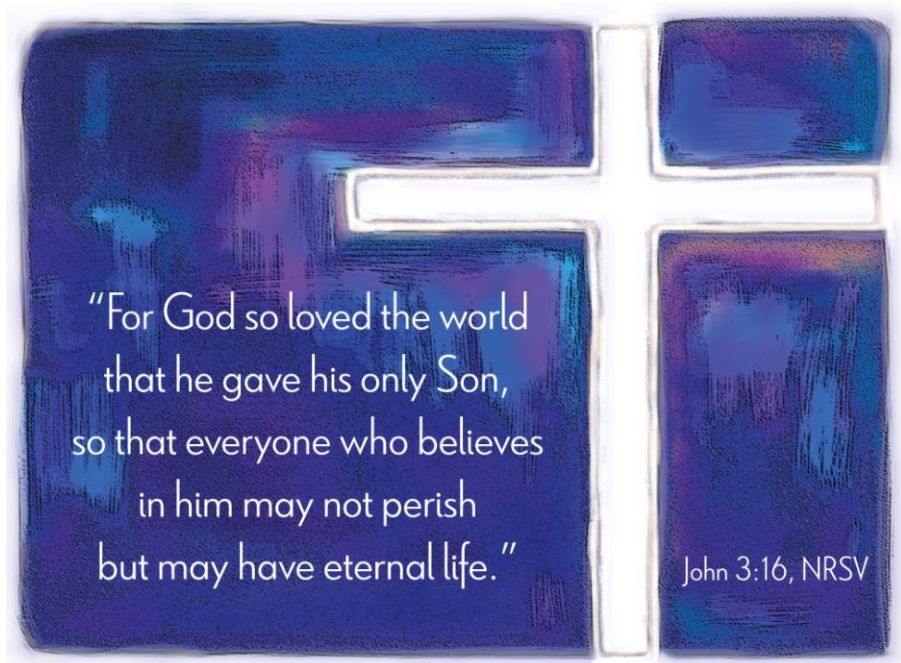
*for our sins. Dear friends, since God so agaped us, we also ought to agape one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we agape one another, God lives in us and his agape is made complete in us."*

As a child, I could only see the tragic – perhaps to use Henry's word, foolish – nature of the sacrificial gifts in Henry's story. I didn't yet have eyes to see the true nature of the God of love. And similarly, we are short-sighted if we cannot see the beauty in the horror, the honor in the scandal, the wisdom in the foolishness of God sending his son into our world to suffer and die. Is it heartbreaking that the Father, like Abraham centuries before, had to give up his only begotten Son? Is it foolish that the Lord of life came into our world only to be despised, rejected, and executed as a criminal? Is it ridiculous that the king of all creation was scorned by that same creation?

Maybe. But more than that, it's real love. And it's the gift that taught us how to really give.

I pray that this season you receive agape and give it in turn.

Pastor Jason



## The Gift of the Magi by O. Henry

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing left to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the look-out for the mendicancy squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, the letters of "Dillingham" looked blurred, as though they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a grey cat walking a grey fence in a grey backyard. To-morrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling - something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honour of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an \$8 Bat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its colour within twenty seconds.

Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the Queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out of the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she cluttered out of the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: 'Mme Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds.' One Eight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the 'Sofronie.'

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practiced hand.

"Give it to me quick" said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation - as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value - the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 78 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a

tremendous task dear friends - a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do - oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"

At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please, God, make him think I am still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two - and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Jim stepped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again - you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice-what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet, even after the hardest mental labour.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Jim looked about the room curiously.

"You say your hair is gone?" he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you - sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on with a sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year - what is the difference?

A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

"Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first."

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay The Combs - the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped for long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise-shell, with jewelled rims - just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!"

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

"Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

"Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on."

The magi, as you know, were wise men - wonderfully wise men - who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.



