



DISTRICT NEWS

NORTH DAKOTA



CHRISTMAS...

More than a plastic manger scene



Rev. Arie Bertsch
District President

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Happy Epiphany to you!

If you have been to the district office in Minot (which also happens to be my home) between Thanksgiving and Epiphany, you have seen the plastic manger scene visible inside the open hayloft door of the barn. I simply open the hayloft door and there it is.

You know the kind of manger scene I am talking about — not quite life-size, brightly colored and illuminated at night, with all of the lifelike joy of a department-store mannequin. The set includes a sheep, a cow and Mary and Joseph, and all have their plastic eyes focused on the baby Jesus. The rays of a star in the peak of the barn shine down on each side of the scene. The plastic figures are so light that they have to be screwed down to keep the wind from blowing them away.

The Christmas season in the Church Year begins on Dec. 25 and ends on Jan. 6. These are the 12 days of Christmas. I opened this article with “Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Happy Epiphany to you!” That is because these are all significant days in the 12 days of Christmas. Christmas, of course, is the birth of Jesus. New Year’s

Day is the Circumcision of Our Lord, and Epiphany is the season of light, as the Wise Men are led by the light of a star to locate the promised Savior, to worship Him and share that Light to the world.

Society has been celebrating Christmas earlier every year with decorating and retailing. I also have lit my manger scene earlier than the actual Christmas season. After Christmas Day, in the community you will quickly see the decorations go dark and go away. I am sure many driving past or visiting the district office may wonder “Why is your manger scene still lit?” That gives me an opportunity to share that Christmas is still here, today and every day throughout the year!

Unfortunately, for some, Christmas isn’t anything more than the plastic manger scene. The plastic Jesus of popular thinking neither suffers nor shares life’s experiences with us poor sinners. As soon as there’s any tribulation or crisis of the soul, any trial or suffering, the imaginary Jesus fails to address our trouble and need for rescue.

The joy of Christmas Day is that the Jesus who was born of Mary is not a hollow, plastic saint who comes to make good scenes or fine appearances. Instead, He takes our flesh and chooses to bear all its burdens and sins for our sakes. His taking of our true humanity frees our humanity from the corruption caused by sin. He doesn’t need us to rescue Him, but we need Him to rescue us.

So that we might be rescued, He was willing to be circumcised on the eighth day for us. He places Himself under the Law

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Servants attend RSTM conference

Members of St. John's, McClusky, attended the 2019 LCMS National Rural & Small Town Mission Conference, held Nov. 14–16, in Bloomington, Minn. From left, (seated) Jennifer Brackett, Faye Hagen, Paul Hagen, Lynn Helm; (standing) Rachel Link and Rev. Matt Thompson.

Support Becky at LBT

Dr. Becky Grossmann of Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT) spoke with various district congregations in September. If you would like to partner with Becky and her mission work, give at us.lbt.org/project/becky-grossmann or call LBT toll free at 800-532-4253.

MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

for us. He is real enough so as to undergo a bloody circumcision as a sign of His further shedding of His blood. The cross is not far from the temple of His body. But He bears the burden of the body and carries it all the way to the cross.

The joy of Epiphany is that Gentile Magi travel from the East to see the promise they heard was for all mankind. A light of a star leads them to this promised Savior so that they may share it with their families, their friends and their neighbors. Thankfully, we have received it, also through those in our past who have seen the Light of Jesus and shared it with us so that we may share it with others.

Unfortunately, we who ought to depend on the promise can easily lose the focus of the season, for we can easily get pulled into the plastic-Jesus world around us.

We can easily turn off the light of our joy and celebration by leaving out Christmas, New Year's Day and Epiphany, along with the rest of the Church Year, when we quickly turn to the ways of the world and neglect God's Word and Sacraments.

