



Mount Calvary Connected January 7, 2021

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.

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A Message from Pastor Jonathan,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

If I had written any sort of reflection for today's newsletter prior to Wednesday afternoon, I'm afraid that the events that took place in our nation's capital would have rendered it meaningless.

Yesterday, months of national discord and division came to a head when the United States Capitol Building was unlawfully "stormed" while congress was in session.

The coming weeks and days will be very telling in regards to the future of our nation, both in regards to the political climate and the ongoing course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, more than ever, we need to unite around our common values, and as people of faith, we need to unite around the teachings of Christ.

Since we're still coming off the heels of the Christmas season, I feel it's appropriate to reflect one more time on the Christmas story: When Christ was born, he was born into a world of conflict and division, and for as much as he spent his life as an adult trying to model and teach peace, the conflict and division of the world only continued, even unto his death.

Through this, I think we can come to one natural conclusion: The peace that Christ offers us is not the absence of conflict. Christ's peace is the presence of God. Emmanuel, God with us.

We will likely always see conflict and division in one way or another, but I hope that we might never again see conflict like we saw yesterday.

Peace be with you in these seemingly unpeaceful times,
Pastor Jonathan

In Person worship resumes this weekend, January 9 (5:30 PM) and January 10 (8:45 AM). Sunday School and Confirmation will also resume at their normal times.

LIVE STREAMING WORSHIP SERVICE INFORMATION

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>

Weekly worship bulletins can be found at: www.rebrand.ly/MtCalvaryWorship

Annual Congregation Meeting

Annual meeting will be held on **Sunday, February 7**, approximately 10:00 AM. If you plan to attend, please be at the church by 9:45 AM.

Backyard Ministries Cookie Collection

Each week, Backyard Ministries usually has a small pack of cookies to give to each family they visit at the Coopersdale Homes. These cookies were made by other churches in the area. However, due to social distancing they have not been gathering to bake. They are asking Mt. Calvary to donate 200 packs of cookies (store bought is ok, if they are not individually wrapped packs, they can be 5 in a zip lock bag) a month for them to deliver. The first pickup being on **February 4** and then continuing on the **first and third Thursday of each month**. Cookies can be placed in the bin outside the church, or the labeled one inside. If you have any questions please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880. Thank you for your continued support!

Flower/Bulletin Chart

Flower and bulletin charts will be out in the narthex starting for the weekend January 16/17. Cost of the flowers have gone up to \$50.00 this year. Bulletins have remained the same at \$15.00. If you would like the flowers for the weekend of January 16/17 please call the church office by Wednesday, January 13 (266-4859).

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

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!

About Our Members:

Hulda Horner has passed away on Monday, January 4, 2021.

Patti Sliko, please pray for her, health issues have recurred.

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

Birthdays and Anniversaries for the Week Jan 3 - Jan. 9.

Jan. 3 - Wendi Culp, Jeffrey McKool, Matthew Sarlouis

Jan. 4 - Timothy Hinkledire, Jacob Shaffer

Jan. 5 - Pastor Scott Klimke, Donald Sauter, Dolores Schneider

Jan. 6 - Alexander Mattern

Jan. 7 - David Brehm, IV

Jan. 8 - Lindsey Pullin, David Raho, Ruth Wagner

Jan. 9 - Tammy Bachota, Jacob Sann, Macey Whetzel

Remember those that prayer has been requested:

Linda & Dick, Kim, Jamie, Dr. Larry Mastrine, Don, Joanne, Shirley, Chris, Tracy, Dolly & Chis Palm, David, Karen, Lauren, Billy, Brooke, Bob Zahorak, Jerry, Rick, Harold and family, McQuaide family, Cindy Solarczyk, Patti Sliko, Bruce and Carol, Julie, Joel, and Andy.

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, JANUARY 3, 2021.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: Almighty God, you used a star to reveal your Son Jesus' arrival. Now use us for your glory, the service of others, and the cause of justice for all, 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 60:1-6

Jerusalem is assured that nations will make a pilgrimage to her because the light of God's presence is in her midst. The bountiful food of the sea and the profits of international trade will come streaming to Jerusalem and thereby declare God's praise.

¹Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ²For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.

³Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. ⁵Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. ⁶A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

SECOND READING: EPHESIANS 3:1-12

What had been hidden from previous generations is now made known through the gospel ministry of Paul and others. In Christ both Jews and Gentiles participate in the richness of God's promised salvation.

¹This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—²for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, ³and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. ⁸Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the

Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ,⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things;¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

GOSPEL: MATTHEW 2:1-12

God's promise shines bright in the night as magi follow a star to honor a new king. Strangers from a faraway land, they welcome the long-awaited messiah of Israel.

¹In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,² asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him;⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:
⁶'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

SERMON BY PASTOR SCOTT

God can be hard to figure out. As my mother Janice has put it in my hearing, "God sure is good at keeping secrets." Our reading from Ephesians would agree. On multiple occasions, it speaks of the mystery of God's will. It's not that God is inconstant. God is steady as you go. Our reading from Ephesians refers to God's eternal purpose in Christ, after all. God has a purpose and a plan and holds to them. But our knowledge and apprehension of God's purpose and plan can be quite lacking. The writer of Ephesians today acknowledges that he'd still be in the dark were not for a special revelation of God; perhaps the revelation of the Holy Spirit the writer later says the holy apostles and prophets themselves received. The point is that God can be hard to figure out and is good at keeping secrets.

This might be one of the reasons the Bible says we each have been created in the image of God. We too, after all, can be hard to figure out. I once sat with the children of a dying father who had often said to them, "Do as I say and not as I do." Most often he said this when, staying home himself, he sent his wife and kids to church and Sunday school. Years later his children were still trying to diagnose the disconnect. How could someone be so adamant and insistent about that which they didn't practice themselves? Someone was hard to figure out.

I also think of what I've heard the children of emotional distant moms and dads say. How could someone demand so much and give so little? How could someone be so tough and yet find it so hard to say, "I'm proud of you" or "I love you?" Someone was a mystery; hard to fathom. But as we sometimes image God with our complexity and ambiguity, it must also be said that we are not nearly as complex and mysterious as our Maker. Sometimes, we're pretty easy to figure out; being anything and everything but a secret.

Turning now to our reading from Matthew, I'd put King Herod the Great in the easy to figure out category. As he quizzes wise men, priests, and scribes, as he prepares to murder all the children of Bethlehem two years old and younger, King Herod the Great is pretty transparent. Part of this is surely meant to serve the purposes of St. Matthew's narrative. As St. Matthew writes of how wise men today announce that Jesus is born King of the Jews, it's necessary to illustrate why a change of leadership is required. King Herod the Great certainly steps up to the plate in this regard. He's bloodthirsty and power hungry. He's insecure; fearing he might lose the crown which is not his by God's will, but by Roman appointment instead. Herod is a leader who illustrates what the gospels have in mind when they say Jesus helped those who were like sheep without a shepherd. He's self-interested and rapacious; looking for himself rather than the flock for which he is to care. He'll stop at nothing to keep stealing away the honor and the glory, the power and the privilege, that rightfully belong to Jesus; the one born King of the Jews. Again, King Herod the Great isn't a mystery. He's a poster boy for why the ninth and tenth commandments call us not to covet. If only God were this transparent. If only God were a little less mysterious; a little less wholly and completely other.

Right about now, it's only natural for us to want to bring God down to our level. Still in the midst of a global tragedy that has now claimed nearly 1.9 million lives, we likely need no help at all connecting the dots when our reading from Ephesians keeps associating mystery with God. To be sure, as we remember during this short season of Christmas, God has drawn much, much closer and has become much, much more relatable in the birth of Jesus Christ. But even with God becoming flesh and pitching a tent among us in Jesus Christ, even with the ongoing presence and counsel of the Holy Spirit, God can still be hard to figure out. Veiled in ongoing mystery, the abiding plan and purpose of God can still be hard to fathom. And even covetous Herod the Great can remind us of this.

Just think about it! In Exodus chapter twenty, just verses before handing down the commandments that bid us not to covet, God says, "Look! I'm not playing around. You better listen and absorb what I'm about to reveal. You better be the priestly kingdom and holy nation I have in mind because I, I am a jealous God." What's this about? We're not to covet, but God can be jealous. Is this another case of "do as I say and not as I do?" Need I say it—God can be mighty mysterious. God can be so, so hard to figure out. No wonder our reading from Ephesians says divine revelation and the ministrations of the Holy Spirit are required if anything like faith seeking understanding is to emerge on our part. But here, at least, as in God's jealousy and the commandments against coveting, the mystery and the confusion are not so hard to crack.

