



Mount Calvary Connected

January 5, 2023

Mount Calvary Connected is a weekly newsletter sent out at the end of each week. Our goal is to keep you connected to your church and your faith with messages from our pastors, information about upcoming activities at Mt. Calvary and more!

Pastor Scott Klimke Cell-Phone: 570-367-3421 Email: sklimke6@gmail.com	Pastor Jonathan Adams Cell-Phone: 412-817-6704 Email: revjonoadams@gmail.com
---	---

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 also stream these services live over the internet. Simply visit www.mt-calvarylutheran.org and click "Live Radio Broadcast" from the home page on Sunday mornings.

Weekly worship bulletins can be found at: www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/bulletins/

Readings & Sermon from the Past Sunday

Listen to the readings and the sermon from this past Sunday on our website: <https://www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/sermons/>

A Message from Pastor Jonathan

By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures. (Proverbs 24:3-4)

Despite what we may think we know about the nativity story, the wise men, or magi, did not arrive to the manger on the night of Jesus' birth, or anytime soon after. Tradition informs us that it probably would have been several years before they found the toddler Jesus and presented him with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

But even so, throughout history, the church has chosen to celebrate the arrival of the wisemen, the acknowledgement that Jesus was born for all both near and far, on a particular date. January 6th is that date; the Epiphany, the official end of the Christmas season.

A more modern way to celebrate the Epiphany is by performing a house blessing. The idea behind this being that the magi came to bless the house of Jesus as much as they came to see and bring him gifts, and so we can do the same for our own homes and the homes of others.

There are plenty of more formal ways to bless one's house, using pre-written prayers, chalking of door frames, burning of sage, etc. But maybe simpler is better...

Sometime this week, as you cross the threshold of your home, take a moment of pause and thank God for the shelter it provides. You can pray in your own words, or you can simply say, "Bless this home, and those who enter it."

After the bitter cold of Christmas, I think we can all appreciate the blessings that our homes are for us. I thank God for my home, and I thank God for yours, and hope that it continues to be a safe haven for you and your family for years to come.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jonathan

Annual Congregational Meeting

Our annual congregational meeting will be held after worship on Sunday, January 15th. The purpose of the meeting will be to approve last year's minutes, adopt a budget for 2023, and appoint and/or elect council members.

Missy Brodt, Todd Moss, Jeff Penrod, and David Raho have all been nominated for three-year council terms, with Cindy Solarczyk being appointed to complete a one-year term vacated by a previous council member. Pictures and bios are below.

Annual Report

In order to limit waste, we have reduced the number of printed copies of the annual report produced. If you're a voting member and you picked up your packet last year, one will be available for you in the narthex this weekend. If you're a voting member and did not pick up your packet last year, you will need to request one from the church office. Also, if you are not a voting member but did make a contribution to or through the church and desire a year-end giving statement, that can also be received by contacting the church office.

A digital version of the Annual Report can be found at:

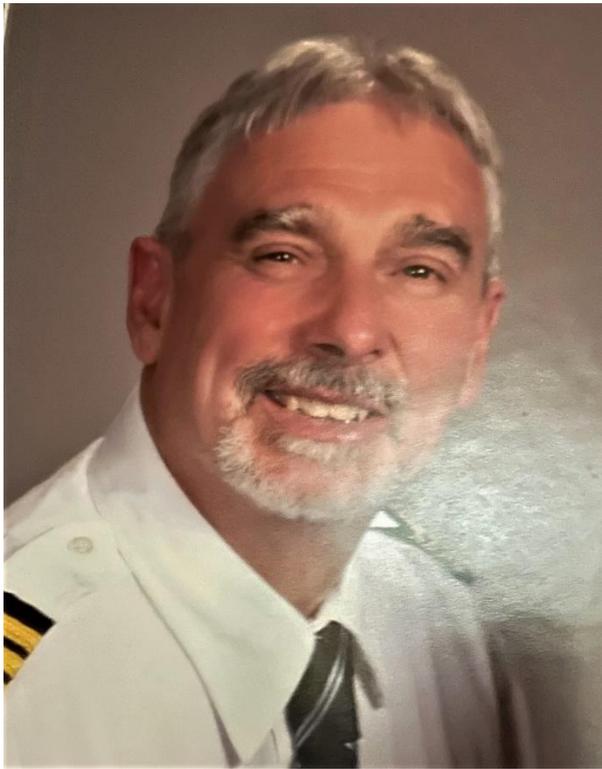
https://drive.google.com/file/d/18QcBsyYXVcSmUYh0ZrkUiGGjP-5avHx9/view?usp=share_link