We are plagued by the weakness of the flesh, and we think that we do not need to rely on God's Means of Grace (Word and Sacrament). We want to rely on our work for God's good grace. But God desires us to rely on His grace. It is this reliance that is the basis for our whole life and existence. Our self-generated egos keep us from relying on the work of the Savior in the flesh. We think, "Jesus has done His part and work, and now it is up to me to prove myself worthy of receiving His benefits."

We don't come to Him; He comes to us. He stoops down to find us in the midst of His bloodied weakness, which begins at His birth and circumcision.

He does this by taking on our human flesh in the Virgin Mary. He becomes visible, touchable and audible. He becomes the One upon whom we look when He was pierced for our transgressions. He becomes the One who was susceptible to the brutal treatment that we deserved. He becomes the One who, for us, was nailed to the accursed tree of the cross.

In the flesh He Himself fulfills the whole Law, He becomes flesh, He undergoes circumcision and, in that shedding of blood, foreshadows yet more blood being shed from His own veins. That flow of blood clears us of the Law's full penalties under the wrath of God.

Jesus is not a plastic mannequin, for His blood was shed for the forgiveness of your sins so that you would have life and salvation.

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Happy Epiphany!

THE QUEST FOR MASCULINITY

MAN UP!

REVEREND JEFF HEMMER

COME HEAR WHAT A REAL MAN IS AND DOES. GENUINE MASCULINITY IS NOT A MATTER OF TAKING BACK YOUR RIGHTS OR STANDING UP FOR YOURSELF. IT'S ABOUT SEEING YOURSELF AS A MEANS FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS, ABOUT LEARNING TO LIVE IN YOUR CALLING TO BE A HUSBAND, FATHER, MAN, SON, HERO, HEARER, AND MORE FOR THE BENEFIT OF THOSE GOD HAS GIVEN YOU TO SERVE. IN JESUS, YOU HAVE BOTH THE PERFECT ICON OF MASCULINITY AND ALSO THE SOURCE OF COURAGE AND HOPE WHEN YOU FAIL IN THESE MANLY ENDEAVORS.

MEN'S RETREAT - January 17-18, 2020

Shepherd's Hill at the Crossroads, St. John, ND
Begins with meal Friday at 6:00 P.M.
Ends 1:00 P.M. Saturday
Cost - \$80
3 meals, lodging, speaker, snacks, games, fireside chats, etc.
Bring: Bible, bed roll, personal items, warm clothing, & friends
Father-Son duos are welcome!



RSVP: corey.isaak@gracefargo.org or 701-281-0240



Using horseshoe nails to hold elements in place, Messiah members, from left, JoAnn Dilger, Renae Hoggarth and Kristi Dilger work on individual pieces to form a stained glass window for the sanctuary.

Church members chip in to create stained glass project

A group of parishioners at Messiah, Mandan, is applying newly acquired skills for an ancient art form to create a set of eight stained glass windows that will adorn the sanctuary for years to come.

It's a labor of love that started about a year ago after a modern problem — lack of funding — halted the Messiah congregation's idea of hiring a company to update the existing sanctuary windows with a stained glass project. The \$60,000 bid for the project was "way more money than what was available," Rev. Kevin Zellers said.

He offered up a solution. He'd share his knowledge of stained glass — learned a few years ago by going to classes "like some people go to bowling once a week," he said — with anyone interested. Once they had some basic skills, they could make their own stained glass windows.

Each 2-foot by 4-foot window for the sanctuary has the same basic design, which includes a circular centerpiece called a medallion. The medallions will be painted, not stained, and each will depict a scene from the life of Christ. When completed, likely in another year, the windows will be placed into the sound baffles on the sides of the sanctuary. Some new age technology — LED lights — will illuminate the windows from behind.

The project draws together a cross-section

of the congregation. Participants range in age from 20 to 83. They work for a few hours each Sunday, taking a day off only if the community room of the church is booked for another function.