The key lies in a subtle, but essential difference between what it means to covet and what it means to be jealous. To covet is to crave what is not rightfully yours; as in the honor and the glory, the power and the privilege, that belong not to Herod the Great, but to Jesus instead. But to be jealous—this is something different. To be jealous is to resent and resist that which steals away what is rightfully yours; as in the faith, the devotion, and the obedience of those you've rescued from slavery in Egypt and now bless with The Ten Commandments. And of course, it's not just Israel of old which is God's beloved and cherished possession. It's all of us, the entire creation, who belong to God. As the psalmist rightly says, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it."

As the Creator of heaven and earth, the reason for all that is, God can't covet as King Herod the Great covets what belongs to Jesus. Everyone and everything belong to God. Everyone and everything are rightfully God's; making it impossible for God to covet. But, as Exodus chapter twenty and other scriptures tell us, God can be jealous; desiring the return of that which has been wrongfully stolen away. And I think this might give us a handle on how to proceed as the coronavirus and other villainous forces continue to steal away those we love ourselves and who God loves even more.

I mean: When there's a breakup or parties in a relationship aren't as together as is desirable, don't flowers often make an appearance? The answer is yes! If this weren't so, Barbara Streisand and Neil Diamond wouldn't have had a massive hit with "You Don't Bring Me Flowers." When hearts have been broken, when distance has entered a relationship or remains in a relationship, those aroused to jealousy often try to woo their beloved back or on to the next stage in their relationship in some fashion or another. And quite notably,

today's readings tell us God is no different; busting out flowers and chocolate of heavenly origin when faith, hope, and love are variously stolen away from him.

Just go down the list. When false gods and other religions stole away the nations represented by the wise men in our reading from Matthew, we're informed that God wooed them back through the advent and subsequent movements of a star. The same nations were earlier wooed to praise and the offering of gifts when God restored the fortunes of Jerusalem according to our reading from Isaiah. And in our reading from Ephesians, it's St. Paul and other likeminded missionaries who God uses to woo faith, hope, and love out of the nations when the wise men and their star have receded from view. Quite clearly, there's a pattern here. It adds up to this. Unlike those for whom Neil Diamond and Barbara Streisand once sang, we don't have to worry that God isn't going to bring us flowers anymore. Even in the midst of the coronavirus and whatever else that steals away that which jealousy rightfully wants back, God's going to bring us flowers; flowers that speak to place we all have in God's heart; flowers that affirm that we do all have a continuing place in God's unfolding plan and purpose. In, by, and through the Holy Spirit, let's notice these flowers and tell each other about them. It will help us to continue to know, believe, trust, and proclaim that love for all, love forever and ever, has come in Jesus Christ. Amen!

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

P: Joining our voices with the song of the angels, let us pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

P: Glorious God, fill your church with joy. Let your faithful people live as beacons of your redemption. Give wisdom and courage to your church that it may speak with boldness and confidence, even when words of mercy are met with scorn. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Show us your faithfulness in the rising and setting of the sun. Place wonder into the hearts of those who search the skies and explore the heavens. Curb waste and pollution, that all might have clean air to breathe. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Bring all nations and rulers to the splendor of your dawn. Raise up advocates who champion the cause of exploited and vulnerable people. Inspire leaders to be generous with abundance, that all people might live in stability and freedom. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Come quickly with your healing power to all who seek love, support, and restoration. Dispel fears and shadows. Restore broken relationships and mend broken hearts. Bring relief to those who are sick or struggling (especially). Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: Send traveling mercies upon all who journey home by other roads. Guard refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers (especially). Protect families fleeing conflict in their homelands or abuse in their homes. Tend to those who have no place to lay their heads. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: According to the boundless riches of Christ, you draw all your saints, from the least to the greatest, to your heavenly places. As you created all things, make all things new again in the splendor of your glory. Hear us, O God.

A: Your mercy is great.

P: God of mercy, come quickly to us with grace upon grace as we lift these and all our prayers to you, in the name of Jesus.

A: Amen.