



DISTRICT NEWS

NORTH DAKOTA



“ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was a light to men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

— John 1:1-14

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Merry Christmas! And now that we got that out of the way, let's talk about the beginning. That may sound kind of abrupt or merry-less, especially as you may be expecting something about Christmas. The beginning is what makes this a merry Christmas. Therefore, let's get to the real meaning and joy of Christmas, starting with “in the beginning.”

It's no surprise to find God “in the beginning,” as we do in the first verses in Genesis. We see God as uncreated, infinite and eternal. He always has been and He always will be. He is without beginning and without end. If it were any other way, He wouldn't be God. Everything else — everything that is not God, whether visible or invisible — is part of His creation. For Moses writes: “In the beginning, God created the



Rev. Arie Bertsch
District President

heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

He made it out of nothing, spoke all creation into being with His word: “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3).

Like Genesis, the Gospel of John begins with creation— “in the beginning” — but offers this twist: “In the beginning was the Word.” Prior to the creation, when there was nothing besides God, there was God's Word. The Word wasn't created. St. John puts it like this: “The Word was with God.” The Word and God are described as two distinct persons. Personal pronouns, such as “He,” “Him” and “His” must be used for the Word. He's a divine person. In short, “The Word was God” — uncreated, infinite and eternal God.

Through the Word, there with God in the beginning, “all things were made.” He was the agent by whom God spoke the entire creation into being, “like a master workman,” as it says in Prov. 8:31. Light and life have their beginning and source in Him. The Word was there when the sun came into being, and snow and evergreen trees, and reindeer and Adam too. He was there in the beginning and it was very good.

It was very good as Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the morning. There was perfect communion with God. But then Adam and Eve were deceived by Satan, and communion and fellowship with God was broken. And that brokenness was carried on through their children — you and me. It is called original sin, which causes actual sin. To fix this brokenness, God promised a Savior (Gen. 3:15) who

See **MESSAGE**, Page 2

Funding our missions

The North Dakota District has adopted a new model for funding district missions. It's completely voluntary and very simple. Introducing 1-1-1 Mission Giving — 1 Dollar, 1 Baptized Member, 1 Week, every week

Every baptized member of the Body of Christ in your congregation, from the newest baby to the oldest member, is involved. This funding model is based on the belief that "there is power and strength in many giving a little." Loving our neighbor includes caring for their spiritual well-being. This is why the need exists for God's people to come together to support missions that bear kingdom fruit.

In addition to each congregation's regular giving to the district, the 1-1-1 funds will stay in the district and support its missions, such as Christ's Care for Children: Kenya; Main Street Living; Wittenberg Lutheran Chapel (University of North Dakota); Iglesia Luterana de Chile and others.

God's generosity is not lacking! The gifts are there. Where the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and the Sacraments are administered according to their institution by Christ, there are ample resources to do this ministry. Look for a special collection box and brochure in your church!



135 years of Immanuel

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lidgerwood, celebrated its 135th anniversary on Oct. 6. Included in the festivities after the Divine Service were a luncheon and the dedications of a new handicap-accessible narthex and new stained glass windows. The congregation rejoices in the proclamation of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for the last 135 years and looks forward to His continued preaching among them.

MESSAGE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

would crush Satan's head and renew the fellowship and communion of God's pinnacle creation (created in His image and likeness) with Himself.

Now, zoom through time from the beginning until the present time, and what you find is darkness and deep gloom over the whole world. A lot of the world in which we live doesn't know God. It's spiritually ignorant and blind. It cannot recognize its Maker, even though His imprint is still evident in the beauty and complexity and order of creation. With a single word — "darkness" — John describes creation's fall, sin, death and hell. The word "darkness" captures the confusion, misunderstanding and futility around us and even in us. "Darkness" means that man can't find God, no matter how many times he bumps into the stuff God made. He is lost, disoriented and alienated, constantly inventing false gods and false worship to fill the emptiness, serving the creation rather than the Creator.

