

From Pastor Wonnacott's Keyboard:

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stpaulsbremen.church
facebook.com/stpaulsbremen
vimeo.com/stpaulsbremen

Church Office Hours:

Monday – Friday
8:00 am – 12:00 pm

Sunday Schedule:

Sunday School: 8:30 am
Worship: 9:30 am

Pastor Wonnacott

Office Hours: M, W, TH & F
8:30 – 11:30 am

Can you believe that it is now December 2024? We made it through another election, we have seen our neighbors to the south suffering through hurricanes and flooding, and neighbors to the east and west battling raging wildfires. We lived through another year that has shown us things we wish we would have never seen or heard about.

We lost loved ones who died in the faith who are now with Jesus. We treasure our memories of them and the ways they touched us with their love.

You might be thinking, "Pastor, this is December, and Christmas is coming! Where in your letter is the joy, good cheer, and peace on earth, good will to men?"

Instead of worrying about that, let's focus on Advent. The season of Advent gives us extra opportunities to worship and to prepare our hearts to meet our Savior, Jesus – Emmanuel: God with us! We reflect on Mary, Joseph, and the Babe of Bethlehem; we remember all the Scriptures that found their fulfillment in Jesus. From His birth to the cross, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to the open tomb, from the tomb to His Ascension into heaven, Jesus has conquered all our enemies and forgiven us all our sins. He showed us the way to live and made heaven our home!

December is usually a very busy month. We have a lot to get done and the list grows longer by the minute. But never forget the reason we celebrate Advent and Christmas, for without Jesus we have no forgiveness, no peace, no hope, and no future. **So stop, look, and listen** to the true story of our salvation that is found only

in the Christ Child. Don't miss Him this year!

THE DEADLINE FOR THE JANUARY EPISTLE IS DECEMBER 20TH!!! Epistle articles, comments, ideas may be deposited in the epistle box in the Narthex mail slots or e-mailed to Eric Thornton at firemanet@yahoo.com. I appreciate all of your articles, ideas and comments!

OUR OFFERINGS TO THE LORD FROM HIS BLESSINGS TO US

Offerings remind us of the blessings God has given us and are an opportunity to thank Him for what He has done in our lives. Please place your offerings in our Offering Box located in front of the water fountains in the narthex of the church. You may also choose “e-tithing” by having a weekly deposit to St Paul’s from your bank account. If you have questions on e-tithing, please contact the Church Office.

Congregational Christmas Caroling

December 8th at 4:00 pm - You are invited to come and make a joyful noise to the Lord and to the shut-ins of our church and community.

We will meet in the Bethany Room at 4:00 pm to break up into groups to go out and sing. At 6:00 pm we will return to the church for dinner and fellowship. **Please bring a dessert** to share



at the meal.

[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC](#)

All children must be accompanied by an adult. Come and Share the Good News of Christmas!!!

You Are Invited To Our Advent and Christmas Services

Midweek Advent Dinners – Dec. 4th & 11th at 6:00 pm

Midweek Advent Services – Dec. 4th & 11th at 7:00 pm

Children's Christmas Service – Dec. 18th at 7:00 pm

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service – Dec. 24th at 7:00 pm

Christmas Day Service – Dec. 25th at 9:30 am

New Years' Eve Service – Dec. 31st at 7:00 pm

Midweek Advent Meal: December 4th from 6:00-6:45 pm is sponsored by The Board of Public Relations. On the menu is chili and cornbread. Please bring cookies or a dessert to share at the meal. This is also sponsored by Thrivent. Parish Fellowship will supply the drinks and tableware. Let's come together and feast on good food, then meditate on the Word of God in the worship service at 7:00 pm.

Midweek Advent Meal: December 11th from 6:00-6:45 pm will be **A POTLUCK DINNER - PLEASE BRING A DISH TO SHARE AND A DESSERT.** Parish Fellowship will supply the drinks and tableware. Let's come together and feast on good food, and then meditate on the Word of God in the worship service at 7:00 pm.