My name is Anne Brodt. I am more commonly known as Missy Brodt. I have been a member of Mount Calvary for over 50 years. My parents, children, and grandchildren are members too. My grandparents were also members of Mount Calvary; meaning we're now in our fifth generation of participation. I taught Sunday school for 10 years while my children were growing up. I participated in the groundbreaking ceremony for the current church, helped on various committees including the one planning the church anniversary a few years ago, served on altar guild, and am currently on church council. During my first term on council, I helped with a wide array of administrative and financial tasks. When not at church, I enjoy spending time with family and friends and my pup Lady.



My name is Christopher "Todd" Moss. I was born in J-town in 1970. I am married to Jill Moss. I am also neighbors of Mark & Deb Rychak. I graduated from Richland High School in 1988. I am the owner of Penske Truck Rental in Johnstown. I was awarded 2nd Degree Black belt at Joe Goss Karate. I enjoy anything on two and four wheels, fishing, and spending time with my golden retriever. My faith journey has been a solo adventure, but when I am with my Mt. Calvary family, I realize I am at home. I truly love helping as communion assistant, participating in the music program, and attending bible study. I am honored to be nominated.



My name is Jeff Penrod. I am a long-time resident of Richland Twp and have 40 years of experience in the construction and aviation industry. Others have appreciated my professionalism, integrity, management skills, energetic personality, work ethic, and compassion for the needs of others. I care deeply about my community and serving as a council member for Mt. Calvary will allow me to bring my experience and confidence into a leadership role as I serve and walk with the Lord. I have 3 children and 5 grandchildren. I reside with my wife Susan and together we own Pilot Trucking & Excavating LLC. I am excited and proud to be part of council and am eager to contribute to the culture and growth of the church.



My name is David Raho. I was born and raised in Uniontown, Pennsylvania and have lived in Johnstown since 1995. I am an attorney who has a general practice with a focus on family law and criminal law. My office is located on Market Street in Johnstown. I have also been a part-time Cambria County Public Defender since 2000. Along with my wife Melissa and our son Luke, I live in Richland. I enjoy skiing and tennis and am an avid Miami Dolphins fan. My family has belonged to Mount Calvary for a little over five years now. I look forward to serving on Council and assisting with the continued positive growth of Mount Calvary.



My name is Cindy Pozun-Solarczyk. I have been a member of Mt. Calvary for over 60 years. My mother, Dorothy Pozun, was a member and I have two brothers, Jerry and Jim Pozun. In my early years I was a Youth Advisor along with Debbie Roth and Pam Verostick. I have served two terms on council as Treasurer prior to this appointment. I am married to Bob and have two children. Sara Solarczyk is a member here and Kymm George, who lives in Leesburg VA along with my son-in-law, Rick and my three grandchildren, Kadence, Wyatt and Colton are members of a church in their area. I volunteer counting money, Altar Guild and Evangelism Committee. My church family has always held a special place in my life. I believe working together makes us stronger in our service to God. I welcome the opportunity to serve you and God once again. Thank you!

Upcoming Meetings/Events

Property Committee Meeting: January 10th at 6:00 p.m.

Youth Committee Meeting: January 11th at 6:30 p.m.

Annual Meeting: January 15th at 10:00 a.m.

Volunteer at Family Kitchen: January 15th from 10-1

WELCA: January 16th at 6:00 p.m.

Church Council Meeting: January 17th at 6:30 p.m.

Social Ministry Meeting: January 19th at 6:30 p.m.