## *"Martin Luther: Art and the Reformation"*

Travel back to the time of Martin Luther in an exhibition at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. More than 100 objects, that have never been outside of Germany, are now at the Mia until Jan. 15, 2017. This exhibition comes as the world prepares to mark the 500th anniversary of Luther posting his famous "Ninety-Five Theses," which ultimately revolutionized religion and society. Visitors experience a close-up of Luther's life through his personal possessions, plus recent archaeological finds from his childhood and adult homes. In addition there are numerous works of art, books, manuscripts, and vestments. There is even an indulgence box, and the pulpit from which Luther preached his last sermon. The admission price for Thrivent members is \$10 throughout the exhibition (general admission is \$20). Thrivent members also may receive up to 4 free tickets on Fridays. Tickets must be reserved ahead of time. Those attending will be assigned an entry time. To reserve, call the Mia at 612-870-3000, or visit [tickets@artsmia.org](mailto:tickets@artsmia.org). Use the promo code THRIVENTMIA for the discounts.

## *A Crooner Christmas with Todd Anderson*

A Crooner Christmas is a wonderful sleigh ride through the best loved songs from Christmas past. You'll hear the holiday music of Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, Johnny Mathis, Bing Crosby, Nat King Cole, Gene Autry, Burl Ives and many more.

Lunch Show - Tuesday, December 13 at 11 AM - 1 PM (\$20 per person)

Dessert Show - Tuesday, December 13 at 2 PM - 3:15 PM (\$13 per person)

Sandhill Center for the Arts

23820 Dewey St NW, Bethel, Minnesota 55005

For reservations call 763-213-1640.

## *Youth News*

### **Upcoming Events for YOUTH:**

December 18 - Two opportunities to serve

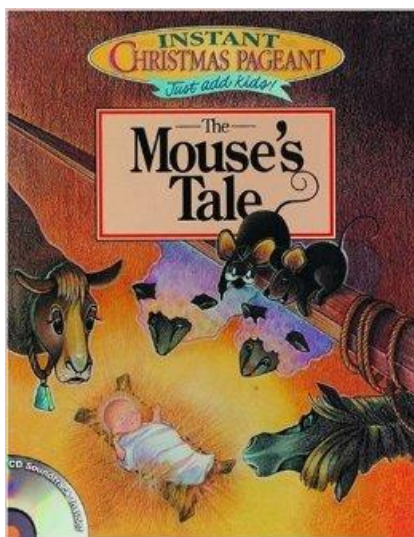
- Help serve treats after worship (no treats are needed, just your helping hands)
- Help serve the potluck meal after the Sunday School program

December 25 - No Sunday School

January 1 - No Sunday School

*Watch for REMIND messages about upcoming events*

# *Christian Education News*



## **Sunday School Christmas Program December 18<sup>th</sup> at 4:00pm**

Potluck supper to follow:

Last name A-I - side dish, salad, or bread

Last name J-P - main dish

Last name Q-Z - dessert

You are welcome to bring more than one dish!

Rehearsal for all participating children will be held on  
**Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup> from 9-11am.**

## **We packed 50+ boxes for Operation Christmas Child this year!**

Thank you for your donations of shoebox items,  
offerings to support our shoebox shipping, and for  
helping to pack shoeboxes on November 18<sup>th</sup>.

Special thanks to Kati Schoenbauer shopping,  
setup, and dropping off boxes!

The project was also supported by a grant from  
Thrivent Financial.



## *Faith Guides Our Steps*

2017 Faith Cards are being distributed December 4<sup>th</sup>. Your Faith Card asks you to make a commitment to the Lord and to this congregation. This financial commitment is made on the basis of the treasure God has provided you and your family during this past year (2016). It is called a “Faith Card” because it is your trust in your heavenly Father that will allow you to commit to returning to God the resources you have been put in charge of.

Having reflected on God’s action in your financial life, ask for the Spirit to move you to a wise and discerning response to these gifts. Ask the Lord to guide you. Ask the Spirit to move your heart. Ask your loving Father to make it obvious what you can afford to give to support the ministry that we as a congregation have committed to. God will answer this prayer, and move you to a commitment that you can fulfill in faithful response to all that God has done. Faith Cards will be collected on December 11<sup>th</sup>.

The beauty of the Stewardship process is that it serves not only the Christian community and the world at large, but it serves you as the giver. Through this process, we begin to have a stronger sense of God’s provision and faithfulness. Through this process, we become divorced from our worship of and reliance upon money. Through this process, we learn what it means to give as we have been given. God’s Blessings on your time of prayerful reflection and on your Stewardship in 2017. May the Lord give you joy in giving.