Euchre Party is Friday, December 6th from 7-9:00 pm in the Bethany Room. Anyone 16 and older can join us for fun and fellowship, and please bring a snack to share. Bring cards and a card table if possible. Beverages will be provided. Come and bring a friend!

The Christmas parties for the residents at the Cardinal Houses will take place on December 20th at 2 pm. The gifts will be provided by an action team card from Thrivent. If you have any questions or want to participate, please call Wayne Spicher or Pastor Wonnacott.

Christmas Lunch for the Bremen Police Department will be on December 20th at noon. The food will be provided by an action team card from Thrivent. We need a few desserts, and we

are also in need of Christmas cards for our men and women on the force. If you are willing to help, please call Wayne Spicher or Pastor Wonnacott.

Thank you to everyone who cooked turkeys, baked pies, donated funds, cooked sides, assembled meals, greeted guests, delivered meals, served, and cleaned up at our Community Thanksgiving Dinner! We greatly appreciate your hard work and generosity! Thanks to Thrivent for sponsoring the meal with needed funds.

Thank you to all who donated clothes for Hope Ministries! You have shown generosity and compassion to our neighbors in the name of Jesus.

List for Christmas Cards – 2024

1. Rita Stanifer Miller's Merry Manor, 635 Oakhill Ave., Plymouth, IN 46563
2. Mel Jones St. Paul 3602 S. Ironwood Dr, South Bend, IN 46614
3. Diana Rodgers 103 N. Center St., Apt. 203, Bremen, 46505
4. Phyllis Brown Autumn Trace Senior Community #110, 2560 W. Lake Ave.,
Plymouth, IN 46563
5. Leo Sahlhoff Miller's Merry Manor, 1630 S. County Farm Road, Room 18
Warsaw, IN 46580
6. Carol O'Connell Miller's Merry Manor, 1630 S. County Farm Road, Room 44,
Warsaw, IN 46580
7. Harold Nettrour 1584 Miami Road, Bremen, IN 46506
8. Lillian Salyer 24550 Riley Road, North Liberty, IN 46554
9. Bob & Troy Yoder &
Andrew 2824 Michigan Rd., Plymouth, IN 46563
10. Goldie Buckner 3483 Elm Road, Bremen, IN 46506

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 11. Martha Miller | 621 South Stewart Street, Bremen, IN 46506 |
| 12. Wilodene Chaffin | 306 East Lincoln Street, Bremen, IN 46506 |
| 13. Eunice Bauer | 187 Oakmont Drive, Bremen, IN 46506 |
| 14. Hank Kiefer | 300 N. Washington St, Wakarusa, IN 46573 |
| 15. Jim & Janet Kaiser | 9105 Hawthorn Road, Plymouth, IN 46563 |
| 16. Lewis Leeper | 515 S. Whitlock St., Room W-14, Bremen, IN 46506 |
| 17. Roberta Meiring | 500 S. Montgomery St. Apt. 215, Bremen, IN 46506 |
| 18. Betty Sahlhoff | 500 S. Montgomery St. Apt. 217, Bremen, IN 46506 |
| 20. Richard Sickman | 6889 1 st Road, Bremen, IN 46506 |
| 21. Barbara Shell | 515 S. Whitlock St., Room N-4, Bremen, IN 46506 |
| 22. Dorothy Walter | 6237 Plymouth-Goshen Trail, Bremen, IN 46506 |
| 23. Marian Yoder | 456 E. Centennial St., Nappanee, IN 46550 |

Just a few brothers and sisters with whom we can share the Joy of Christmas in a card.



