



Mount Calvary Connected December 17, 2020

Mount Calvary Connected is a weekly newsletter that will be sent out each Wednesday while the church is pressing "pause" on in-person gatherings. Our goal is to keep you connected to your faith and your church with messages from our pastors, health information, and ways to share Christ's love during our current national crisis.

Pastor Scott Klimke

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Email: sklimke6@gmail.com**Pastor Jonathan Adams**

Cell-Phone: 412-817-6704

Email: revjonoadams@gmail.com**A Message from Pastor Jonathan,**

When our daughter Annabelle was born two and a half years ago in the labor and delivery department of Conemaugh Hospital, I was amazed at just how elaborate the process was. Not only were there all sorts of medical equipment that I had never seen before, but from the time she was admitted until our daughter was born, she was constantly under the care of nearly a dozen different healthcare providers: her obstetrician, a midwife, an anesthesiologist, numerous nurses and aides, and I'm sure there were others I've forgotten, too. Through it all, a happy, healthy baby girl came into the world. It was amazing!

When I think about my mother having been born sixty-five years ago, I imagine it was quite a bit simpler: no fancy machines, no team of scrub-wearing doctors and nurses rushing in and out of a clean white hospital room, more likely just a doctor and maybe a nurse at the doctor's office, or maybe even at my grandparent's house, coaching my grandmother through the process like they certainly had done for dozens of others they'd cared for over the years. Far simpler than my own daughter's birth, but still, the doctor was trained and ready, and a happy, healthy baby girl came into the world. My grandmother would tell you it was amazing!

And then I think about the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth; we all know the story: no hospital, no doctor, no room at the inn; our savior was born in a manger designed for animals. I've read some biblical commentaries over the years that have suggested that Mary and Joseph may not have been alone, that it's possible and maybe even likely, that some of Mary's older female family members may have been present to help with the birth. But even if that is true, they would have been simply passing on their own experience of motherhood, not acting as trained physicians. The birth of Jesus was simpler than my mother's birth in 1955, and far simpler than my daughter's birth in 2018, and yet, a happy, healthy baby boy came into the world and changed the world. And those who were witnesses to it said it was amazing!

Our Christian celebrations of that simple, humble birth have significantly evolved over the past two thousand years, just as the process of delivering a newborn baby has. And for many of us, it's hard to imagine a Christmas Eve that doesn't involve a packed church, candles, hymns, choirs, poinsettias, and more.

But it's hard to imagine giving birth in a barn, too, isn't it? And yet, Mary and Joseph were undoubtedly celebrating the birth of their child in those simple, humble surroundings, whether surrounded by family, or alone as a new family of three.

That first Christmas was simple, both in terms of the medical practices, and the celebration. Maybe this year gives us the opportunity to reflect on the simplicity of that night. Yet again, the COVID-19 pandemic is giving us an opportunity to consider the things that are most important in life. And as much as I live for the energy of Christmas Eve worship, I am reminding MYSELF that it's the story of the humble birth of the Messiah that is the centerpiece, not anything else. Without any pomp and circumstance, without any modern amenities, a happy, healthy baby was born to change the world.

And when I remember that, I'm not as upset about this Christmas being "different." In fact, I'm excited!

I look forward to worshipping our Lord with you all on Christmas Eve and remembering that simple things can still be AMAZING!

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jonathan

2021 Offering Envelopes can be picked up in the narthex.

Envelopes are renumbered so they are in alphabetical order. Your number may have changed from last year. So, beginning Jan. 1, throw away your 2020 and start using your 2021 envelopes. If you have received envelopes and choose not to have them, OR if you did not receive envelopes and would like to have them please call the church office. Also, please help deliver envelopes to your friends and neighbors. Thank you!

Year Round Giving Tree

Beginning in January, there will be a new Giving Tree in the narthex that will be up for all of 2021. Each month a different group/organization will be selected to receive the donations from the tree. For January, all proceeds will go to Pro Papa Missions to help the country of Honduras which has been hit hard by hurricanes and COVID-19. On the tree you will find an envelope attached to a handmade face mask. The suggested price on the envelope is \$3, however, any amount will be accepted. Envelopes can be returned to the collection plate or dropped off at the church office. Thank you!