If the creation were to be saved, redeemed and rescued from this darkness of sin

and death, then God would have to make Himself known, point Himself out, reveal Himself to us. God would come to where we are — descend to earth and enter His creation so that we lost and condemned creatures might know Him and have communion and fellowship with Him again, as it was before sin entered into the world.

This is what makes a merry Christmas! God shows up in a place where we certainly don't expect to find Him. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." God the Word, who was there in the beginning and participated in the creation of all things, took on a human nature like yours and mine. The Uncreated became the created, the Infinite became limited and bound, the Eternal became subject to time. The Word became flesh, the Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the Child of the virgin, Immanuel, God with us (Is. 7:14), Jesus Christ, true God and true man in one person.

The glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. He is the light of the world, the light that shines in the darkness, the light no darkness can overcome.

This is why we have a merry Christmas!

The one who formed man from the dust of the ground has come with fingernails, eye-

brows and kneecaps to claim His creation. He was born of a woman, His mother, Mary, who wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger. He was before Adam and yet He can be found in Bethlehem as a tiny babe.

The One who made the forests and the mountains has come also with arms outstretched on a wooden cross raised up on a hilltop. There the Creator of heaven and earth suffered, bled and died for His creation — you and me. The One in whom "we live and move and have our being" was wrapped in linen and rested in a tomb, bursting forth on the third day as the first fruit of a new creation.

The One who made the wheat and the vine comes now in bread and wine to you. His true body and true blood are present on the altar. Eternal life, the light of the world, is given into your mouth and taken into your body. He makes Himself known to you with forgiveness, life and salvation.

For God the Word who was in the beginning is now and forever in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. That makes Christmas a blessed surprise. The uncreated, eternal and infinite God comes right here among you as your light and your life.

Merry Christmas!

Casselton teacher is award finalist

Jessica Brandt, a member of Crosspointe, Fargo, was one of five finalists for the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction 2020 Teacher of the Year award.



Brandt

Jessica Brandt is a Title I English and reading teacher at Central Cass Public School in Casselton. She works with students who need extra assistance in reading. One of her writing exercises is called Hot Dog Mummy, a project-based learning effort in which students are responsible for mummifying a hot dog, building a small pyramid and writing an essay about the process.

“I work extremely hard at showing kids that no matter what their reading level is, there are a plethora of books that they can find to keep their interest and to understand and enjoy reading,” Brandt wrote in her Teacher of the Year application. “They gain confidence, see success, and the transformation of becoming an avid reader begins.”

Hearing from her students and their families about the students’ growing interest in reading is a thrill, Brandt wrote.

“I love the emotions I see and hear from a child or a parent when the student starts to read at home, in the car, during free time, or for no reason other than enjoyment,” she wrote. “That is when I know that what I am doing is making a difference in the life of my students, and there is no feeling better than that.”



Servants pack meals for Liberian children

Messiah Lutheran Church, Mandan, in partnership with Mercy Meals of North Dakota, hosted a packing event on Nov. 2. About 40 volunteers packed more than 9,600 meals that will be sent to Liberia to feed students in Christian schools.

On some days, these meals of rice, soy protein, flavoring, dried vegetables and vitamins are the only meals a child eats. Messiah raised almost \$1,300 to cover the cost of the meals. Mercy Meals of North Dakota provided the supplies and training in order to mix, weigh, seal and pack nutritious meals.

Mercy Meals of North Dakota is based in Jamestown and has already sent more than 140,000 meals in 2019 and anticipates sending another 170,000 before the year ends.

Pastors invited to pre-Lent retreat

A retreat for North Dakota District pastors will be held Jan. 6-7 in Bismarck. Rev. Bernie Worrall, senior pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Fargo, will present on Hebrews 11.