YOUTH BOARD NEWS and NOTES

Upcoming Events

HAPPY BIRTHDAY JESUS: On Saturday, December 7th the Board of Christian Education is sponsoring a morning of activities geared toward children in Preschool through Grade 5 celebrating the Christ Child’s birth. At the beginning (8:30 am) our Youth will be preparing a pancake breakfast for the children and their families. Please join us as able – all are welcome.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE (December 24th at 7 pm): Our Youth will once again have an opportunity to share the Christmas Gospel message as in years past. Please join us as we will present the Good News through “Christmas by the Book” during the service

2025 NATIONAL YOUTH GATHERING

We appreciate your continued support and ask that you keep all of those listed below in your prayers as they prepare to attend the National Youth Gathering next summer. Thank you to those who took part in our recent Rent-A-Youth leaf raking; we will communicate additional opportunities to support this group in the weeks and months ahead.

FINANCIAL GOAL UPDATE: We have collected nearly half of our financial goal of \$25,000. If you have questions or would like to donate toward this, please speak with Youth Board Chairman Andy Wildauer or any Adult Leader listed below.

Youth Attendees (by grade): Noah Wildauer (12th), Autumn Napper (11th), Jack Wildauer (11th), Izzy Wildauer (10th), Lexi Andrews (9th), Gavin Hundt (9th), Gabi Mejia (9th), Reuben Napper (9th), Colton Napper (8th), Brantley Thornton (8th), and Abby Wildauer (8th)

Adult Leaders: Tonya Hundt, Rebecca Mejia, Rick Napper, Eric Thornton, Heidi Wildauer

Information is available through our GroupMe “St. Paul’s Youth” chat as well as various church communication channels. If there are any questions related to the Youth Group, please contact Andy Wildauer at (801) 707-3399.

School Corner

Happy Thanksgiving! We praise God for all He has given and blessed us with!

Thank you to all who celebrated Pilgrim Meal with us and donated items for the nursing home care kits! There were a lot of collections for charities going on last month, and we are truly blessed to give back to those in need.

The students are practicing for the Children’s Christmas Service, “From Heaven Above”, December 18, 7:00pm. Please join us as we celebrate Christ’s Birth. A reception will follow the service.

Christmas Break is December 23rd through January 5th. School resumes on January 6th.

This is the last month you can give to the Lutheran SGO, and receive a tax credit and deduction for your donations for 2024! (We can now use these funds to offer assistance to

Pre-K students, age 4 by August 1st.) You can find several (easy) ways to donate at www.lutheranSGO.org/Donate, or we also have a link on the church website, stpaulsbremen.church, under the school drop-down_menu. Donations can be given through a check, IRA, stocks, Donor Advised Funds, PayPal, credit card, and **NOW electronic giving!** Benefits to you are a 50% state tax credit for your donation and eligibility for a tax deduction. These scholarships make a big difference for our families. If you desire to mail a check to the LSGO, pamphlets with mailing information are available in the tract rack. **(Checks needs to be written to the Lutheran Scholarship Granting Organization.)**

We also continue to take donations to St. Paul's tuition assistance fund. Checks for tuition assistance can be made out to the church.

Merry Christmas!

Preschool Postings

Colorful lights hanging on the house, ornaments decorating a pine tree, the smell of gingerbread coming from the oven- we associate these with Christmas as part of our traditions, instilled in our memories. But the baby lying in the manger is at the forefront of our Christmas activities! As our students practice their songs and fingerplays for the Children's Christmas Service, their focus is on the Christ Child, and we pray that they share that Good News with their families just as we share it with those we meet.

PTL FUNDRAISER

Thank you to everyone who has supported us at our past fundraisers!!

FINANCIAL COACHING OFFERED

The Board of Stewardship is offering a new ministry to our congregation and to the community. We recognize that this economy has created many challenges for families and as a caring church we are offering to provide individualized financial coaching for local families. This is offered at no cost and is on a private and confidential basis with the goal of assisting families in developing strategies to benefit their financial health and ultimately their spiritual health. We have 3 volunteers from our congregation who are finance professionals to serve as coaches. Appointments are one on one and scheduled at the family's convenience. If

you or someone you know has interest in speaking to us, please have the Meeting Request card (see below) completed and sent to our Church Office. Additional Meeting Request cards are available on the brochure rack in the Church narthex.

