

## The Mission of Christ the King

To Shine the light of Jesus, Reflect his unconditional love, and Mirror his kindness to all people.

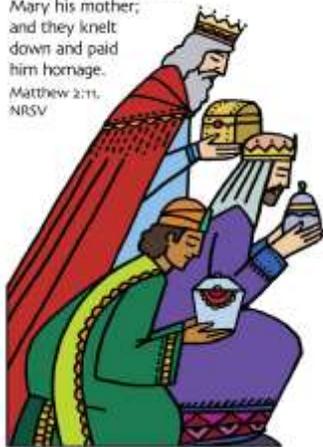


[www.CtKTwinsburg.com](http://www.CtKTwinsburg.com)

### READ ALL ABOUT IT!

- Bishop Eaton's Message p. 6
- Pandemic Relief Available p. 3
- Pastor's Page p. 4
- Shining the Light p. 5
- Youth Happenings p. 5

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Matthew 2:11, NRSV



### CELEBRATE EPIPHANY JANUARY 6TH

The feast of Epiphany ("manifestation") concludes the Christmas season with a celebration of God's glory revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. In Isaiah and Ephesians, that glory is proclaimed for all nations and people. Like the light of the star that guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are: children of God who are claimed and washed in the waters of

baptism. We are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God's love to all people. From *Sundays & Seasons*

The Feast of Epiphany, always on January 6th, is at the end of the liturgical Christmas season. Christ the King has held an evening Epiphany worship service annually, but in the pandemic the 2021 service will be available to view on the Ctk Twinsburg channel of YouTube.com by Epiphany, Wednesday, January 6th.

### 2021 COUNCIL TO BE INSTALLED JANUARY 10TH

The Christ the King Council for 2021 will be installed at 9:30 AM outdoor worship on Sunday, January 10th. The 2021 Council members are President Mike Coss, Vice President Katie Bach, and At-Large Members Bob Coleman, Glenn Fasnacht, Sally Morris, & Karen Reid. At the January 11th Council meeting a Council Secretary will be selected for the year.



Installation of Council

### WORSHIP WITH LESSONS & CAROLS WILL BE JANUARY 3RD

Worship on January 3rd, the Second Sunday of Christmas, will be outdoors at 9:30 AM and will be a service of Lessons & Carols. Listen on 90.1 FM. There will be no communion that Sunday because Pastor Matthew will be on well-deserved, long overdue vacation.



### PREPARE TO "UNDECK THE HALLS"

Watch your email and the *Weekend Messenger* for information about taking down the indoor and outdoor Christmas decorations after Epiphany, January 6th.

### THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD, BAPTISM FAITH STEPPING STONE TO BE JANUARY 10TH

Each year the church celebrates The Baptism of Our Lord on the Sunday after Epiphany. That will be January 10th in 2021. That is the Sunday at Christ the King when we recognize during worship those baptized in the previous year with the Faith Stepping Stone for Baptism. In 2020 Piper Smith and Julien Michalek joined the family of Christ the King through baptism.



**CRITICAL NEED FOR BLOOD DURING HOLIDAYS!**

On Tuesday, January 5th, the Red Cross will hold a blood drive at CtK from 12:00 PM to 6:00 PM. CtK will also host a drive on Tuesday, January 19th, from 10 AM to 4 PM. The Red Cross has announced a critical need for blood donations at this time. Donors should make an appointment at [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org).



On Tuesday, December 8th, 22 pints of blood and one super-red were collected from 31 donors. There were five first-time donors, two of whom had worn shirts whose sleeves would not roll up. CtK was able to help and Shine the Light of Jesus by giving them gently used "Luther is my homeboy" and "God's work. Our hands." shirts that no one had adopted.

CtK Council has approved these additional first quarter 2021 blood drives:

- February 2nd, 12 - 6 PM
- February 16th, 10 AM - 4 PM
- March 2nd, 12 - 6 PM
- March 16th, 10 AM - 4 PM

**REVIEWING WORSHIP NUMBERS IN PANDEMIC**

Christ the King last held indoor worship with Holy Communion on Sunday, March 15th, 2020. The pandemic then threw everything into turmoil. Pastor Matthew began recording weekly Lenten Wednesday and Sunday worship services in his home for March 18th. For Easter Sunday, April 12th, Pastor Matthew asked organist Kevin Basom to join him in recording a worship service in the sanctuary with technical assistance from Julie Groenke.