Christmas Eve Worship Service

Christmas will certainly be different this year, but that doesn't mean it can't be special as we gather around the good news of the birth of Jesus Christ...

This Christmas Eve, Mount Calvary Lutheran Church will be offering two drive-in services at **2:30pm & 4:30pm in the parking lot of the former "Skateland" at 423 Walters Avenue (next to the driver's license center.)** Hear the story of Christmas in a worship service that blends traditional and modern worship elements, all from the safety of your car. Bulletins will be made available electronically and Holy Communion will be celebrated in a "bring your own bread" style for a contact-free experience, even while joining together with so many other faithful worshippers. Check back in the middle of week of Christmas Eve for all of what you'll need to fully participate.



Later in the evening, at **7:15pm, a third service will be made available via live internet radio on our website and via our FM transmitter** which can be heard through a large portion of Richland Township and the surrounding community.

WEBSITE

Our website has been updated and redesigned. Please check it out at <https://www.mt-calvarylutheran.org>. If you have any feed back, please call the church office (814-266-4859) or let the pastors know.

LIVE STREAMING WORSHIP SERVICE INFORMATION

At Mount Calvary Lutheran church, we strive to spread the good news of the gospel by any means available. Today's technology allows us to provide alternatives to in-person worship. This includes social media such as Facebook, internet live streaming, recorded sermons, and through FM radio broadcasts.

Mt. Calvary hosts live broadcasts of the liturgy at 8:45 AM Sunday mornings. The broadcast can be heard by tuning your radio to 88.3 FM if you are near the church. We can also stream the service live over the internet. By clicking the following link, you can gain access to the live stream audio. <https://streams.radiomast.io/96172026-6cba-407b-9090-e150b471ae0e>

We want you to stay connected to Mount Calvary, even if you cannot be here in person. Help us spread the good news of the gospel by inviting friends to tune in, as well. Everyone is welcome to use any of these methods to join us and hear the message and teachings of Jesus Christ. Facebook Live versions of the service will be made available on Wednesdays most weeks, but on other days as well depending upon the schedule of the preaching pastor. Our Facebook page is found at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church of Johnstown, PA.

About Our Members:

Lee & Dot McQuaide's son Tim McQuaide passed away on December 14.

Reminder to please pray for our members and their families that are affected by COVID 19.

Kid's Corner with Pastor Jonathan

Each week, Mt. Calvary will be publishing "Kid's Corner" as an offering for our children and families. Kid's Corner is part Sunday school lesson, part children's sermon, and all about sharing God's love. Join us each week for this and other online offerings from Mt. Calvary on our church Facebook page: Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church of Johnstown, PA.

Birthdays and Anniversaries for the Week Dec. 20 - Dec. 26.

Dec. 20 – John Pullin, Jacob Wasnick

Dec. 21 – Sydnee Dusack, Jeff Hill

Dec. 22 – Nancy Elliott, Jessica Hershberger, Jamie McMullen, Michael McQuaide

Dec. 23 – Jane Hagins

Dec. 25 – Holly Yarnick

Dec. 26 - Dana Begley, Nicholas Berkey, Lenora Streilein

Dec. 23 Lee & Dot McQuaide (72 years)

Remember those that prayer has been requested:

Patti Sliko, Joe, John, Scott, Carlye, Mark, Betty, Lucy's Family, Leslie, Mountain Family, Kim, Tim, Linda & Dick, Kim, Brian, Jamie, Dr. Larry Mastrine, Don, Joanne, Shirley, Chris, Tracy, Dolly & Chis Palm, David, Karen, Lauren, Billy, Brooke, Bob Zahorak, Jerry, Brian, Rick, Harold and family, and McQuaide family.

Support of Mount Calvary

Through the end of November, Mount Calvary's monthly expenses have been averaging about \$17,685. This is in the neighborhood of \$4,225 a month less than budgeted. Thanks to your generosity and the faithfulness of your leadership team, Mount Calvary has not yet had to dip into reserves in spite of all the disruption introduced by the pandemic. We're a team and the entire team deserves a thank you! Now all that's left to do this year is to top things off with another strong and robust December as we have done for many years running.

CONDENSED WORSHIP FOR THE WEEKEND OF SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13TH.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **A: Amen.**

FIRST READING: ISAIAH 61:1-4, 8-11

Though the people had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, they continued to face hardship and oppression. In the language of the jubilee year described in Leviticus 25, the prophet, moved by the spirit of God, announces deliverance for those who are oppressed and comfort for those who mourn.