Financial Coach Meeting Request

- Best day(s) to meet: M T W TH F (circle one or more)
- Best time of day: Mornings Afternoons Evenings (circle one or more)
- Interest in discussing: General family budgeting _____
Debt reduction strategies _____
Savings/Investing _____
Other _____

Contact: Name(s): _____
Address: _____
City: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

Mail or drop off at the St. Paul's Lutheran Church office or email this info to: janmiller@stpaulsbremen.org

Mission of the Month

Our Sunday School continues to send \$75.00 each month to a mission.

December Mission of the Month: AbleLight, formerly Bethesda Lutheran Communities

Bethesda officially changed its name to **AbleLight** but the mission remains the same -- to enhance the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through services that share the good news of Jesus Christ.

For more information, go to ablelight.org

The Board of Evangelism would like to thank the youth and their families and all who helped stock, pack and deliver Welcome Bags in Bremen on Sunday, November 10! We packed 49 bags for our new neighbors! Next delivery date will be spring of 2025. Watch for more information in the spring.

The Board of Evangelism along with St. Paul's congregation will be doing an **ingathering for Grace Food Pantry in Bremen from December 1 to 15** with delivery on December 19. Your items may be placed on the table in front of the church office.

They have requested the following items; any kind of baking items such as pie filling, cake or cookie mix, flour, sugar, brown sugar, baking soda, chocolate chips, also French fried onions, sloppy joe mix, canned meat(except salmon), juice, peanut butter, jelly, canned soup, pasta or rice sides.

The Food Pantry also gives birthday boxes to its clientele! If you would like to make birthday boxes they include a cake mix, frosting, 12 oz can soda, sprinkles, candles, foil pan and a blank birthday card.

The Food Pantry is open on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month from 11 am to 4 pm. Due to Christmas being on the 4th Wednesday this year they will be open Monday, December 23 instead. This is a great way to love and minister to our neighbors. Thank you for your donations!!

Students will be intrigued by **NOT-SO-NICE BIBLE STORIES: GORY DEATHS!** This study uses true stories from the Bible to show how God's justice smashes the sinful, the sinister, the sneaky; and they show how Jesus conquers death and gives new life (through His own gory death).
..... taught by Barb Middaugh 8:30-9:15 a.m.

High School (Bethany Room)

Please join the Adult Bible Class during the month of December. Watch for additional announcements.

Adult Bible Class (Bethany Room)

The account of Jonah is more than a whale of a tale! Hear God's message to the lost and to those who have been called to be the hands, feet, and voice of Jesus in a very broken world.
..... taught by Tom Coxey 8:30-9:15 a.m.

More Opportunities for Bible Study:

Men's Wednesday Morning Bible Study meets every other Wednesday (beginning December 11), 6:30-7:30 a.m. at the Bremen Hospital cafeteria. Enjoy a delicious breakfast and lively discussion!

Thursday Morning Ladies' Bible Study meets every week beginning December 5, 9:30-10:45 a.m. The ladies are finishing up **LifeLight Bible Study: Matthew, Part 2**. It will be followed by the new study. . . . **Mirror, Mirror** Do you like what you see when you look in the mirror? If you said no, you aren't alone! This study will encourage you to see yourself as God does - through the filter of the cross, in the reflection of His Son, with eyes of love.

Happy Birthday, Jesus!



A Saturday Celebration

Bring the family for a morning of Christmas fun, centered on the advent of our coming Lord. Age-based activities will be happening throughout the church all morning, so come and go as you please!

Breakfast | 8:30 – 9:30 a.m.