There is no way to know how many people are actually viewing an online service, but below are the monthly average numbers of views on YouTube for weekend worship beginning with March 22nd, 2020.

On Sunday, June 28th, outdoor worship with Holy Communion was held for the first time at 9:30 AM. Services were held every other week in July, but weekly outdoor worship began the first weekend in August.

While fewer people attend worship in their cars than had attended in the sanctuary, there has been a loyal contingent of worshipers even as the weather has turned colder. The FM radio transmitter has helped tremendously. The average outdoor worship attendance below is since July 1st.

**YouTube Services**

- March - 115 (2 services)
- April - 103.5 (4 services)
- May - 48.2 (5 services)
- June - 39.3 (4 services)
- July - 26.8 (4 services)
- August - 22.4 (5 services)
- September - 24.7 (3 services)
- October - 21.5 (4 services)
- November - 22 (5 services)
- December - 17 (3 services)



**Outdoor Services**

- 44.5 (2 services)
- 38 (5 services)
- 31.5 (4 services)
- 44 (3 services)
- 30.6 (5 services)
- 36 (3 services)

**Every Sunday evening...**

...a Twinsburg-area church serves a free Community Meal from 4 to 5:30 PM. (Meals are carry-out only during the pandemic unless noted below.)



**Location Schedule**

- 1st & 3rd Sundays** - Good Shepherd Christian Church, 9571 Shepard Road, Macedonia
- 2nd Sunday** - Faith United Methodist Church, 2560 Post Road, Twinsburg - limited indoor seating is available; **their clothing pantry is also open.**
- 4th Sunday** - First Congregational Church, UCC, 9050 Church Street, Twinsburg
- 5th Sunday (Including January 31st, 2021, depending on state of pandemic.)** - Christ the King Lutheran Church, 10285 Ravenna Road, Twinsburg

All are welcome for a free meal! (Social distancing is observed.)

**FREE COMMUNITY MEAL AT CTK TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 31ST**



Christ the King is scheduled to host a free community meal from 4:00 to 5:30 PM in months with a fifth Sunday. The next such date is Sunday, January 31st. The surge in the pandemic caused us to cancel the November 29th meal, and the state of the pandemic in late January will determine whether or not the meal will take place. If CtK hosts a meal, it will be carry-out only. (At press time Summit County was under a Stay-at-Home Advisory through January 31st.) Watch the *Weekend Messenger* or talk to coordinator Mary Ellen Robinette.

**DIRECTORY**

**Christ the King Lutheran Church**

10285 Ravenna Road  
Twinsburg, OH 44087  
**330-425-7377**

[www.CtKTwinsburg.com](http://www.CtKTwinsburg.com)



**Reverend Matthew Groenke, Senior Pastor**

[pmatthew@CtKTwinsburg.com](mailto:pmatthew@CtKTwinsburg.com) x109

**Kevin Basom, Director of Music**

**Linda Mondry, Saturday Worship Musician**

**Wendy Gibbons, Office Administrator**

[wgibbons@CtKTwinsburg.com](mailto:wgibbons@CtKTwinsburg.com) x102

Email Wendy to receive this publication via email.

## FROM THE SENIOR PASTOR

JANUARY 2021

Well, what could be said about the year that was 2020? A list of words which I have heard thrown around in an attempt to describe it includes: unprecedented, harrowing, tragic, horrible, etc. Books will be written about the year that was 2020. A global pandemic, social justice concerns, hurricanes galore, election anxiety, were just a few of the events that we experienced. What should our response be to such a time of crisis? God has responded for us on our behalf in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God has and will fulfill every promise, often in the face of and in the presence of a crisis or suffering. Grief and brokenness are all around us, yet God comes to us in the suffering of the cross to bring life out of death, hope out of despair, transformation out of alienation. As we turn the page on 2020, we can be thankful for all the ways that God was faithful and a comforting presence in our lives. The body of Christ known as Christ the King Lutheran Church stepped up to love each other, care for our neighbors, and be a calming presence in the chaos swirling around us.