¹The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. ⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

⁸For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed. ¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

SECOND READING: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-24

Paul concludes his letter to the Thessalonians by encouraging them to live lives of continual joy, prayer, and thanksgiving. The closing blessing is grounded in the hope of Christ's coming.

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise the words of prophets, ²¹but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

²³May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

GOSPEL: JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28

John's gospel describes Jesus as the "light of the world." John the Baptist is presented as a witness to Jesus, one who directs attention away from himself to Christ, the true light.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." ²¹And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." ²²Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" ²⁶John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

SERMON BY PASTOR SCOTT

I prepared this sermon with a Pepsi at my side. Back in mid-March, just days after our first shutdown due to COVID-19, I shared with many of you that my mornings always feature one regular Pepsi and one diet Pepsi. Despite all that's happened in the year of our Lord 2020, this hasn't changed. Depending on the weekly sale prices, a diet Coke may sometimes take the place of the diet Pepsi, but the basic pattern has remained unchanged. In the morning, every morning, there's one fully-leaded soda and one unleaded soda.

Yet even as I remain a creature of habit in some ways, I am in other respects different than I was back in mid-March. There's no doubt I am again a bit wearied, a bit dazed and confused, after once again having to reorganize our schedule and much of our ministry at a moment's notice. After the latest governor's order on Thursday, I said more than once I felt like it was mid-March again. Most people thought I was referring to the weather being a bit nicer. I was actually referring to how my mind was again in wearying overdrive as it was back in mid-March when a flurry of public health orders kept showing up; one on the top of the other. People in every sector of life know what I'm talking about. Maybe this is another reason why the sale of pajamas skyrocketed in 2020. Involved with all sorts of rapid-fire change, we've been stretched to the limit sometimes and therefore in need of more sleep than usual; making a good set of pajamas all that much more important. But even so, here at Mount Calvary we've managed to rise to the occasion.

It's one of the big reasons I'm feeling different than I was back in mid-March. These past nine months the way we've together risen to the challenge before us has been incredible. This sermon is being made available today through the FM dial and through the internet. Later in the week it will show up on Facebook, in email inboxes, and in envelopes mailed to those who aren't computer or cellphone savvy. Eleven days from now, on Christmas Eve at both 2:30 and 4:30, we'll be worshipping in our cars over at 423 Walters Avenue, as we also worshipped in our cars on Easter Sunday, Mother's Day, and every Wednesday throughout the summer and fall. None of this was on our radar, much less possible, just a few months ago. And this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to all the new and formerly unthought of things we've done this year.

Throughout 2020, I've often said I'm glad I spent a lot of time dancing back in high school and college. It's what we've been doing again and again. We've had to dance our way through night after night; through unknown circumstance after unknown circumstance. Perhaps the band Genesis had this sort of thing in mind when they once wrote a song about dancing on a volcano. All I know for certain is that God has used us to create something out of what often appeared to be nothing again and again in 2020. It hasn't been the virgin birth, but it's been remarkable nonetheless. How could it be any different! We're kids of the comeback king, you and me.

You know that, don't you! We're kinds of the comeback king. Through the sacrament of holy baptism, we've been forever adopted as children of the Most High. We are and shall remain sons and daughters of God. And my, oh my, is our Father through baptism the king of the comeback. In our reading from Isaiah, reference is made to how God shall build up the ancient ruins and raise up the former devastations. This was originally a reference to God bringing Israel and its capital city of Jerusalem back from the devastations the Babylonian Empire had meted out in 586 BC. It's come to refer to much, much more since then.

In 70 AD, doing its own version of what Babylon had done before, Rome would raze Jerusalem and its Temple to the ground. And yet, as I did earlier this year, people still pray at the remaining wall of Jerusalem's former Temple nearly two thousand years later; with people waiting in long lines to do so. The bottom line is: God's people have taken Babylon's best shot. God's people have taken Rome's best shot. God's people have taken the best shot of despots like Adolf Hitler and of despotic regimes like the former Soviet Union. God's people have survived the Black Plague. And when our troubles haven't come from without, they've come from within thanks to our sins. But even so, we're still standing. We keep rising from the dead. Our faith is alive and well thanks to God, who remembers his mercy from generation to generation. You and me, we're kids of the comeback king. My faith in this identity has been reinforced over and over again this year. But back in mid-

March, when I first introduced you to my early morning devotion to Pepsi products, I must confess that my faith in our identity as kids of the comeback king wasn't quite as strong as it is now. Why was this?