Snow Camp at Camp Sequanota: January 27-29

Coffee Hour

The evangelism team will be having a coffee hour the first Sunday of every month. We will be offering refreshments before the Sunday service from 8 a.m. until 8:45 a.m. Hope to see you there!

Help Wanted!

The Property Committee is looking to recruit a number of small job volunteers. Tasks might include replacing light bulbs, changing hardware on a commode, getting a lawnmower or snowblower ready for use, etc. The Committee believes we have a lot of talent in the congregation and wants to make greater use of it. Every small job handled by a member equals one less call that needs to be made to a vendor who may have a minimum visit charge or an hourly rate of \$50 or more. Volunteers who can be available on short notice are needed to help with set-up, serving, and tear-down after funeral luncheons. Interested parties should contact Mark Rychak or one of the pastors. A message could also be left with the church office at 814-266-4859.

Giving Tree

The Giving Tree collected a total of \$550 for the months of November and December. It was donated to Helping Hand Rescue Mission in Portage. Thank you for your continued support!

Family Kitchen Opportunity

Mt. Calvary will be helping out at the Family Kitchen on Sunday, January 15 from 10-1. They are still doing take out on weekends so our responsibilities will include packing/taking out meals, washing dishes, and cleaning the kitchen. If you would like to volunteer, or donate cookies, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880. This is a great event to start the new year by helping those in need!

Visits to Shut-ins, Hospital, & Nursing Home Patients

Never hesitate to contact the church office if you, or a loved one, desires a visit from one of our pastors or a lay visitor. If you, or someone you know, is homebound, hospitalized, or in a nursing/care home, and wants or needs a visit or more frequent visits, we are happy to do so. We never want anyone to be missed. We try to get information on those hospitalized or placed in nursing homes, but please don't assume that info is given to us automatically. Call us!

Scheduled Worship Help

Ushers:

Saturday, January 7th: Hiltz Family
Sunday, January 8th: Mayket Family

Saturday, January 14th: Hiltz Family
Sunday, January 15th: Mayket Family

Saturday, January 21st: Jackie Carpenter & Jack Weisbrodt
Sunday, January 22nd: Mayket Family

Saturday, January 28th: Jackie Carpenter & Jack Weisbrodt
Sunday, January 29th: Mayket Family

Readers/Communion Assistants:

Saturday, January 7: Cindy Buday & Todd Moss
Sunday, January 8th: Rebecca Daly

Saturday, January 14th: Jack Weisbrodt & Ida Mary Williams
Sunday, January 15th: Carter & Laura Bower

Saturday, January 21st: Mark & Paige Williams
Sunday, January 22nd: Laura Bower & Marybeth Heinze

Saturday, January 28th: Kevin Oleksa & Cindy Solarczyk
Sunday, January 29th: Ray Leverknight

Those interested in volunteering may contact Pastor Scott to sign up.

Snow Camp!

The snow camp is for Grades 6-12 and is at Camp Sequanota. Registration is online at the camp's webpage, or see Pastor Jonathan for more info!

Children's Sunday School

Children's Sunday School for youth in preschool, elementary, and middle school is ongoing! See Pastor Jonathan for more information.

Choir Reorganization

Several people have been asking about starting up a new choir! Between time lost over COVID and losing a couple of longtime choir members, we will be needing to start fresh! Over the years at Mount Calvary, we have sometimes worked with small numbers and sometimes included large groups of over twenty singers. Some have been strong musicians and others of modest ability. We have sung in unison and in parts. We have occasionally included ambitious music such as that of Mozart and Handel, and even sung significant portions of the Messiah! The one constant is that we have worked with people who are available and are willing to give freely of their time.

This is an opportunity where anyone can participate. By singing in the choir, you yourself become a stronger musician. Singing is a form of prayer. Singing touches our souls. Singing in a group connects us in a spiritual way. For this September, it might be nice to tiptoe gently into a new season. I am thinking of beginning with some rounds and two-part singing. If this takes off, we certainly can be more ambitious!