One of the ways to cope and live in a time of crisis is to spend time in prayer. May the prayer of St. Francis guide and comfort you all.

***Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.  
Where there is offence, let me bring pardon.  
Where there is discord, let me bring union.  
Where there is error, let me bring truth.  
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.  
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.  
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.  
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.  
O Master, let me not seek as much to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love,  
for it is in giving that one receives,  
it is in self-forgetting that one finds,  
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,  
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.***



Living in God's amazing grace,

Pastor Matthew Groenke

**RENEWED STEWARDSHIP**

Christ the King is embarking on the start of a new year. 2020 is over and 2021 begins. We have reset our plans for the upcoming year with:

- Approval of 2021 Continuation & Improvement Plan (budget)
- Forecast to have carryover funds from 2020 into 2021
- Outdoor worship aided by using radio transmission on 90.1 FM
- Meetings & Bible study conducted via Zoom

This is an entirely different way of operating because of the impact of COVID-19 on all of us and our environment.

Members have kept the promise of accepting the safety measures put in place and renewing their promises of Stewardship.

*Sandy Molnar  
Financial Secretary*

<b>NOVEMBER 2020 FINANCE REPORT</b>	
<i>Complete financial information is posted on the kiosk outside the office.</i>	
Operating Income	\$12,138
Other designated income	\$874
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$13,012</b>
Operating Expenses	\$15,953
Other payments	\$1,236
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$17,189</b>
Net (Deficit)	(\$4,177)
Monthly Budget	\$17,062

**MITTEN TREE GENEROUSLY FILLED!**

In 2020, Christ the King decorated a Mitten Tree for The Emergency Assistance Center serving northern Summit County. Thanks to the generosity of our members & friends, CtK gave these winter accessories to those served by TEAC:

- 39 pairs gloves/mittens
- 2 earmuffs
- 23 hats
- 1 scarf
- 1 pair slippers
- 3 hat/glove sets
- 1 scarf/hat set
- 1 scarf/glove set
- 1 hat/scarf/glove set



**ANNUAL REPORT SEASON IS UPON US**

Ministry leaders should start their 2020 Annual Reports. The date of the annual meeting was not set at press time, but reports will be due to Wendy in the office three weeks before that meeting to allow time to assemble and distribute the report booklets for review prior to the meeting.

**CTK COVID-19 COMMUNITY RELIEF FUNDS STILL AVAILABLE IN 2021!**



In December, the CtK COVID-19 Relief Fund was able to provide emergency support to three additional households, bringing the total to 13 households in 2020. Recipients' names are not published to respect their privacy, but all these individuals received crucial help to pay important, often overdue, household expenses, such as rent, car payments, and utilities. In all cases, these are community members who have been unable work or whose income has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last spring, the CtK Council requested \$7,500 to set up the fund, to which the Endowment Ministry generously agreed. Since that time, CTK has distributed just over \$6,000 in 2020. In September, the Endowment Ministry agreed with the CtK Council again to provide an additional \$5,000 grant to support even more people. In addition, CtK members generously gave \$600 to the fund. (Thank you!) This means, the fund still has about \$7,000 available. To maintain the integrity of the fund, payments are only made to third parties (usually companies or banks) and not directly to individuals. Funds may also be used to provide gift cards for food or other essential items.

**Who do you know whose income has been directly impacted by the pandemic? Could they benefit from this assistance?** In several cases, members themselves have told recipients about the fund. Those in need should contact Pastor Matthew, Mike Coss (Council President), or Katie Bach (Incoming Council Vice President) to have their request approved at the next monthly Church Council meeting.

*David Schiopota, 2020 Council Vice President*

**SILVERWARE NEEDED**

Hearts, Hands, and Homes (H3O) is a local organization that collects housewares, some furniture, and linens for people in need. They have run out of silverware to distribute. If you have any extra silverware you no longer need, please consider putting it in the Giving Center bin for H3O. Talk to Karen Reid for more information.

**ALUMINUM CANS RECYCLED!**

In December, CtK received \$1.85 for 6 pounds of aluminum cans.



