

Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church

NEWSLETTER

Meditation on Jesus and John the Baptist

We often have occasion to note it: God marries so often the high and the low; the higher the position and the greater the gifts, the more lowly the appearance and the greater the suffering. Few mirror that axiom better than John the Baptist. Consider his misery in prison. Still worse, humiliation awaits him in a death not of a great hero of faith but a death inspired by a conniving and manipulative adulteress and ordered by a drunk.

But listen in these verses to the great praise that Jesus has for John. However, Jesus says these things after John's disciples have left. We might be tempted here to give Jesus some advice: Why didn't you say these things about John while his disciples were still there? Surely they would have been thrilled to hear these words about their beloved teacher and would likewise have been delighted to report them back to John. But no, Jesus waits until they are gone. Hidden in the shrine of John's own heart is the awareness of his exalted position, a position that had been announced already before he was born. He had rejoiced in his Savior even in the womb of his mother (Luke 1:41-44). And now, in his suffering, he would cling to the joy that had been his the day he pointed his disciples to Jesus and declared, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" That message was the one John wanted his disciples to hear and remember, not praise about John himself. John showed it more than once: He had no interest in being praised; his all-consuming concern was to point to Jesus as the Savior, the only one really deserving of praise. So even John would not have wished his disciples to hear a message about John's greatness, lest their attention be diverted from Jesus to his forerunner (see John 1:19-36; 3:22-36).

But we still need to listen to what Jesus says about John. Jesus could ask the same questions of us in church on Sunday morning that he asked of those who heard the sermons of St. John. When you went to hear John, when you came to hear your pastor, what were you looking for, hoping for, expecting? When you come to church during this Advent season, do you come for a reed blowing in the wind, for a messenger whose message changes with the latest fad? Do you come expecting the preacher to check out who is there to make sure the message floats easily over them, through their ears but past their hearts? If he sees members as self-righteous as the Pharisees, will he extol their piety as compared to the wickedness of the world? If he sees those who, like the Sadducees, are proud of how broadminded and tolerant they can be of false doctrine and of their own sins and those of their relatives, will he praise them for being so understanding? If the poor and lowly are there, will he speak of the virtues of pious poverty? If the rich come, will he remind them that they are obviously the favored of the Lord? Or do you come expecting a fancy and entertaining preacher who certainly deserves wealth and fine clothing like those of princes among men? One who tickles our fancy, is always amusing, and never says anything that would leave us feeling bad? One who never reminds us of our total and desperate need for the Savior, never calls us to either sorrow over sin or turn away from it? If that's what you came for, or worse, if that's what you found in church, you're in the wrong place. For you have come to a reed blowing in the wind.

After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'" -- Luke 7:24-27

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UPCOMING DATES

December 7
Elders

December 11
Women of Immanuel
Christmas Party

December 14
Church Council

December 21
SS Christmas Service

Christmas Eve
Lessons and Carols

Christmas Day
Divine Service

May it be that you come in Advent and find one who is a voice crying in the wilderness of our world. For truly our world is a wilderness. It is dead to shame. It boasts of its own imagined—but vain and empty—wisdom, while mocking both the fresh and life-giving truth of God's Word and the Savior who comes to us in that Word. In that wilderness, may you have a pastor like John the Baptist; may he with his preaching of the law pick the scabs off of your soul and open your heart to the truth of your desperate, oh, so desperate need for a Savior. May he hold you before the mirror of the law, so that you cry out with the tax collector in the temple, *God, be merciful to me, a sinner!* (Luke 18:13).

And then in that wilderness, may you find in your pastor one with the healing message of life and joy in Christ. May your pastor pour the oil of gladness into the mortal wounds in your conscience with this declaration: Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The declaration may be from one as simple in appearance as John. It may be from one as obviously without eloquence like John, whose message was repeated over and over again in the simplest of terms: Repent! The axe is at the tree, and whoever does not bear fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 3:10). Repent and believe the gospel of the Lamb who has come to redeem you by his sacrifice on that gruesome altar of the cross.

If you come to church and find one like John—not so glorious in appearance, not interested in flattering you or appealing to the mood of the moment—then give thanks to God for his gift of grace through the one he has sent to help you prepare for Christmas. For without pastors like John, the world (and we with it) will perish in the wilderness of unbelief. We will perish wallowing in filth, too surrounded and covered by it to recognize its horror. That's what—in every age—follows the rejection of John's saving message about the Savior. That's what happened in Israel. That's what has happened in one place after another where the law was ignored and the gospel treated like a cheap cloak to cover up sins for which there was no repentance. God always takes his Word seriously, whether we do or not.

So then, let's get ready for Christmas! Let us hear the voice of John the Baptist crying out to us, still pointing us to the Lamb of God coming in the manger. The decorated tree points us to the tree that one day will bear him. Its green reminds us of the life he brings by his coming. All of the decorations point us to the real decoration: a heart and soul that has cried out for pardon and then received the perfect and everlasting covering of pardon and peace from the Savior, who comes still and ever in his gospel. (Adapted from *On Giving Advice to God*, Daniel Deutschlander, pp.4-6.)