Peoples' schedules are busy. In recent years, we have done Wednesday evening rehearsals for those who can make it. Sometimes I meet people individually. Sometimes people join in last minute at the choir warmup before the service. I often record parts and, these days, can send an audio text to help people be better prepared. Since I do not know everyone in the congregation and may not have invited you to sing, let me know if you would like to give it a try! Thanks so much! Talk to Dan Gresh after any church service or text or call at 814-659-5109.

Computer & Internet Connection Now Available

Members may use the computer in the library during office hours:
Monday – Thursday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Help Us Fill in the Blanks!

Our birthdate, wedding anniversary, and church membership records are incomplete. We have been working on moving records from paper to electronic and it's a huge undertaking. Please help Terrie or one of our volunteers if they contact you for missing information. You can be a bigger help by calling the church office to verify birth and anniversary dates with Terrie. Thanks for your cooperation!

2023 Offering Envelopes Available in the Narthex

The envelope numbers have been changed from the prior year. Those who donate apart from an envelope should make note of their new number once the new year begins. Those who presently don't have envelopes, but desire them, should contact the church office.

All You Can Eat Pancake Breakfast

Mt. Calvary is holding an all-you-can-eat pancake breakfast on Saturday, February 18th from 7-11 a.m. Also includes 2 sausage patties or bacon and OJ, milk, or coffee. Cost is \$7. For children 12 and under, the cost is \$5. Hope to see you there!

Altar Guild

We are reorganizing for 2023. We can never have too many helpers for this important service, so if we haven't approached you yet, please tell anyone you see cleaning up after services that you'd like to help. Join us any time. We'll show you what to do!

The Altar Guild schedule can be picked up in the office when you have an opportunity. If you would like it mailed, please contact Terrie in the office, and she will forward a copy to you. Thank you once again for serving!!

Extra Note Cards

Donations of birthday, anniversary, or blank note cards are always needed. Drop your extras off in the church office during normal business hours or give to Joan Bunnell.

Communion Bread Sign-ups

Communion bread sign-ups for 2023 are low. Though a number of families have signed up for a month at a time lately, this is not necessary. Please sign up to donate bread for even a week so we might be reminded of how there is one bread for the one Body of Christ.

“A sign of welcome”

By Caitlin Sellnow

Kyle Svennungsen is a missionary in Bratislava, Slovakia, where, among other duties, he is pastor of the English-speaking Bratislava International Church. Its worship space in the city’s Old Town borough was constructed at a time when Protestantism was barely tolerated in Slovakia, a historically Catholic country, so the building doesn’t look much like a church. No crosses or stained-glass windows are visible from the outside. The entrance is tucked into a cobblestone alleyway, out of view.

The “directions” section of the congregation’s website reads: “If you are a few minutes late because of trouble finding the church, you wouldn’t be the first.”

Svennungsen likes to tell the story of how his friend and parishioner Ahmad (name changed) decided to create a sandwich board to stand outside the building, naming the different groups that worship inside. The process of getting the sign approved was surprisingly difficult. He had to design it in a way that would meet many different city requirements and win approval from parish leadership. Still, Ahmad persevered until the sign was finished. Thanks to him, it’s now a little easier for people to find the church doors on Sunday mornings.

For Svennungsen, this story illustrates Ahmad’s dedication to their faith community. But it also demonstrates that Ahmad doesn’t give up in the face of red tape. He has plenty of experience in that area—he has been trying to gain asylum status from the Slovak state for over seven years.

A long journey

Ahmad came to Bratislava from Iran as a young adult. His personal faith journey led him to Christianity, and he was baptized at Bratislava International Church. After his religious conversion, he received multiple death threats from residents of his hometown. He couldn’t return to Iran safely, yet the Slovak government also made it difficult for him to stay in Bratislava.

Ahmad went through the lengthy and involved process of applying for asylum status as a refugee. He gathered the many necessary documents, including an authentic certificate of Christian baptism.