**WELCOME BACK TO CTK MEMBERS!**

Christ the King welcomes the Reyes family into membership! Parents Stacy & Zar and their son Noah and daughters Alaina & Lea have returned after several years' membership at Rejoice! Lutheran in Hudson. Look for them (in their car!) at worship, and say hi, if you can recognize them with their masks on!

**Shining the Light of Jesus...**

**CONFIRMATION CLASS IN JANUARY VIA ZOOM**

In January Pastor Matthew will lead the monthly Confirmation Class via Zoom for all 7th and 8th graders on a date to be determined. Pastor Matthew will give you the link if your student is interested.

**7TH—12TH GRADERS ZOOM TO SUNDAY SCHOOL**

Mr. David Schiopota, the leader of the 7th - 12th grade Sunday school class, hosts a weekly Zoom group for the class from 4 to 5 PM on Sunday. There will not be class December 27th or January 3rd, but class resumes January 10th. Please contact David if your student wants to participate.

**FAITH WEDNESDAY STUDY ON ZOOM**

Pastor Matthew leads a Bible study at noon on Wednesdays via Zoom most weeks. There will not be class on Wednesday, December 30th. See the *Weekend Messenger* to know what will be discussed that week. Contact Pastor Matthew at pmatthew@ctktwinsburg.com for the Zoom invitation to the class. Everyone is welcome to participate!

**CTKTWINSBURG.COM IS BACK!**

The Christ the King website, CtkTwinsburg.com is back online and up-to-date after it was hacked late this summer. Thank you for your patience in this tumultuous time! Please take a look at it, and let Wendy know if there is information that is missing or outdated.



**MESSAGE FROM AMERICAN RED CROSS**

Despite the challenges presented by COVID -19, you not only kept your regular schedule but provided a tremendous amount of donor opportunity when other sponsors closed their doors. While Christ the King traditionally hosts six blood drives a year, in 2020 you doubled your efforts by welcoming our staff for 12 events that allowed us to collect 289 pints. These units of blood have the power to help up to 867 patients in need, but I imagine that impact extends to their friends and family who are grateful for extra time together.

...by decorating inside & out for Advent & Christmas : Koren Goss, Pastor Matthew, Jillian & Evan Harnak, Jay, Kate, Travis, & Hartland, Sandy Molnar, Karen Reid, David & Janet Schiopota, Jane Zaremba

...by shoveling after December snows: Bob Coleman, Mike Coss, Tom Pituch

...by sanitizing the building: Bob Coleman, Tom Pituch

...by assisting in many ways with worship: Kevin Basom, Kristin Bedford, Bob Coleman, Mike Coss, John Gibbons, Julie & Pastor Matthew Groenke, Linda Mondry, Karen Reid, David Schiopota, Jane Zaremba

...by picking up poinsettias: John & Wendy Gibbons

...by donating Christmas poinsettias: John & Wendy Gibbons, Linda Mondry, Ginger & Tom Pituch, Jane Zaremba

...by Christmas caroling to homebound members: families Bob & Tina Coleman, Mike Coss, Pastor Matthew Groenke, Sally Morris, David & Janet Schiopota

...by putting Baby Jesus in the snow-filled manger during the blizzard at Christmas Eve worship: Aliana Reyes

... by donating chancel flowers for the abbreviated 2020 indoor worship year:

- Bryan & Kristin Bedford
- Glenn & Nancy Fasnacht
- John & Wendy Gibbons
- Julie & Pastor Matthew Groenke
- Patti Jabre
- Rae & Ray Kendrick
- Ginger & Tom Pituch
- David & Janet Schiopota
- Sue Simmons
- Jane Zaremba

## We are never alone

By Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the ELCA

The room was spare and dimly lit. We sat on folding chairs in a circle—young Honduran women and some of us from the ELCA. We had come to Honduras to observe the work of AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities). This is the ELCA's strategy to help youth who have been forced to flee their home countries because of violence, abuse, extortion by gangs and extreme poverty. *Amparo* is the Spanish word for shelter or refuge.

In this case, AMMPARO partnered with the Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonites to resettle returned migrants—those who had tried to seek asylum in the United States but had failed or had been denied and deported back to Honduras.

