



**North/West Lower
Michigan Synod**

**2900 N. Waverly Rd.
Lansing, MI 48906**

**517-321-5066
mittensynod.org**

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A Saint Matthew Christmas

I don't expect my annual routine for celebrating our Lord's Nativity will work this year. So, I am looking to Saint Matthew, rather than to Saint Luke or Saint John, to guide me through Christmastide. John's assertion, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (1:5), feels to me more plea than promise. Luke's manger scene strikes me as strangely sentimental, and the angel's words to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid," ring hollow. Rather than compelling Mary and Joseph to journey to Bethlehem, our government (and our bishop) are doing everything in their power to compel us to stay home.

So, Matthew 1:18-2:18 has become my Christmas story this year. Matthew's account is more backstory than birth story, more about us, about our need for Jesus, than it is about Jesus. Rather than front and center in this Christmas pageant, the baby stays somewhere offstage.

Matthew begins, "Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way" (1:18). Then Matthew tells us about the scandal surrounding Mary's pregnancy and how an angel of the Lord had to intervene to prevent Joseph from dismissing her quietly. In the midst of this scandal, through a strange dream sequence, we learn the baby is from the Holy Spirit and is to be called Jesus because he will save us from our sins. God working through scandal and dream to bring salvation. This is Christmas. Emmanuel: God with us. Amid scandal God dares us to dream.

Matthew continues with another allusion to Christmas: "...after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea." Then Matthew tells us about wise men from the East coming to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?" (2:1-2). Matthew begs the question of what we, who supposedly know the story and how Christmas is to be celebrated, miss about Jesus. After all, in Matthew, the first ones to understand are magi from the East. Matthew invites us to seriously consider what people we are quick to label as "outsiders" see in Jesus that we who consider ourselves "insiders" miss. The problem of doing this, of course, is we don't know who is really "in" and who is really "out." This is Christmas. Emmanuel: God with us. Mixing things up, turning everything upside down, or maybe right side up.

Matthew then tells us about Herod, a king intent on doing whatever it takes, including deception, destruction, and the massacre of innocent children, to hold onto power. Matthew tells us how God intervenes to thwart the king's plans and save Jesus. God defeating evil. God suffering with the innocent. This is Christmas. Emmanuel: God with us. Already foreshadowing the cross.

Matthew's Christmas is atypical, at least from our perspective, and ours will be as well. But the good news remains the same. Whatever may come, be it scandal, deception, destruction, unsettling revelation, suffering of the innocent, or unnecessary death, it will be Christmas. For Jesus has saved us. Emmanuel is God with us.

I pray that you know beyond knowing this good news, and God graces you with moments of joy and peace this Christmas.

The Rev. Craig Alan Satterlee, Ph.D., Bishop

Missional Hope

We are deep in the midst of the season of Advent. Many folks have rushed to put up Christmas decorations early during the pandemic. I admit that I am one of them. It is an act to brighten up an already drab season with the light and joy that God brings into our lives this season.

The Advent season is a time of hope and joy. During our Advent readings, we usually hear a message from an Old Testament prophet, a letter from Paul or Peter, and a gospel about John the Baptist or the angel's visit to Mary. In general, every one of these texts has an element of hope in the midst of waiting, watching, and the feeling of wilderness.

Those feelings are echoed in this time as we navigate and look for hope in the wilderness of the COVID-19 pandemic. We often feel like we are the children of Israel in the wilderness of captivity, John the Baptist or a follower, or one of Paul's congregations trying to make it without him. The good news is that in these readings for Advent, God's promised hope comes through. We experience this hope through our faithful work with God in mission for the world.

In the Old Testament, prophets brought a word of hope and encouragement to a people in exile while they were on the journey home. During their many years of captivity, some people thought there was no hope. However, the prophets promised God's hope telling them that new life would spring forth from the parched land and God would be with them. God is with us in the pandemic and both during and after the pandemic, our mission remains the same: to bring God's hope in Jesus to the world.

Paul spends his ministry starting mission churches all around the east end of the Mediterranean Sea. When he is away and when he is imprisoned, he writes letters about matters of faith and encouragement to mission. There are times when Paul wishes he could visit those places again, but cannot. When we are secluded in our homes and away from our worshipping communities and loved ones, God still provides hope. The congregations Paul and his followers started flourished, even when Paul was not there. Even when we cannot see each other face to face, the mission of the church, of being Jesus to the world, continues and brings hope to the world when it is in short supply.