# *December Celebrations*

## **Birthdays**

1	Pam Birkholz	16	Sue Anderson
1	Sara Neel	18	Dixie Kolk
2	Gwen Mikish	23	Elise Dupre
3	Georgia Kedrowski	24	Judy Waterman
3	Lynne Yarbrough	26	Kenny Schieffer
4	Steve Johnson	27	Collin Mathiason
4	Betty Meyers	28	Carole Kampf
4	Deb Parson	28	Skyler Dean
7	Jeff Parson	29	Chris Elhardt
7	Jennifer Dangers	30	Max Gerard
10	Josh Kretsch	31	Larry Waterman
11	Amy Fuhry		
11	Pete Welle		
11	Tim Welle		
14	Grace Kurvers		
15	Jerry Berg		

## **Anniversaries**

2	Jesse & Kristy Johnson
9	Art & Elaine Hayden
18	Charles & Dixie Kolk
30	Dan & Kari Pawlik

# *Serving the Lord in December*

## **Elder**

- 4 Chris Schoenbauer
- 7 Wes Spadgenske (6:45pm)
- 11 Tom Yarbrough
- 14 Ralph Fuerst (6:45pm)
- 18 Nick Fuhry
- 21 Tom Yarbrough (6:45pm)
- 25 Chris Schoenbauer (9:00am)

## **Reader**

- 4 Lynne Yarbrough
- 11 Shari Pack
- 18 Larry Waterman
- 24 Heather Kurvers (4:00pm)
- Judah Neel (10:00pm)
- 25 Rita Matheson (9:00am)

## **Greeters**

- 4 Stu & Joyce Kvalheim
- 11 Sandy & Rita
- 18 Elaine & Pam
- 25 Neel family

## **Nursery**

- 4 Amy Fuhry
- 11 Cassie Weinhold
- 18 Jennifer Williams
- 25 Sara Neel

## **Acolyte**

- 4 Reece Palmer
- 7 Jacob Mathiason (6:45pm)
- 11 Simon Young
- 14 Anna Brynteson (6:45pm)
- 18 Carter Lease
- 21 Richard Pawlik (6:45pm)
- 24 Kenny Schieffer (4:00pm)
- Reece Palmer (10:00pm)
- 25 Judah Neel (9:00am)

## **Altar Guild**

- 4 Jan Berg
- 11 Natalie Hofman
- 18 Jan Fuerst
- 25 Open

## **Trustee**

- 12/7-12/13 Doug Degler
- 12/14-12/20 Mike Hammerstrom
- 12/21-12/27 Justin Zimmerman
- 12/28-1/3 Adam Garland

### **Do you need a Christmas gift idea?**

Check out the calendars and notecards. They make wonderful gifts. Pick one up for yourself too! They will be on sale most Sundays in the narthex beginning on November 20, or you can write your name on the sheet and Sandy Elhardt will make sure you get one. The beautiful calendars are \$7 and the practical, fun and uplifting notecards are \$4. Proceeds will support the Spirit of Christ Youth Group. Thank you for your support.



*A Suite for Christmas*

- Joy!** It unites the wondrous, awe-inspiring, simple and diverse tapestry of worship expressions at Christmas
- Joy!** It is the theme that shines through all the celebrations of our Savior's birth.
- Joy!** May the hope of the season and gratitude fo God's greatest Gift be the inspiration for your Joy this Christmas and always!

Created by Keith & Kristyn Getty with David Hamilton

Presented by the Spirit of Christ Choirs

Dec. 18th 2016 9 am



**Advent Midweek Worship**

December 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> 6:45pm; Soup Supper at  
6pm

**Choir-led Christmas Worship**

December 18<sup>th</sup>, 9:00am

**Children's Christmas Program**

December 18<sup>th</sup> 4:00pm; Potluck to follow

**Christmas Eve Worship**

December 24<sup>th</sup> 4:00 & 10:00pm

**Christmas Day Worship**

December 25<sup>th</sup> 9:00am