One by one they told us their stories of fear and desperation. Not a one undertook the long and dangerous trek north on a whim. They told us about the abuse they had suffered, about family members who had been killed by gangs, about the inability to make a living because of the extortion by organized crime. They talked about the bitter sadness of leaving home and family, and the uncertainty of the future.

I remember one young woman in particular. She was pregnant when she tried to migrate to the United States. She had the baby somewhere along the way. She was far from home, mostly alone and desperately wanted her mother to be with her. None of this is what she had hoped for when she was growing up. Circumstances beyond her control had forced her into this new and strange existence. She and her baby were now back in Honduras—but not at home. Home was too dangerous.

Remember last Christmas? Remember all of the preparations, the travel to be with family? Remember the holy beauty of the Christmas Eve liturgy and receiving Christ's grace and forgiveness at his table? The shopping and Christmas caroling? The in-person gatherings? All that has changed.

The pandemic hasn't forced us from our homes but into our homes, sheltering in place, isolated. Not together, but physically distanced. Not gathered with family and friends, but forced apart because of the threat of infection. Forced by circumstances beyond our control into this strange existence. Oh, there will be Christmas carols piped into grocery stores and other essential services, but they will be painful reminders of how life used to be.

We are reminded of the experience of the exiles in Babylon: "By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captives asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land" (Psalm 137)?

I told the young Honduran woman about another young woman who was forced to leave home because of a government decree. She, too, was pregnant and made a long and difficult journey. She, too, was far from home and without her mother when the baby came. She had to find shelter wherever she could. This wasn't what she had hoped for when she was growing up. Circumstances beyond her control had forced her into this new existence.

That young woman was Mary and the child was Jesus. Precisely in our distress, in our dislocation, the Lord shows up. Emmanuel—God with us—makes his home in the very places we find foreign or isolating. The young Honduran woman, and all of us, can find hope because of the birth of Mary's child. There is no God-forsaken place and we are never alone—not in hospital rooms, or sheltering in place, or Zoom calls or on dangerous roads.

Many of us will not be physically home for Christmas, but we are truly home in Christ.

Reprinted from *Living Lutheran* with permission.



Ginger Pituch	1-Jan
Cheryl Stumpf	1-Jan
Lynn Jaskiel	7-Jan
Sharon Straka	8-Jan
Tom Foster	11-Jan
Jason Stahlman	11-Jan
Daphne Jablonski	14-Jan
Allison Bach	16-Jan
Scottie Leverenz	18-Jan
Dana Biltz	19-Jan
John Humrichouser	19-Jan
Dylan Noble	20-Jan
Leatrice Alexander	23-Jan
Wiley Wolfe	26-Jan
Marty Spitz	27-Jan
Kate Hartland	28-Jan
Elijah Groenke	30-Jan



Continue to pray for the successful roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine and for those who are infected to receive strength and healing.



We are not all in the same boat.  
We are all in the same storm.  
Some are on super-yachts.  
Some have just the one oar.  
— *Damian Barr*

# January 2021

For the most up-to-date Ctk information, go to What's New? at [www.ctktwinsburg.com](http://www.ctktwinsburg.com)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																																			
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## The humanity of the nativity

### In his Christmas Book, Luther emphasized the story's realism

By John Potter



*The Shepherds* by Albrecht Durer (1471-1528). The stable is a thatched ruin of Romanesque architecture to suggest the remote. The ox and ass feed in the rear of the stable. Shepherds arrive with bagpipes. Cherubim at the manger contracted Luther's view.

If we had lived in Bethlehem when Jesus was born, would we have believed that this newborn was actually God?

This is the question Martin Luther asked in much of his writing on Christmas and Advent. Typically direct for Luther, the query reflects the concerns of humanity and doubt that permeated his work.

"The human rather than the miraculous aspects of the story interested him," wrote Reformation scholar Roland H. Bainton in his introduction to *Martin Luther's Christmas Book*. "[Luther] was able to compose the incredulous reflections of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Wise Men because these were precisely the doubts with which he was wrestling. The Virgin birth appeared to him a trivial miracle compared with the Virgin's faith."