The Advent Gospel lessons also reveals God's hope in the promise of new life through the birth of a baby and from the new mission from God's hope embodied in Jesus. The world was waiting in quiet anticipation for a word, a sign from God. First Elizabeth, Mary's cousin finds out she is pregnant, then Mary herself finds out that she has been chosen to bring hope to the world by birthing God's son. And Jesus comes. Jesus brings hope to those hiding in fear. First a few who hear the word and follow, then 12 disciples, and then 5,000 and more as Jesus brings hope, healing and grace to a people secluded in darkness.

God's mission in the world prospers, even in dark times. In times of darkness and seclusion God is already looking ahead, going about the work of bringing hope to the world and preparing a way for us. The biblical witness shows that as the people of God keep God's mission as the goal, even in dark times, there is hope and a brighter future.

The Rev. David E. Sprang
Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission

Bishop Satterlee and the Synod Staff
will be on break from Zoom from
December 24 - January 4.

If you have an emergency, please
call the Synod Office at
517-321-5066 and leave a message
for Bishop Satterlee.



Racial Justice

We are nearing the end of the year 2020. It has been a year filled with many challenges, one of which is the racism that continues to be such a blatant part of our daily lives. The North/West Lower Michigan Synod continues our focus on working toward racial justice and an end to systemic racism.

Our Synod's website has many resources that address the sin of racism. These materials can be found on the Racial Justice Resources page. To access this page, select the Public Church Resources page from the Resources tab on the main menu. A direct link is provided here:
<https://www.mittensynod.org/racial-justice-resources/>

Included in these resources are ELCA social statements and reports, webinars and social justice videos, and suggested books and other readings.

As we leave the year 2020 behind and begin the new year of 2021, I invite you to take some time for individual and congregational reflection on our call to be people of justice and our commitment to be anti-racist.

Let us continue to pray and walk together to end the sin of racism in our world.

*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.
 Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.
 Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
 Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.*

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Rev. Rosanne M. Anderson
 Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Candidacy



NORTH/WEST LOWER MICHIGAN SYNOD ELCA

A SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

*Premiering Sunday, December 27, 2020
 Facebook Live*

Join Bishop Satterlee, the Synod Staff, and congregations around the Mitten Synod for A Service of Lessons and Carols on Sunday, December 27, 2020 at 7:00pm ET.

This service will premiere via Facebook Live on the North/West Lower Michigan Synod's Facebook Page:
<https://facebook.com/MittenSynodELCA>

The service will also be made available for congregational use. Rostered Ministers and Congregational Leaders are invited to sign up to receive the service in advance.
 Sign Up: <https://bit.ly/3meFQ3z>

If you have additional questions, please contact communications@mittensynod.org

North/West Lower Michigan Synod 2021 Synod Assembly

As 2020 comes to a close, the North/West Lower Michigan Synod is looking ahead to our 2021 events. Given the ongoing concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic, many events will continue to be held differently than in past years. This includes our biggest event, Synod Assembly. For the 2021 Synod Assembly, Synod Council has approved a virtual assembly, which will be held May 14-15, 2021.

While next year's assembly will be different than past years' assemblies, we are looking forward to using this opportunity to engage members in new and exciting ways. The Synod Staff is already at work planning and more information will be available in the coming months.

Due to the nature of a virtual assembly, we are expecting to need volunteers to help with technology. If you have experience in filming, video and/or audio editing, production, technology support or any related fields and are interested in volunteering, please complete the interest form linked here:

<https://bit.ly/2WdBQWf>

If you have additional questions, please contact communications@mittensynod.org

A Message from the Environmental Stewardship Task Force

During this Advent and Christmas season, *Joy to the World* can be heard as an invitation to join "fields and floods, rocks hills and plains" in welcoming Jesus and anticipating God's reign. We can also choose to hear and sing *Joy to the World* as a call to join God in caring for a wounded creation as we sing: "[Jesus] comes to make his blessing flow far as the curse is found."

If your celebration of Jesus' birth and your eager waiting for Christ's return prompts a renewed delight in and concern for our environment, please contact our Synod's "Green Team" chairperson, Linn Kracht, at ldkracht@gmail.com for help in getting involved. Lutherans Restoring Creation, lutheransrestoringcreation.org, also has a wealth of information and resources for learning about and responding to the climate emergency.