The windows are being built two at a time, with a team working on each window. Each is going a little faster than the previous, said Kristi Dilger, a lifetime member of the church. She thought the process would be as simple as putting the pieces together and hanging them up, but she's learned there are many more steps than she anticipated.

The roots of stained glass are tied to architectural developments of the 1200s and 1300s in western Europe, said Nicole Derenne, an instructor at the University of North Dakota's Department of Art and Design. Builders began using arches and buttresses to support the weight of buildings, which allowed for thinner walls that did not have to support as much weight. That in turn allowed for the use of glass in the walls.

Stained glass was a storytelling and communication medium in a time period when many people were illiterate, Derenne said. Churches at the time were in the heart of communities and were gathering places as well as places of worship, so the stories in the glass were meant to reach many people and be educational, she said.

Some of the workers at Messiah cut the glass into shapes, while others trim it to exactly fit the design mapped out for each panel. Once the pieces fit, they are soldered into place with lead came — pliable H-shaped strings of lead into which the glass fits — between the pieces. Putty will be added around each piece of glass to make the panel more firm. One of the final touches is the application of patina, a coating that keeps the glass from oxidizing and turning black.

Anthony Steele, 20, has been part of the project since it started. His participation "just kind of happened," he said, and he's enjoyed working with a group to complete a project that will last for generations.

A dedication service will mark the completion of the project. The group hasn't set a strict deadline, Ames said, adding "everybody is more interested in doing it right."

The article, written by Travis Svihovec, first appeared in the *Bismarck Tribune*. We have shortened the article for the district insert, but you could read it in its entirety at <https://thelc.ms/messiah-mandan-nd>.

SAVE THE DATE

Shepherd's Hill hosting marriage retreat

A Marriage Enrichment Retreat will be held Feb. 21-23 at Shepherd's Hill at the Crossroads.

Presented by Rev. Arie Bertsch, North Dakota District president, the retreat begins with dinner at 7 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 21. Sessions follow at 8 p.m.

The cost is \$150 per couple for one night, or \$200 per couple for two nights. Register by contacting Shepherd's Hill at the Crossroads at director@shretreat.org or 701-244-5225.

INSTALLATIONS

Rev. Heath Trampe was installed as pastor of Our Savior, Minot, on Nov. 10. From left, (front row) Revs. Rick Jones, Ken Hoover, Heath Trampe, Arie Bertsch (district president), Philip Beyersdorf; (back row) Dr. Matthew Richard, Tim Stout, Daryl Rothchild and Jon Bonine.



Rev. Zelwyn Heide was installed as pastor of Zion, New Salem, and St. Peter, Hannover, on Dec. 1. From left, Revs. Toby Heller, Zelwyn Heide, Arie Bertsch (district president), Jon Walla, Vicar Richard Dailey; (back row) Matt Thompson, Kevin Zellers, Les Wolfgram, Kirk Peters and Dennis Voss.



Rev. Carlyle Roth was installed as associate pastor of St. Paul's, Minot on Dec. 8. From left, Revs. Dr. Matthew Richard, Scott Ramey, Heath Trampe, Carlyle Roth, Philip Beyersdorf, Arie Bertsch (district president), Josh Reimche and Rick Jones.



HURRY: scholarship deadline is Jan. 31

Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF) is offering \$1,000 scholarships for LCMS high school seniors and college students. Scholarships will be awarded to at least one applicant from each district in the LCEF Central Region, which includes North Dakota. Learn more at lcefcentral.org/scholarships. The application deadline is Jan. 31.

Follow in Paul's footsteps

Christian Travelers of the North is presenting a trip to Greece: "In the Footsteps of Paul the Apostle," featuring a three-night Greek Islands and Turkey cruise, to be held May 6-16.

Tour highlights include Athens, a taverna dinner show, Mykonos, Ephesus, Patmos, Santorini, Thessaloniki, Kavala, Philippi, Meteora, Delphi, Corinth and the Acropolis.

For more information, visit the North Dakota District website at nodaklcms.org.