First published in 1948 by Muhlenberg Press, *Martin Luther's Christmas Book* collects 30 excerpts from Luther's sermons on the nativity, translated and edited by Bainton. A 2017 gift edition from Augsburg Fortress includes illustrations by Luther's contemporaries and two Christmas carols written by Luther—including "From Heaven Above" (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 268), which he intended to be not only sung but acted out.

In these reflections, Luther consistently focuses on the human realism of the nativity story. "One of the things I appreciate is that Luther doesn't spiritualize the birth of Jesus," said Kathryn Kleinhans, dean of Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University, Columbus, Ohio. "He recognizes that the birth of a baby—even the Christ child—involves pain and blood and that the care of an infant—even the Christ child—can be dirty, smelly business."

As a husband and father, Kleinhans said, Luther is able to show a deep appreciation for the reality of Mary's experience giving birth with no midwife or water. "She was flesh and blood, and must have felt miserable—and Joseph too—that she was left in this way, all alone, with no one to help, in a strange land in the middle of winter," wrote Luther in the sermon "Nativity."

Kleinhans added, "He preaches about the fear and the loneliness she must have felt while giving birth. The deep joy of giving birth to the Son of God, the savior of the world, does not take away the pain and blood and work of labor, especially in less-than-ideal circumstances."

Indeed, Luther argued, the difficult realities of the human experience are where God meets us through the Christ child. "The crux of Luther's messages on Advent and Christmas is this: God comes down for us," said Mary Jane Haemig, professor emeritus of church history at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

"Consider each part of that statement. 'God': it is God in the flesh who is in the manger. The lowliness of God offends human reason but should not offend us. 'Comes down': God does not demand that we ascend to heaven; rather, God comes to us, into our lives, our situations, our sufferings. 'For us'—God in Christ comes to do something for us. Christ is not simply an example; rather, he actively changes our lives."

In this way, Luther emphasized that we should feel comforted rather than alarmed by the notion of God joining us in our struggles.

"I would not have you contemplate the deity of Christ, the majesty of Christ, but rather his flesh," Luther wrote in "Nativity." "Look upon the Baby Jesus. Divinity may terrify man. Inexpressible majesty will crush him. That is why Christ took on our humanity, save for sin, that he should not terrify us but rather that with love and favor he should console and confirm."

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In these works, Luther cautioned his audience—and us today—not to think of ourselves as having transcended our humanity. “If only I had been there! How quick I would have been to help the Baby! I would have washed his linen,” he wrote in “Nativity.”

“You say that because you know how great Christ is, but if you had been there at that time you would have done no better than the people of Bethlehem. Why don’t you do it now? You have Christ in your neighbor.”

In the nativity, Luther identified a mission of living out the Christmas story all year by finding ways to care for those in need in our communities. God enters into these ordinary places and, in turn, sends us back into them, Haemig said, emphasizing Luther’s doctrine of vocation.

“Luther’s sermons are not primarily about motivating us to do something,” she added. “They are about announcing God’s work, a work that frees us and carries us back into our ordinary vocations, to serve God and our neighbor in very ordinary ways.”



John G. Potter is a content editor of *Living Lutheran*.

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## Living in Mary’s time

By Karoline M. Lewis



“My soul magnifies the Lord” (Luke 1:46)

Timing is everything, but often the truth of this adage is seen only in hindsight. While we’re in the moment, the purpose of the time in which we find ourselves is hard to adjust into view.

Time has taken on a different kind of meaning these past 11 months. Months seem like years and days like minutes. We can’t tell one day from the next, as the boundaries that mark hours are blurred by homebound life and the upheaval of our rhythms.

Everything we have counted on to give life purpose and meaning—the rituals of life and death, the ways we go about relationships and maintain community, the security of jobs and the satisfaction of outside pursuits—has been taken away by something we can’t even see and by a reality we didn’t want to see. Add a hard-to-swallow dose of political machinations and it’s enough to believe that we’ve been thrust into a different time zone altogether.

We know all of this, but that doesn’t make it easier to accept, especially when we face yet one more holiday that won’t be as it once was. We long for that “once was” time—the pre-pandemic way of life and the pre-George Floyd way of looking at life.

Nostalgia is hard to let go of, particularly when the transitions are abrupt and leave us feeling out of control. And denial is hard to give up when it has worked so well for so many years.

