

The Gifts of God

By Pastor Nancy Larson
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As we move into the season of Advent, we are pushed more and more toward Christmas. The pressures are all around us to decorate, bake, shop, wrap and act as if we are all the Norman Rockwell image of the perfect family. We all know better. Our lives and families are anything but perfect. We have our shortcomings and flaws. Our family may be made up of a hodgepodge of real people—related or chosen. We may be single, widowed or divorced; we may be unemployed, grieving the death of a loved one or living with a scary diagnosis. Norman Rockwell's America we are not.

This Advent season is about preparation, but not in the ways briefly described above. Rather, we are invited to prepare our heads and hearts for the presence of God that comes in the most unexpected ways. God's presence comes in the baby born of a poor young virgin and her carpenter husband-to-be. God's presence is made real in a Bethlehem cave warmed by the breath of the stabled animals.

To this very day, God's presence surprisingly comes as our spiritual nutrition in the means of grace that is body and blood in bread and wine and Word. We are recipients of God's grace that brings forgiveness of sin, life and salvation. As recipients of these indescribable gifts, we are called and challenged to steward them. We

have the privilege to manage and use them as a means of being strengthened in faith and as a living statement of the power of God to turn death into life, despair into hope, bondage to sin into freedom to serve.



Indeed, Advent is a season for preparation that we may receive all that God has prepared for us. This gift from God of Jesus goes beyond anything we could have hoped for or anticipated. Yet once again this year, in the midst of all the hubbub and flurry of activity, God is at work in our midst, feeding and nurturing us so that we might reach out with these same gifts of God to a desperately needing world.

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel...free your own from Satan's tyranny; from depths of hell your people save, and give them vict'ry o'er the grave.” ELW 257

God's grace and peace be with you all in this time of waiting and preparing.

To download this article or for more stewardship and mission support resources, visit www.neiasynod.org/synod_resources/Stewardship-MissionSupport.asp.

Companion Synod Trip to Hungary

There is still time to join the companion synod trip to Hungary and Eastern Europe May 11-21, 2013. The 11-day trip leaves from Cedar Rapids and includes stops in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Led by the Rev. Dr. Kit Kleinhans, professor of religion at Wartburg College, the trip will include a visit with Bishop Tamas Fabiny, of the Northern Diocese of the Lutheran Church in Hungary.

A \$500 deposit is required with each reservation, with the balance due by Feb. 1, 2013. Arrangements for the trip are through Christian Tours Europe. To learn more, visit www.neiasynod.org/events or contact Kleinhans at Kathryn.kleinhans@wartburg.edu or 319-352-8283.

Mark the date for the Tri-Synodical Conference

“Gospel Ethics Rooted in the Lutheran Confessions” will be the theme of the Tri-Synodical Conference set for Sept. 22-24, 2013, at the Sheraton Hotel in West Des Moines.

Sponsored by the Northeastern, Southeastern and Western Iowa Synods, the event will feature keynote speakers Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson, Dr. Per Anderson, and Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda. Worship services will take place at Faith Lutheran Church in Clive.

Look for more information on the synod website, www.neiasynod.org.