Worrall

Worrall writes: If you’ve ever been to the Capitol Building in Washington D.C., then you’ve seen the statues in the hallways. Each state has two statues. North Dakota has John Burke, who served as its 10th governor and as a state Supreme Court justice, and as U.S. treasurer; and Sakakawea, who traveled with the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Hebrews 11 also has a great hallway of faith filled with living memorials of those who have walked in faith before us. Heb. 13:7 says:

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

For more information, go to nodaklcms.org/calendar-news/news and scroll down.



Send submissions for the district supplement to

Marie Johnson at
news@nodaklcms.org

Having manhood issues?

The 30th Annual North Dakota District Men's Winter Retreat will be held Jan. 17-18 at Shepherd's Hill at the Crossroads, St. John.



Rev. Jeffrey Hemmer

The presenter will be Rev. Jeffrey Hemmer, pastor of Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fairview Heights, Ill. His presentation is "Man Up!" which also happens to be the title of the book he wrote, published by Concordia Publishing House in 2017.

Are you tired of a culture that wants to ignore the differences between men and

women? Do you think being a real man is little more than having the biggest muscles, guns, and truck and knowing how to get your woman to submit to you? Are you fed up with signing syrup-sweet love songs to Jesus in church? Does your wife think this retreat could teach you a thing or two about being a real

man? Are you just looking for something to do on a weekend in January?

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.

For 30 years men have enjoyed the camaraderie of these retreats, including the thought-provoking, Scripture-based presentations, fellowship, music, good food, card games, skeet shooting and more.

Father-and-son duos are encouraged to attend.

The event begins with supper at 6 p.m. on Friday and ends at 1 p.m. on Saturday. The cost is \$80 per person.

To register, contact Corey Isaak at 701-281-0240 or corey.isaak@gracefargo.org.

Registration open for Higher Things events

It's that time of year already – time to get registered for another Higher Things conference!

Groups are going in two different directions this summer for "Watermarked" — one to Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colo. (June 29-July 2) and one to Calvin University, Grand Rapids, Mich. (July 21-24). There is group transportation being arranged for both locations, along with some fun events along the way.

Tana McKenna, parish assistant of Zion, Gwinner, will handle registrations for Michigan. You can reach Tana at zionwinner@gmail.com or 701-308-0411.

Diane Pierson, Board of Christian Education chair, St Paul's, Minot, will handle registrations for the Colorado trip. You can reach Diane at christianed@anchoredminot.com or 701-721-7844.

For more information about the conference, go to higherthings.org/conferences/watermarked2020. For more information about Higher Things, visit higherthings.org.

If you are unable to attend one of the conferences this summer, perhaps consider attending one of the retreats.

The retreat titled "What is Church?" will be held March 27-28 at St. Paul's, Minot, and Immanuel, Wahpeton. It is one retreat at two locations with area North Dakota District pastors presenting.

Picture the sanctuary filled with teenagers — eager for the organ to begin the opening lines of the liturgy or their favorite hymns — listening intently as they learn how their Lutheran faith applies to their lives and relationships, and laughing as they horse around playing games and getting to know other youth from the area. That's a glimpse of what will happen at this retreat.

The cost is \$50 per registrant, which covers lodging, food, speaker fees, games and snacks.

For more information, visit higherthings.org, click on "Retreats" and scroll down for the link to either Minot or Wahpeton.

Submit your milestone celebrations!

We would love to celebrate with you, our congregation members! In years past, the district's supplement to *The Lutheran Witness* mentioned birthdays of our congregation members who were 90 years or older, and wedding anniversaries of 50 years or more.

It's time to start sharing such wonderful milestones again, but we need your help. Please let us know if anyone in your congregation has a milestone coming up. The articles need to be submitted about six weeks ahead of time. By starting with January 2020 celebrations, articles have to be submitted to us by Nov. 20. Pictures are optional and would depend on available space each month.

If you have any other articles or ideas for the supplement, the North Dakota District *eNews*, or *Message in the Pew*, please submit to Tami at lcms.nd.busman@gmail.com, Vicki at fargooffice.ndlcms@gmail.com or Marie at news@nodaklcms.org. Thank you!