Pancakes, sausage, fruit, juice

Program | 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

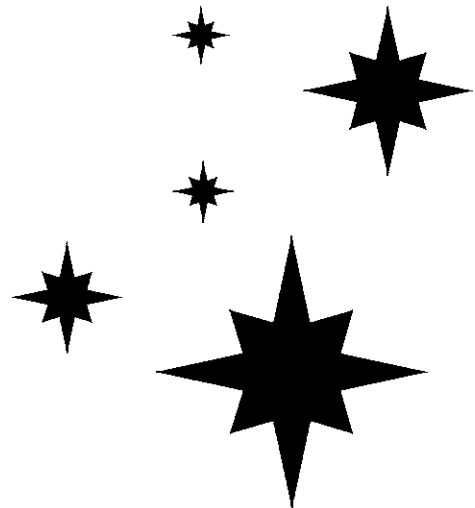
Devotional

Re-enact the Christmas Story

Songs

Crafts for Pre-K through 5th grade

Special activities for 6th–8th graders



Saturday, Dec. 7

“A Gift Like No Other”

9:30–11:30 a.m.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Bremen

FREE WILL OFFERING taken at Breakfast to support St. Paul's Youth

It is Christmas Day and, if all has gone well, most of your rushing and running ought to be over.

It would be good if we could hear the story of Jesus' birth, as the angels first shared it: "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (see Luke 2:10).

It would be good, but doing so is almost always difficult.

It's hard to separate Jesus' coming to save sinful humanity from the way the world wants the holiday to be remembered. If you doubt there is such confusion, then listen to the little girl who told her baby brother the story of Christmas. Her rendition went this way:

"Jesus was born just in time for Christmas, up at the North Pole surrounded by eight little reindeer and the Virgin Mary. Then Santa Claus showed up with lots of toys and stuff and some swaddling clothes. The three wise men and elves sang carols, while the Little Drummer Boy and Scrooge helped Joseph trim the tree. In the meantime, Frosty, the Snowman saw this star. Here endeth the reading."

You may shake your head at such silliness. But the little girl's sad story is no stranger than that promoted by those who say the true meaning of Christmas is family, fun, fuzzy feelings, and cartoon fantasies.

They would have us believe the salvation Jesus brings is secondary to Santa, His grace less important than expensive gifts and greeting cards. In their hearts the sound of parties and cash registers drown out God's Good News.

We should not be surprised.

The world, Satan, and sin have always tried to defeat, deny and discredit the coming of the Savior. Yet, in those hearts and homes where the Word still works, the Savior still comes. Born of a woman, He is one of us, yet better than us.

I encourage you to look upon the little hands and remember they will be pierced to save you. See His beautiful brow and recall how it will be crowned with thorns. Listen to His first cry and hear that cry echo, 33 years later, upon Calvary's cross, as He proclaims our salvation is *finished*.

Today we remember the fulfillment of God's promise, the story of how our forgiveness and salvation was won. Today we hear the story of humanity's God-given, blood-bought gift of forgiveness, redemption and renewal.

It is the story of good news of great joy. It is the story of the Babe of Bethlehem, the Christ of the cross, the Savior of the empty tomb.

Hurricane Disaster Relief Opportunity – If you are asking, “What can I do?” to assist our fellow Lutheran churches and members, along with other victims, of hurricanes Helene & Milton in the southeast US, then please see the back page for information on ways to help. **Thrivent members:** Thrivent will provide a \$1 match for every \$2 donated to featured organizations: Convoy of Hope, LCMS Disaster Response, Lutheran Disaster Response, and Orphan Grain Train. This match will run until the \$750,000 cap is met, or December 10, 2024, whichever comes first. Donations must be made through Thrivent's online giving platform or through a Thrivent Charitable Impact and Investing® Donor Advised Fund.

Online giving and text-to-give opportunities:

Disaster Response Strategic Use

Providing for disaster victims today and tomorrow.

lcms.org/givenow/disaster

Text LCMSDISASTERS to 41444

Current areas being served by LCMS Disaster Response include:

Florida, Georgia, North Carolina

Hurricane Helene

Hurricane Milton

Give by credit/debit card over the phone:

Call 888-930-4438

(LCMS Donor Care Line)

Donate by Check:

Make your check payable to *LCMS, or The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*. On the memo line write “Disaster Response—Strategic Use (TR9206).” Or contact Mission Advancement for other options by calling 888-930-4438 or by email to mission.advancement@lcms.org

Mail your gift to:

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

PO Box 66861

St. Louis, MO 63166-6861

View the latest stories, videos and podcasts, as they become available, at lcms.org/hurricane-response.