Most generally it was because I'm a human being through and through. I am a pastor, but being ordained doesn't make you superhuman. On the day when I accepted the call to serve my first congregation after seminary, I told the good people of Faith Lutheran in New Florence that I was just an Okie from Muskogee. I've always liked that song by Merle Haggard. Unlike Merle, I've got no claim to being from Oklahoma, but ordination or not, I am just an average, ordinary human being with the same fears and doubts as everybody else. Back in mid-March, those fears and doubts were looming larger than they are today. This was only natural.

Back in mid-March, so much of what we had known before was thrown out the window with virtually no warning and we feared the shoe would drop even harder in the days to come. In some ways, it did, but we still managed to rise up from the ashes by God's grace. Will we remember this the next time change comes our way and march on with our faith and our hope uninterrupted? Probably not. Unless we become superhuman, we're never going to be free from fear and doubt on this side of the hereafter. But perhaps, we can over time reduce the degree to which we fear and doubt that we are not in fact kids of the comeback king. With that in mind, for me, getting up and back at it again has been important. I've been known to say that God finds us most powerfully not in the sugar of life, but in the salt and vinegar of life. In good times, but even more so in bad times, when we remain active and observant, alive to the new things God is always doing, we're blessed with additional reasons for thanksgiving and our reading from 1st Thessalonians does say we should give thanks in all circumstances. It's no wonder why this encouragement is extended. When we're active and observant, when we count our blessings, particularly when we're knee deep in the salt and vinegar of life, we're reminded anew and afresh that we are in fact kids of the comeback king and that reminder gives us what we need to get up and back at it again; paving the way for additional reminders that we are in fact kids of the comeback king.

And speaking of the reminder that we are in fact kids of the comeback king, Scripture too is adept at delivering and reinforcing this message. As it should be, my language of being kids of the comeback king came after, not before I engaged today's collection of scriptures. Imagine how much more often we'd be reminded of our identity as kids of the comeback king if our exposure to Scripture involved every day of our lives rather than just an hour or so on weekends. If it's not already happening, let's find our way through to God's word more often. If it happens, with Mary the mother of our Lord, we'll more often sing out, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Yes, with Scripture's help, we may even make one of Tom Petty's songs our own; singing out, "You can stand me up at the gates of hell, but I won't back down because I know, I know, I'm a kid of the comeback king." Amen!

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

P: God of power and might, shine your radiance and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need.

God who speaks so we may speak, you have entrusted your church with the work of proclaiming good news. Strengthen the witness of bishops, pastors, deacons, church musicians, lay leaders, and all people who contribute their prayers and talents to public worship. Embed your word in their hearts. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: God of every living creature, you announce the year of your favor for all of creation. Extend your kindness and relief to endangered animals and plants. Strengthen the human beings who rely on the rhythms of nature to make their living. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: God of all peoples and nations, you plant us as your oaks of righteousness and ask us to care for one another. Be present with the leaders of every nation as they govern. Give them a spirit of righteousness, that your goodness and mercy is revealed through their actions. Hear us, O God. **A: Your mercy is great.**

P: God of exiles and wanderers, you repair what was once destroyed. We pray for people who have been displaced from their homes by fire, flood, earthquake, or storm (survivors of recent natural disasters may be named). Support the work of Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Disaster Response, and all disaster relief organizations in their recovery efforts. Hear us, O God. **A: Your mercy is great.**

P: God of the powerful and helpless, you clothe us with strength when our spirits are weak and weary. Bestow your spirit upon this congregation and empower us to comfort the people who turn to us in times of need. Make your church a place of refuge and healing. Hear us, O God. **A: Your mercy is great.**

P: God of sinners and saints, you offer joy even in the midst of our grief. We are grateful for the beloved, imperfect people whose lives testified to your radiant love (especially Lucy, martyr of the church). Anoint all who mourn with the oil of gladness. Hear us, O God. **A: Your mercy is great.**

P: Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **A: Amen.**