December Worship Themes for Advent

Our theme for the Sundays of the Season of Advent this year is: **Imminent Arrival**. Do you remember the feeling when someone important is about to arrive at your place? It's a mixture of anticipation and excitement and nervousness. Did you make all the correct preparations? Will the person be happy to see you? When and how will the person arrive? Will there be any surprises?

During these weeks before Christmas, we anticipate the imminent arrival of Jesus. He's an important person! We are about to celebrate his birth. He could return on judgment day at any time. But in worship we realize that he is coming to us when the Bible is heard and read and when the sacraments are administered. Suddenly we feel the excitement of an imminent arrival.

- 12/3 – Midweek Advent 1 – “*Magnificat*” – The Song of Mary
- 12/7 – Second Sunday in Advent – Imminent Arrival of the Judge
- 12/10 – Midweek Advent 2 – “*Benedictus*” – The Song of Zechariah
- 12/14 – Third Sunday in Advent – Imminent Arrival of the Messiah
- 12/17 – Midweek Advent 3 – “*Gloria*” – The Song of the Angels
- 12/21 – Fourth Sunday in Advent – Imminent Arrival of Immanuel
- 12/21 – Sunday School Christmas Service – Hope. Peace. Joy. Love.

Advent Preparation

Unlike the world, the Church does not prepare for Christmas by frantic doing or frenzied promises to get something done. Instead, the Church prepares by receiving. To help us receive the gifts of Christ and be prepared for his threefold coming, we offer midweek services during Advent. These will be held on December 3rd, 10th and 17th at 7:00 p.m.

Midweek Advent Services

The theme of this year's midweek services is: Bible Songs of Christmas. People love Christmas music! It seems to be played earlier and earlier every year. There are many popular tunes, and some songs even have words that point us to the reason for the season, the birth of Jesus, our Savior. The Bible has songs of Christmas! They are sung to announce Christ's birth. Christian composers through the ages have set those biblical words to music. This year we look at the background and words of those songs to help us prepare to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child.

Advent Prayers

The Prayers of the Day for the Sundays in Advent set the tone for the season. Traditionally, these ancient (three from the 10th century and one from the 8th century) prayers were spoken by the faithful during the week and children recited them while lighting the candles on the Advent wreath. During the season of Advent, incorporate these beloved prayers in your daily devotions.

- The prayer for the week of November 30th is: Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Protect us by your strength, and save us from the threatening dangers of our sins; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
- The prayer for the week of December 7th is: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son. By his coming, give us strength in our conflicts, and shed light on our path through the darkness of this world; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
- The prayer for the week of December 14th is: Hear our prayers, Lord Jesus Christ, and come with the good news of your mighty deliverance. Drive the darkness from our hearts, and fill us with your light; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
- The prayer for the week of December 21st is: Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the burden of our sins, and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

December Worship Themes for Christmas

The theme for the Season of Christmas is: **Christ the Savior Is Born.** It draws on themes found in the well-known Christmas hymn, “Silent Night.” That hymn was written originally in German by Joseph Mohr, with music composed by Franz Gruber. The carol was first performed on Christmas Eve in 1818 at St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria. Legend says the church organ was broken, prompting Gruber to compose a simple guitar accompaniment. Subsequently accompanied by many instruments and translated into many languages, the text paints the picture of the incarnation. The last phrase is repeated, so in the second stanza we hear it twice: “Christ the Savior is born!” Every word of that phrase is significant, and every line of the Christmas carol describes a Bible truth. We use the beloved hymn to ponder the profound message of the Twelve Days of Christmas.

- 12/24 – Christmas Eve – A Service of Lessons and Carols
- 12/25 – Christmas Day – Holy Infant So Tender and Mild
- 12/28 – Festival of the Holy Innocents – Son of God
- **There will be no New Year’s Eve service**

Festival of the Holy Innocents

The church has set aside December 28th to observe this minor festival. Matthew’s gospel tells of King Herod’s vicious plot against the infant Jesus after being “tricked” by the Wise Men. Threatened by the one “born King of the Jews,” Herod murdered all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or younger. These “innocents,” commemorated just three days after the celebration of Jesus’ birth, remind us not only of the terrible brutality of which human beings are capable but more significantly of the persecution Jesus endured from the beginning of his earthly life. Although Jesus’ life was providentially spared at this time, many years later, another ruler, Pontius Pilate, would sentence the innocent Jesus to death.

Advent By Candlelight

The women of Immanuel are invited to Advent By Candlelight on Sunday, December 7th at Zion Lutheran Church in Olivia at 2:00 p.m. Desserts will be served and there will be singing, bells, and fellowship. Contact Diane Kremin if you have questions or if you would like to attend.