As Svennungsen puts it, Islam is “barely tolerated” in Slovakia, the way Protestantism once was. Because Ahmad was a former Muslim from a Muslim country, he needed to prove that he was a practicing Christian. Even though he had the correct materials and met the requirements for asylum, his application was rejected. He appealed the decision and submitted his application again. And again, and again.

When Svennungsen became pastor of the congregation in 2019, Ahmad was already a member. By that time he had been trying to gain asylum for years. The previous pastor had written multiple letters of endorsement to government officials. Svennungsen wrote at least three more affirming that Ahmad was a confessed, baptized and practicing Christian.

Svennungsen said he was troubled by how resistant the government seemed to be toward Ahmad—especially when it was so welcoming to other refugees. When Russian forces launched their unprovoked attack on Ukraine in February, Ukrainians came pouring into neighboring Slovakia to escape the conflict. Svennungsen watched his neighbors give up clothes, food, money and sometimes even rooms in their homes to these strangers. He was inspired by his community’s response, but he also suspected that the reaction would have been different had the refugees looked less like Slovaks and more like Ahmad.

“We felt a great tension, knowing how Ahmad was not treated in the same way because of racism as well as ethnic and religious prejudice,” he said.

Svennungsen describes Ahmad as warm and genuine. Despite his difficulty finding acceptance in Slovakia, his dedication to his faith community has not wavered. Ahmad writes the church’s newsletter every week. During the pandemic he and his fiancée moved over an hour away from the church, but they still make the drive to attend services on Sunday mornings.

Svennungsen’s wife, Anna, notes that Ahmad is always willing to hold their 1-year-old son. “He really makes you feel seen and heard when you’re talking with him,” she said. “We are so privileged and honored to know him, to have him as part of our community.”

Eventually Ahmad’s case reached the highest court in Slovakia, where a pro bono immigration lawyer helped him argue his case. Ahmad has told Svennungsen that he expects to win asylum at his next hearing. The Svennungsens hope to celebrate this with him soon.

They also hope they can help build a community that is more accepting of refugees and migrants such as Ahmad, who don’t look Slovak and whose stories don’t appear on the evening news.

They have already begun this work with Ahmad’s partnership.

As their new sign indicates, the church doors are open to all.

Caitlin Sellnow is an ELCA communications manager.

Alpha Course

Mt. Calvary will be hosting the Alpha Course beginning February 21st. The 11 weekly sessions will explore Christian faith. Watch for sign-up information in early 2023.

Give Now for Eastern Europe Crisis Response

Lutheran Disaster Response is accompanying our companions in Ukraine, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Moldova, as well as such ecumenical partners as Lutheran World Federation and Church World Service, in their humanitarian responses to the crisis. These partners provide refugees with immediate support and supplies such as food, blankets, water, and hygiene kits. Your gifts designated for “Eastern Europe Crisis Response” will be used entirely (100%) to provide support for people impacted by conflict in the region.

Financial Update

When the council gathered to review financial reports through the end of October, there was once again much good news to celebrate. Due to fluctuations in the financial marketplace, our overall financial holdings are down for the moment. But eventually, we'll find ourselves ahead of where we were a year ago. As for income, it's tracking slightly ahead of budget, with expenses under budget by an even greater degree. Thanks to the fine work of Mark Rychak and members of our Property Team we recently received an insurance reimbursement for much of the damage done by inconsistencies in our electrical supply.

With the holiday season soon upon us, please remember that December is the month that makes or breaks the year. If you have fallen behind in your customary giving, or have not yet made your donation for the year, please do your best to catch up by the end of the year. Thus far, things have been coming along just fine. Let's make sure to keep it that way as the year closes and as large, year end expenses start to appear. Thanks in advance for your faithfulness and your generosity.

Birthdays and Anniversaries for the Week: January 8 – January 14, 2023

Jan. 8 - Lindsey Pullin, David Raho, & Thomas Reed, Jr.