Birthdays & Anniversaries

December 2024

ANNIVERSARIES

10	Larry & Beth Enders	22	Ken & Lori Knigga II
12	Anthony & Katherine Barts	28	Brad & Ada Sahlhoff
		31	Wayne & Tara Andrews Tony & Melonie Venable

BIRTHDAYS

1	Doug Aurand	19	Jayden Potoczky Elaine Young
2	Penny Holderman Robb Jones	20	Elijah Kulcsar Wyatt Wildauer
4	Lindsy Knigga	21	Emiliano Mejia
5	Sara Sahlhoff	23	Dawn Schmeltz
8	Karen Matthew	24	Traci Pulliam
10	Annette Knepper John Stayton	26	Katherine Goze Matthew Ringle
11	Lisa Clark	27	Patty Bowen Rhonda Owens Ethan Tjernagel
13	Kandice Ernsperger Joe Ervin Christie Wonnacott Christina Wright	28	Eric Miller
14	Grace Barts Noah Youngman	29	Katie Lynch
15	Tammy Britt Mark Cope	31	Larry Britt Alexia Cannon CandaceWright
16	Anthony Barts Noelle Cannon		
17	Steve Fox		
18	Conner Barts		

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be born upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

Silent Night,



Holy Night

St. Paul's Lutheran Women's Missionary League

As Lutheran Women in Mission, we joyfully proclaim Christ, support missions, and equip women to honor God by serving others. Adopted 2021

LWML Ingathering for Ft. Wayne Seminary

will be delivered to Ft. Wayne, courtesy of Ken Eichinger. Thank you, Ken.

Thank you to all who donated for your generosity.

December 8: Congregational Caroling 4:00 pm

LWML will fill 24 "Cheer Boxes" for our home-bound members. If you would like to contribute, please bring 2 DOZEN INDIVIDUALLY WRAPPED ITEMS to the church kitchen on Sunday morning, December 8. Boxes will be filled after morning service.

The Eyeglasses & Eyedroppers ministry for M.O.S.T. is ongoing. Any type, in good condition are needed. Please place in the box beneath the "Bulletin Table." Thank you.

Psalm 100:2a *"Serve the Lord with Gladness"* LWML motto

St. Paul's 179th LITURGICAL YEAR † **December 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024**

Worship Opportunities To Bless Our Lives


 Celebration Of Holy Communion

Sunday 9:30 a.m.

MIDWEEK 7:00 PM

Dec 1 1st Advent Sunday

Dec 4 1st Advent Wednesday 7:00 pm

Dec 8  2nd Advent Sunday

Dec 11 2nd Advent Wednesday 7:00 pm

Dec 15 3rd Advent Sunday

Dec 18 3rd Advent Wednesday 7:00 pm

Dec 22  4th Advent Sunday

Dec 24 Christmas Eve Candle-Light 7:00 pm

pm

DEC 25  CHRISTMAS DAY - THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD 9:00 AM

Dec 31  New Year's Eve 7:00 pm

December Minor Festivals: 21 St. Thomas, Apostle • 26 St. Stephen, Martyr • 27 St. John, Evangelist & Apostle • 28 The Holy Innocents, Martyrs of Our Lord • *Commemorations:* 4 John of Damascus, Theologian & Hymnwriter • 6 Nicholas of Myra, Pastor • 7 Ambrose of Milan, Pastor & Hymnwriter • 13 Lucia, Martyr • 17 Daniel The Prophet & The Three Young Men • 19 Adam & Eve • 20 Katharina Von Bora Luther • 29 David