Without our usual places for living out our faith this past year, we’re having to reimagine the spaces God might choose to reveal God’s self—in barns and mangers that, over the centuries, we replaced with buildings and best practices, rubrics and rest-assured structures.

The time in which we find ourselves—as individuals, communities, a nation, a world and a church—is much more than unprecedented. It’s unnerving, unsettling. Upending and upheaving—suspended in that in-between space caused by pandemic and protest, by disbelief and dystopia, by resistance and revolution.

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But as Christians, we know this time well—the time between the *already* and the *not yet* of the kingdom of heaven. The time between *God so loved the world* and waiting for it to come true. The kind of time that Mary understood. The kind of time coiled with the tension between “How can this be?” and “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:34, 37).

This time can feel interminable.

Mary reminds us of this kind of time, gives voice to this kind of time. We have just forgotten it as Christianity became mainstream and even popular, as it became a kind of tame, feel-good spirituality, regularized by denominational affiliations and marked by doctrinal warring. Somewhere along the line we lost sight of the kind of time we are called to keep.

### **For such a time as this**

Such a time as this is the kind of time we are supposed to keep this Christmas—the kind of time between “How can this be?” and “Nothing will be impossible with God.” It’s the kind of time Mary felt in her very body.

You see, it’s a laboring time, one that hovers somewhere in the middle of questions and confidence, lived between fear and love, between doubt and hope. It’s a laboring time born out of a certain kind of love that is known in extraordinary effort and yet palpable apprehension. A love that is bloody and bold. A love that is resilient and fierce. A love that makes you feel as if you’re dying and yet is life-giving.

For Mary, Christmastime is but a microcosm of the time she will be asked to keep her whole life. In John 2:5, she pushes Jesus out the door (“Do whatever he tells you”), knowing who he is and what he has to do. And then she finds herself at the foot of the cross. She births the savior of the world, whose breath will be smothered by the world.

Mary’s song would make our world a different place, a better place, a place where we might even catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God. It’s a song that trusts in God’s future, and it’s sung to insist on making God’s future present for all people.

And so, Mary’s hope is an honest one. She hopes in the endless possibility of God, but she knew the truth of the cross long before we did—that empire silences the protesters, speaks lies for its own gain and crushes those who stand in the way of its privilege.

Maybe that’s why she asked “How can this be?” as she pondered the forces that stifle love with hate. Of course, we know the story Mary did not—where this Jesus movement would go.

When the church is at its best, it embodies the Jesus movement by truly contesting for the kingdom of God. At its worst, the church settles into complacency and complicity, a kind of denominational satisfaction or competition.

We need Mary’s reminder that we don’t know the whole story either. We cling to that honest hope. To do so is to lean into a kind of trust we haven’t had to count on in a long time. The kind of trust that is able to utter, “Nothing will be impossible with God.”

### **Christmastime**

We have to read ahead in Luke to Mary’s song, for it’s here that she sings of the trust on which she drew to move herself from “How can this be?” to “Nothing will be impossible with God.”

We hear Mary’s version of God, who looks with favor upon the lowly; who regards those we would overlook; who calls her blessed; who scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, who brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; who has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. Her God, who has helped servant Israel, in remembrance of mercy, because God keeps God’s promises (Luke 1:46-55).

And because God keeps God’s promises—and all of the promises Mary names—she can lean into God’s possibility while not fully understanding what it means for her, her son or the world. That the birth of her son would upend the world—but not before it made sure to silence him. That the joy of parenting would also mean the suffering of watching her son die. That sometimes favor and regard will also call us to love fervently and relentlessly.

Maybe what will be born from these times in which we find ourselves are new possibilities for how we imagine God’s presence—a presence that we made too predictable by ecclesial practices and expectations, by denominational smugness and theological sparring.

Without our usual places for living out our faith this past year, we’re having to reimagine the spaces God might choose to reveal God’s self—in barns and mangers that, over the centuries, we replaced with buildings and best practices, rubrics and rest-assured structures.

Maybe this was God’s intent all along, why God chose to become one of us—to upend our normal. And maybe this is why Christmas has to come every year—to remind us, once again, that the normal we create isn’t the normal God wishes for us.