Jan. 9 - Macey Whetzel

Jan. 10 - Robert Loftis

Jan. 11 - Emylee Brandau & Rachael Wolfhope

Jan. 12 - Laiken Cassidy, Pat Giunta, & Vicki Karnes

Jan. 13 - Sean Horn

Jan. 14 - Marcie Kovalsky

Remember those that prayer has been requested for:

Linda & Dick, Claudia Plows, Maddie Pierce, Gladys Haupt, Bill & Linda, Jose & Family, Dave, Tom, Lt. Hunter Bergman, and Lt. Dylan Merchant, Harold, Rick, Shirley, Debbie, David, Lauren, Billy, Barb, Sara Solarczyk, Jackie Janak, Jack, Corinne, Joan, Dan, Natalie Zerby, Pastor Scott Custead, Luella Koontz, Al Lindner & Family, Bob, Dawn, Stacy & Josh, Bob Trotter, Bill Layton, Deb Zilch, Bennett, Cassy Sojak, Paul Miller, Keith Mayket, Ruth, Pete, Teplitza Family, Ken, John Nerone, Dane Wisner, Jeff, Irene, Karen, Erin, Susan Dyers, Bob McMullen, Wyatt George, Larry Hockensmith, Jean Pellon, Mike, Corey, Pastor Jonathan & Family, Roxanne Horner, Miriam Horner, Becky Lilja, Kathy P., Al Johnson, Chris, Donna & Danny, Cheryl, Jennifer & Family, Jaime, Matt & Ashley, Landon, Linda Haberkorn, Lorraine, Joe, Donna, Danny & Family, Becky Jo, Bill, Linda & Family, Mary, Mary Jane, Janice, Rick, Don, Mabel Ann, Betty, Cathy, Cindy, Jill, Theresa & Family, Dean, Madi & Family, Patty & Family, Sydney & Family, Paulette, Ron, Andrea, Mary Ann, Midge, Rayford, Lois A., Nicole, Trent, Kyle, Anna, Beverly, Sondra, El Warshel, Audrey Rubis, Carol, Katey, Janice, Trina & Family, Jake Wissinger, Candi Walker, Dave Brehm, Chrissy-Baby Emma, Wyatt, Gerald Barrick, the Shreffler Family, Louise, Kim, Devin, Laura & family, Dorothy, Jo Ann, John Alt, Jan Mertz, Denny, Jill Lisson, Jaci, Dominic Megia, Jackie Hauger, Sharon, Barbara, Louise & Family, Dennis, Mary M., Joel Penrod, Tim Miller, Cathy T., Paul Brodt, Kim Stayrook, April & Schuyler, Alan, Pastor David Louder, Frank Robison, & Sandy.

Condensed Worship for Christmas Eve, December 31, 2022

Prayer of the Day

P: Eternal Father, you gave your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be a sign of our salvation. Plant in every heart the love of the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Numbers 6:22-27

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Psalm 8

P: O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!—

A: you whose glory is chanted above the heavens out of the mouths of infants and children; you have set up a fortress against your enemies, to silence the foe and avenger.

P: When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

A: what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them, human beings that you should care for them?

P: Yet you have made them little less than divine; with glory and honor you crown them.

A: You have made them rule over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet:

P: all flocks and cattle, even the wild beasts of the field,

A: the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

P: O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Second Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Gospel: Luke 2:15-21

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

P: The gospel of the Lord.

A: Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Adams

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from Christ Jesus our Lord and savior. Amen.

Luther Dean.

That name is still etched in my memory, despite the fact that I've never actually met the man it belongs to. Despite the fact that I haven't even heard it in probably 25 years or more.

Luther Dean.

He was the starting running back of my school's varsity football team when I was in elementary school. And he was pretty good. Part of why his name holds a spot in my memory is probably how often I heard it uttered in the particularly unique tone of the public address announcer.

"Luther Dean, the ball carrier picking up a first down for the Golden Lions."

"Luther Dean, moving the chains for Greensburg Salem."

"Luther Dean, with the touchdown."

I can hear his name like it was yesterday. Not twenty-five years ago.

But the other reason his name is etched in my memory is because of his brothers, who also played football. His older brother... Martin. And his younger brother... King. The Dean brothers... Martin, Luther, and King.