LITURGICAL CALENDAR. An annual cycle fit over the secular year to aid the worshiper to regularly remember God's words and actions as revealed in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. ~~~ Most Reformers rejected a calendar when they left Catholicism. Luther (who was 'kicked out,') had a different attitude: if it was useful to the worship life of Christians, fix it to agree with Scripture. Hence, the liturgical cycle was not a problem for him (though Saints Days minus apostles & evangelists named in Scripture were removed). For this we should thank brother Martin, as the calendar helps us examine yearly what we believe, teach, and confess about our Triune God, Jesus our Savior; man; sin; salvation; faith; grace; works; eternal life; heaven; hell; justification; sanctification; and so on and so forth. ~~~

Happy new liturgical year!

A "condensed" history of December 25, part I (from Stories Behind the Great Traditions of Christmas; Ace Collins; Wonderland; 2003)

Long before Jesus was born, pagan cultures: Babylon, Egypt, Persia, Phrygia, Greece, Rome, et al, held winter solstice festivals (shortest day of the year) to celebrate "the rebirth of the sun." Paganism is a polytheistic, nature religion fueled by superstition and the occult. In Rome, midwinter festivals, called Saturnalia (in honor of Saturn, god of peace and plenty), were days of excess - wild carousing and drunken parties that lasted a week (December 17 - 24). ~~~ The church, in the first 100 years after Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, gave little thought to observing His birth. Most Christians throughout the Roman Empire were more concerned with avoiding persecution. To do this, many outwardly observed the old pagan customs. Church leaders watched as members continued to participate in such festivities after confessing Christ; but had little idea of how to change matters, and Christians were still very much a minority. ~~~ By 125, Christianity was more widespread, and Jesus' followers started adopting new customs. Pope Telesphorus declared a service be held to "memorialize the Nativity of our Lord and Savior." He chose a date in September, which coincided with the Jewish Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah). Within a few years, congregations adopted more than a dozen different days to hold Nativity celebrations. In 129, a bishop asked for a carol, called "Angel's Hymn" to be sung at a Christmas service in Rome. Carols, a word referring to dancing and singing, were sung year round in early times and embraced a wide range of subjects. In 130, the pope declared all Christian congregations should sing the "Gloria in Excelsis Deo" at

services honoring Jesus' birth. These are the first 'carols' to be sanctioned by the church. ~~~ In 274, Emperor Aurelian, a pagan, declared that year's winter solstice, December 25, *Natalis Solis Invicti* - festival of the "birth of the invincible sun." Christian leaders could do nothing, even though many Romans were now Christian. The emperor was not; his word was law, and the threat of lethal persecution was still very real. ~~~ In 320, Pope Julius I, tired of multiple days for nativity observances, declared - for no 'apparent' reason - December 25, as the day to observe Jesus' birth. His proclamation was basically ignored, and *Natalis Solis Invicti* remained the more widely celebrated holiday, even among Christians. But some, hearing the pope's proclamation, adapted secular carols into songs about Jesus' birth. Frowning upon this, the church took control of all music used for Christmas. It was *not* joyful music. Carols as we know them didn't become "popular" until the 1800's. ~~~ In 325, Constantine 'converted.' Easter became the most celebrated holiday in the empire. Then, no doubt influenced by church leaders, Constantine (re)introduced December 25, as "Christmas;" and made it an *immovable feast (having a fixed date)*. With the government behind them, it may be Christian leaders thought this would cancel out the Saturnalia feast. To their dismay, it was not. ~~~ Throughout the centuries the birth of Christ continued in a "head-to-head" confrontation with pagan celebrations. Many chose to celebrate Saturnalia, the midwinter festival to the sun; then "repent" after the party. Others, who did 'observe' the Nativity, did so in much the same way pagans honored the false god Saturn. And so it stayed for centuries. ~~~ By the 1600's in England, "Christmas" revelers showed up at church in wild costumes, gambled during the service, and then afterward stormed homes in search of food and drink. Things got so bad by 1649, that Christmas celebrations were one reason the Puritan Oliver Cromwell succeeded in overthrowing King Charles I. He ruled for fifteen years and his most dramatic proclamation was the *banning of all Christmas festivities*. Anyone caught participating could be arrested, fined, and jailed. Like other Catholic and Protestant leaders, he believed Christmas was a time for sober reflection, a day to consider what Christ meant to each person's life. Unless it fell on Sunday, Christmas was not observed. ~~~ Then Oliver died; the commoners demanded his son Richard restore festivities; he refused; rebellion ensued; the Puritans were tossed out of power; and Charles II became King. Soon the riotous Christmas excesses returned, with the