As a result, one unspoken aspect of grief in this time of protest, pandemic and partisanship is that the ways we’ve come to know God and embody belief have been taken. We find ourselves asking, “Is what I believe about God still true anymore? Is my faith strong enough to find other ways of expression?”

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In times like these, theology is no longer a given, if it ever was. We are constructing and reconstructing, deliberating and dialoguing about meaning. For Christians, finding meaning always involves asking, "What is God up to in all this?"

The usual reason for Mary's question "How can this be?" is her incredulity about being pregnant. "How can I possibly be carrying a child when I am a virgin?"

But what if, behind her question, lurked a list of additional questions: "What am I supposed to tell my family?" Or "Who is going to be there during labor?" Or "How am I supposed to raise a baby by myself?" Or "Who am I for God to choose me?"

The angel Gabriel anticipates her layered fear: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:30-33).

Because Christmas is not just a day but a way of being.

### Time for new

Every single year, the birth of Jesus upends the world as we know it, especially when the world needs it the most and specifically when the world persists in pretending that the status quo can continue.

What if, this Christmas, we sang Mary's song? A song to sing instead of talking of indifference and intolerance. A song to sing instead of speaking words of hate and fear. A song to sing instead of closing our mouths, unwilling to speak up for or speak out against.

Mary's song would make our world a different place, a better place, a place where we might even catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God. It's a song that trusts in God's future, and it's sung to insist on making God's future present for all people.

How can we sing this song that both comforts the lowly and topples empires, that gives hope to the hopeless and speaks truth to unchecked power? Mary gets from "How can this be?" to "Nothing will be impossible with God" through the promise of the Spirit. We sing because the same Spirit has been promised to us.

That Spirit has been showing up week in and week out, no matter how or where we worship. No matter if it's by Zoom or in a parking lot. No matter if all we have to share at the Lord's Supper is ginger ale and a Ritz cracker.

We might not yet be able to say "Nothing will be impossible with God," and that's OK. We may need to occupy that in-between place a little longer—and we may have to.

This Christmas won't be normal for any of us. But it just might be like that first Christmas, and we might find ourselves not at the inn but in the barn, sitting by the manger next to Mary.

There is no going back to normal. Mary knew that as well. She realized this truth as she found herself between who she thought God was and who God needed her to be. But isn't this the very heart of the gospel?

There was no going back to normal when the women found the tomb empty. There was no going back to normal when Jesus sent his disciples into all the nations. And there was no going back to normal once the Word became flesh.

Maybe this was God's intent all along, why God chose to become one of us—to upend our normal. And maybe this is why Christmas has to come every year—to remind us, once again, that the normal we create isn't the normal God wishes for us.

Christmas is this very promise and perhaps one that can be easy to forget. Before Christmas became presents and pageants, dinners and decorations, Jesus' birth was a threat to those in power. It was a threat to those who, in no uncertain terms, wouldn't allow their privilege to be taken away and to those who had become gods of their own making. Christmas was, if you will, unprecedented.

This Christmas won't be normal for any of us. But it just might be like that first Christmas, and we might find ourselves not at the inn but in the barn, sitting by the manger next to Mary. Waiting for her world, our world, to be changed, even to be reborn. Indeed, it's time for new.



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# JANUARY MESSENGER 2021

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## WORSHIP WITH LESSONS & CAROLS

**9:30 AM Outdoors, Sunday, January 3rd, 2021**  
(No Communion today.)

## EPIPHANY WORSHIP

**Wednesday, January 6th, 2021**

**On CtK Twinsburg Channel of YouTube.com**

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0DyPtpgvHWrYdrFgWQso5A>

## THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

**9:30 AM Outdoors, Sunday, January 10th, 2021**  
**Includes Faith Stepping Stone for Baptism,**  
**Installation of 2021 Council,**  
**Holy Communion**



***Have so many people ever so anticipated a new year?***

**Christ the King welcomes you to our worship, fellowship, and service!**

Sunday Outdoor Worship w/Communion .....9:30 AM  
Listen on 90.1 FM on your car radio.

Worship with us from home weekly at the CtK Twinsburg channel of YouTube:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0DyPtpgvHWrYdrFgWQso5A>

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