Obviously, their parents had something in mind when they named their children. Wanting to pay homage to the important civil rights reader. Maybe even projecting their hopes and dreams onto their babies through the name they gave them.

In Shakespeare's famous play, "Romeo and Juliet," it is Juliet who asks the question, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet..."

She's talking about her beloved Romeo Montague, and the idea that while we use names to distinguish ourselves, that they are just that, just a way to separate. Her love for Romeo was forbidden because of their last names, because of the feud between their families. Had he been part of any other family, their love might have been celebrated.

Sometimes names are just names, but sometimes they are so much more than that. Names have power. Names have history. Names have hopes and dreams.

There are stories behind the names of my two daughters. There are stories behind the names of my brother and I. There's even a story behind the name of that famous civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. He and his father were both actually born with the given name Michael. Michael King, Sr. and Michael King, Jr. It was in 1934 that Michael King, Sr. travelled to the Holy Land, and then to an international conference of Baptist ministers in Berlin, Germany. He was so impressed with what he learned there about the protestant reformer Martin Luther, that he decided change to his name, and eventually the name of his son, too.

Names have power. Names have history. They have stories of hopes and dreams. When we give something or someone a name, we are making a statement about it.

And the same could certainly be said for us as people of faith. Throughout all of history, the names that have been given have meaning, they have significance.

Like the name, Jesus.

The name that been foretold by the prophets of old.

The name that Mary had given her baby following the instructions given to her by the angel Gabriel when he first visited her to tell her the great and terrifying the news.

The name which literally means, "Yahweh saves."

"The Lord is our salvation."

Now is that just a name to differentiate one from another, or is that a name that carries power, significance, a name that has history, a name that has meaning.

Mary and Joseph were faithful and obedient in the birth of their child because they knew, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that they were involved in something much larger than themselves, that they were involved in God's plan to save the world.

And so, 2,000 years later, we continue to celebrate the name of Jesus. The name that is more than a name. The name that is a symbol, that is a sign for all the people that God is merciful and gracious. The name that is a claim, that Jesus is God's only son, sent to save the world. Because Yahweh saves. The Lord is our salvation.

The story behind the name is almost as important as the story of the man who lived with it.

Each one of us has a name with a story, with a meaning, with a significance.

And when we were given our name, that significance was part of it. The hopes and fears of our parents, of our ancestors, gathered together in that name. And in that claim, by that name, each one of us was claimed by the Lord, claimed eternally as God's children. Claimed for all of time as the ones whom Jesus was sent to save.

It's right there in his name. It's right there in ours. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

P: With wonder and thanksgiving for Christ's coming into the world, we pray for the church, the life of the earth, and the whole human family.

P: Holy God, you have given the church the holy name of Jesus, and in him we are your beloved children. Unite us in mission through the power of his Spirit. Make us worthy of the name we bear, the name in which we pray. God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: Renewing God, restore your glory to the earth. Awaken humanity to our kinship with all living things that depend on your provision. Teach us to care for the earth and safeguard its treasures for those who come after us. God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: Peacemaking God, reconcile the nations. Lead those in conflict into negotiation, especially in areas of religious or ethnic strife. End acts of aggression and violence carried out in your name. God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: Delivering God, rescue our siblings in any danger, especially in communities where disaster and disease threaten. Move those in authority to respond with speed and compassion. We pray for the safety of first responders, health care workers, and all who protect us. God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: Healing God, raise up any who are bowed down with illness or sorrow. Deepen our care and concern for one another. We lift to you all who are undergoing transition in relationships, occupation, living situation, or health condition (especially). God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: Saving God, redeem us and grant us eternal peace. We give thanks for the faithful departed who now rest in your undying love, made known to us in Jesus our Emmanuel. God of grace,

A: hear our prayer.

P: Pondering the mystery of eternal love made flesh in Christ Jesus, we commend all for whom we pray to the mercy of God.

A: Amen.

Blessing

P: May Christ, who by his incarnation has filled us with grace and truth, give you peace this Christmas and always. Almighty God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. **Amen.**