Women of Immanuel Christmas Party

The Christmas party will be held on Thursday, December 11th, starting at 6:30 p.m.

Sunday School Christmas Rehearsals

We will hold rehearsals to prepare for the Christmas service on December 7th and 14th. The children will be fed after Sunday School and the rehearsal will go from 12:00-1:00. We will also meet on Saturday, December 20th, from 9:00-11:00 a.m. The Christmas service will be held on December 21st at 4:00 p.m. A meal will follow the service.

Birthday Party For Jesus

Saturday, December 20th, 11:30 to 1:00 p.m.

Christmas Services

We will observe a Service of Lessons and Carols on Saturday, December 24th, starting at 5:30 p.m. A Divine Service celebrating the Incarnation of our Lord will be held on December 25th at 9:00 a.m.

Christmas Invitations

As we get closer to the celebration of our Lord’s birth, there will be postcard invitations in the Narthex for you to hand out. Please make use of them and give them to unchurched or de-churched family and friends.

Sunday School

We will not hold Sunday School classes on Sunday, December 28th.

Fellowship and Bible Class

On Sunday, December 28th, we will have our normal time for fellowship followed by a short family Bible study.

2026 Bible and Music Academy

We have submitted our application to have a student from Martin Luther College at Immanuel for the summer. We hope to hear word in January that a student has been assigned to us. Please keep this in your prayers.

2026 Mission Festival

Our mission festival is scheduled for January 25, 2026. Rev. Jacob Behnken, Dean of Chapel and Professor of Music at Martin Luther College, will be at Immanuel on that day to lead worship and make a presentation on MLC. There will also be a meal served after Pastor Behnken's presentation. Watch the newsletter and the announcements in the service folder for more information.

2026 Offering Envelopes

Please pick up your offering envelopes for next year in the Narthex.

Volunteers to Provide Transportation

We are in need of some more volunteers to give rides to church on Sunday morning. Please talk to pastor if you would be willing to help.

Winter Weather and Worship

We will hold our regularly scheduled services for those who are able to make it to church. If conditions are poor enough, we may cancel Sunday School, Bible classes and other activities but we will always hold our services. Check Operation Snowdesk for cancellations. Please use your sound judgment to determine whether or not you should travel to and from church in hazardous conditions.

Church Council Meeting Minutes

October 12, 2025

Members Present: Martin Fabrizio, Jim Buffington, Michael Ziebell, Kent Larson, Aaron Butenhoff, Matt Sindelir, Tom Jurgenson, Pastor, Jay Remmele

MMSP = Motion Made, Seconded, Passed

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman at 11:30 a.m.

Opened with the Lord's Prayer.

Agenda: MMSP to accept the agenda with a minor formatting change

Secretary's Report: MMSP to accept the September 14, 2025 council minutes as presented

Reports of Officers and Standing Committees:

Chairman's Reports:

- Regarding the "openness" or "how welcoming" our church feels to visitors usually begins with the greeters. If the greeters recognize there are visitors, it would be nice to direct them to Pastor.
- The communion sign-up podium in the Narthex will be removed. All communion sign up will be done in the registers in the pews. Please utilize them and fill them out.

Elders Report:

- MMSP to release from membership Jacob, Megan, Ryker, Wyatt, and Payton Hoflock.
- The fall and winter service dates have been set. There will not be a New Year's Eve service.

Trustees Report:

- Trustees will look into options to replace the accordion style partition in the basement. They are looking for one that will fit the existing track if possible to make installation easier.
- Trustees are still looking into the cost and feasibility of making one set of front doors handicap accessible with remote door opener switches. The biggest obstacle is getting wiring ran.

Financial Secretary's Report: MMSP to accept the financial secretary's report as presented.

Treasurer's Report: No report.

Planned Giving: No report.

AV Committee: No report.

Pastor's Report: Olivia vacancy: Everything will stay as is until after harvest.

Old Business and Action Committees:

Pew Committee: Five new pews are here

Church Operation Manual: Justin and Martin made some revisions to the treasurer's job description, which will be reviewed at the next meeting.

Budget Committee: No report.

Called Worker Compensation Committee: No report.

Updates in Narthex: Most of the discussion is around the current water cooler. Pastor will talk to Ross about it.

New Business:

Set Date for Fall Cleanup: Saturday, November 1, 2025.

Social Security and future PTO for Jo:

- To stay within social security rules Jo worked some hours but couldn't be paid for them so she wouldn't go over the monthly Social Security limit.
- MMSP to donate the hours she didn't get paid for back to her as PTO next year (2026)

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

- November 9, 2025 after Bible class
- December 14, 2025 after Bible class
- January 11, 2026 after Bible class

MMSP to close the meeting at 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully, Jay Remmele, Recording Secretary

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

*“FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN,
UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN;
AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL
BE UPON HIS SHOULDER. AND HIS NAME
WILL BE CALLED WONDERFUL
COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD,
EVERLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE.”*

ISAIAH 9:6