Email Scams and Internet Security

In the past few weeks, congregations and synod around the ELCA have experienced another round of email spoofing and scams. Given the upcoming Christmas holidays, it is likely that these scams will be more prevalent. In these scams, bad actors pretend to be people you know (ex: Bishop Satterlee or your congregation's pastor) and ask you for help "discreetly" or "privately". These scams ultimately result in the bad actors asking for money or gift cards. Bishop Satterlee and the Synod Staff will not contact you in this way. Please do not respond to those emails or send any money or gift cards.

In order to better protect the personal data of our Synod's staff and leaders, we have removed the Leader Directory from the Synod website. We recommend that all individuals be mindful of the information they post on the internet and social media. If you need to find contact information for a Rostered Minister in the ELCA, we recommend using the ELCA's directory: <https://bit.ly/3mjNslk>

To learn more about spoofing, email scams, and internet security, we invite you to review the resources on the Synod website: <https://www.mittensynod.org/internet-security/>

Synod Finances as of November 30, 2020

	Current Year		Prior Year		Variance*	
	November	Year to Date	November	Year to Date	November	Year to Date
Revenue						
Mission Support	89,496	1,053,251	89,262	1,108,550	234	(55,299)
Other	1,555	50,435	4,122	129,762	(2,567)	(79,327)
Total	91,051	1,103,686	93,384	1,238,312	(2,333)	(134,626)
Expenses						
Churchwide Proportionate Share	46,025	526,625	44,631	554,275	1,394	(27,650)
Other	51,240	550,393	67,084	733,433	(15,844)	(183,040)
Total	97,265	1,077,018	111,715	1,287,708	(14,450)	(210,690)
Net Assets Released from Restriction	0	0	0	0		
Net Change to Fund Balance	(6,214)	26,668	(18,331)	(49,396)	12,117	76,064

*Variance in "other" revenue reflects no 2020 Synod Assembly. Variance in "other" expenses reflects no 2020 Synod Assembly and changes in staffing.

Synod Staff Video Sermons for Weekly Worship

For the foreseeable future, Bishop Satterlee, Pastor Rosanne Anderson, and Pastor David Sprang will be recording sermons for congregations to use as part of their weekly virtual worship services.

Rostered Ministers are invited to sign up to receive the sermons in advance. These sermons are then released to the general public on Sunday afternoons.

Sign-up: <https://bit.ly/3hnZd7A>

Coronavirus Resources

We continue to post updates and resources pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic on our website.

On December 7, The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services extended the emergency order that enacts a three-week pause on indoor social gatherings and other group activities to December 20, 2020. Bishop Satterlee continues to recommend the suspension of indoor in-person worship.

Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3aeNE2L>

Many congregation leaders are asking how they can utilize technology to conduct meetings necessary for the business of the congregation. The North/West Lower Michigan Synod has provided an FAQ document with common questions related to conducting a remote meeting. Learn More: <https://bit.ly/3nwsdyd>

View all resources: <https://bit.ly/2MPx4to>

Upcoming Events

December 24	Christmas Eve		
December 25	Christmas Day		
December 27	A Service of Lessons and Carols	Facebook	https://facebook.com/MittenSynodELCA
January 1	New Year's Day		

Due to the current government restrictions and recommendations on in-person gatherings, many upcoming events have been cancelled or postponed. Please check with the event's organizer for more information.

Congregations in Transition

Note: We include congregations on the public list when the called pastor or rostered leader completes her or his ministry in the congregation. Thus, congregations in which the pastor has resigned but is still serving are not listed here. We also do not post calls that are accepted until Bishop Satterlee signs the Letter of Call.

Bay Conference	Rev. Emily Olsen, Dean	Kalamazoo Conference	Rev. Kjersten Sullivan, Dean
Capital Area Conference	Rev. Gary Bunge, Dean	Stony Lake Conference	Rev. Sarah Samuelson, Dean
Greater Grand Rapids Conference	Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Dean	Sunrise Conference	Rev. Chrisy Bright, Dean
		Trinity/Ocqueoc St. James/Rogers City	Partnering with Rev. Clay Bates and Peace/Holland
		Traverse Conference	Rev. Scott Torkko, Dean
		St. Paul/Reed City	CALL ACCEPTED: Rev. Kara Shaw (A-OK)