royal family supplying the liquor. Crowds demanding their 'figgy pudding' meant it when they said they wouldn't go until they got it. Christmas of the late 1600's was rarely seen as a holy day; in sad fact, it was a day of unpredictable violence. Still, many Catholic and Anglican churches held Christmas Eve and Day services, determined not to let the day set aside to recognize Christ's birth be defined by what went on in the streets. ~~~ Meanwhile in America, the Puritans *outlawed* Christmas from the time they landed on Plymouth Rock. Until after the Revolutionary War, churches did not gather, businesses stayed open, and those caught celebrating were fined. From 1789 until 1856, Congress met on December 25, and there is no record anyone stopped to so much as mention Jesus' birth. But an influx of emigrants in the 1820's began to change things. Anti-Christmas laws stayed on the books, but were ignored. Once again, drunken parties and gang riots marked the day. In 1828, New York City needed a special police force just to protect life and property from unruly Christmas revelers. ~~~ In 1840, Queen Victoria married her German cousin, Prince Albert. In England and America, Christmas wasn't much more than an excuse to party; but in Germany, it was the second most holy day of the year. Albert brought his reverent traditions with him to England, and the people, emulating the royal family, starting changing their customs. ~~~ And just as it was Prince Albert who brought the reverent, family-oriented traditions of Christmas to England, so too, in large part, the German and Dutch emigrants to America in the 1840's, were changing the meaning and customs of the season with their focus on family and worship. ~~~ St. Nicholas, was bishop of Myra, a devout Christian who helped the poor, especially children. In 1822, Clement Clarke Moore's poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas" was published. For the first time, children became a focus at Christmas. Within ten years merchants, combining Nicholas and Sinter Klaas, a.k.a. Santa, brought to America by the Dutch, began to make it into a commercial holiday. In 1834, Charles Dickens wrote "A Christmas Carol," at a time when only money and hard work seemed important. Its themes of family, love, hope, and charity, with Christmas as its setting, caused many people to re-examine their values; and how they observed Christmas. ~~~ By the 1840's, the Lutheran church in Germany was drifting from its confessional roots. Distressed by Enlightenment philosophies corrupting doctrine, and the increasing secularization of the 'state church,' many families took drastic action. They pulled up roots and came to

the New World - and their “nativity traditions” came with them: advent wreaths, candles, gifts, birthday cakes for Jesus, and the evergreen tree. By the Civil War, these changes helped make Christmas a time for family, giving, and worship. ~~~ Some things of course don’t change about human nature. Just as in the earliest days of the church, Jesus’ birth still goes “head to head” against secular themes and commercialization. And “solstice parties” are making a comeback. ~~~ But without Jesus, December 25, is just December 25. It is not the *date* which makes the day holy (*set apart for God*); but the *how* in which it is celebrated. Christmas, for believers in Christ, is truly what the church declared it to be in 124 AD: A day to “memorialize the nativity of our Lord and Savior.” A quiet, reflective time to examine what Jesus means to our life. A time to hear once again God’s Good News to man: *“Fear not! For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”* Luke 2:11

The Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, December (24 and) 25, is the first major festival of the church year: a day of Joy, celebrating the Incarnation and birth of our Savior Jesus. The color of is *white*, signifying its importance as a festival to God the Son.

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child, Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,
Within my heart that it may be A quiet chamber kept for Thee. TLH, #85 vs. 13