

The Fountain

“Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life”

From your friends in
Advent/Christmas/Epiphany, 2004 the NWPAsynod

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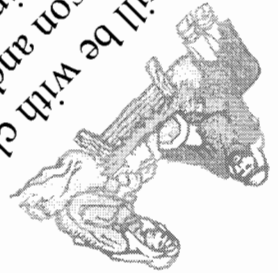
Enjoy Life - ADVENT 2004

Sometimes we get so caught up with the new year that is coming at midnight on December 31st that we forget about the new year that begins for the church on the first Sunday of Advent—this year November 28th. Each New Year, whether on New Year's Eve or the First Sunday of Advent, comes with it the urge to make new beginnings, to renew our hope, to have new expectations, and to make new years resolutions. While all of these may be important, don't forget to take time to enjoy life. I think Mark Twain said it best,

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off your bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

So this year, try and delight in the little things, like feeling the sun on your face or the sound of children laughing. Be kind to yourself. Take time to rest and be healthy. Don't get so caught up in the Christmas rush that you forget to live with the hopeful expectation that Christ is coming again. Give back to those who have helped you, to your community, to your friends and family. Have faith in yourself and the path that God has chosen for you. You pass through this world but once, so be passionate about life and enjoy it.

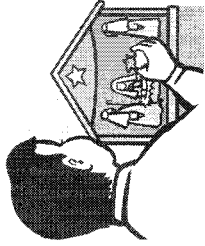
Immanuel—which means
him
The virgin will be with child and will
give birth to a son and they will call



The Fountain
c/o Jeff Ewing
109 West Third Avenue
Warren, PA 16365

ADVENT IDEAS

Advent is a season of hope. It's a time that we are actively waiting for the celebration of Jesus' birth at Christmas. During Advent we remember Jesus coming into our world. We also look forward to the celebration of Christ's presence among us at Christmas and we look forward to Jesus coming again. Here are some Advent ideas you can use with your family, church, small group or Sunday school class



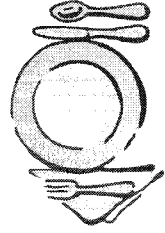
THE NATIVITY: Many families have nativity sets. Each Sunday add one or two more characters to the scene, depending on how big your set is. Be sure to wait until Christmas Eve to add baby Jesus!

ADVENT LOGS: First Lutheran in Warren tells of a special event they had one year: Each family received a small 1/2 log of wood with 4 holes bored into it. They decorated the log with garland, evergreen branches and other decorations. They then put in four blue candles and encouraged families to use it as a table centerpiece. At dinnertime, the family could light one candle during the first week of Advent, two the second week, etc...

COMFY CRIB: Decorate a shoebox to symbolize Jesus' crib. During the four weeks of Advent, whenever someone does a good deed or helps someone, place a piece of straw or colored paper in the box. By the time Jesus arrives at Christmas, there should be a nice, soft bed for him. (from The Coming of Jesus Advent Calendar, Channing Bete (1-800-628-7733))

ADD A CHAIR AND PLACE SETTING:

put an extra plate and silverware out at the dinner table as a reminder that Christ is coming and is welcome in your home.



Movie Clip for Kids: A Humble Beginning

(Scripture: Luke 2: 1-12)

Movie Title: *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (G)

Start Time: 20 minutes, 30 seconds

Where to Begin: The kids look and laugh at the little tree that Charlie Brown bought.

Where to End: The kids decorate the tree and transform it.

Plot: Charlie Brown brings a scrawny tree before the gang as the one he's chosen for the Christmas tree. The kids are disappointed at this humble, little tree. After Linus explains the true meaning of Christmas, the gang uses teamwork and all of their decorations to transform the humble tree into a beautiful one.

Review: You can use this scene to help children understand that King Jesus' coming as a baby in a manger was a very humble beginning. And like Charlie Brown's Christmas tree, his glory is revealed with time and care.

Supplies: White paper and children's scissors

Now Playing:

Say: We're going to watch a scene from *A Charlie Brown's Christmas*. Charlie Brown was asked to pick out a tree for the gang's pageant. Charlie Brown just brought the Christmas tree for everyone to see. Let's watch. Play the *Charlie Brown clip*.

Ask: Why did the gang originally laugh at Charlie Brown's tree? What helped the tree get beyond its humble beginning?

Say: Jesus came for all of us to have life here and in heaven. He came down from being king in heaven to a baby in a manger—what a humble beginning for the King of the Universe! But because he came and was born in a manger, we can know God.

Show the children a plain sheet of white paper and the beautiful sample snowflake that you made earlier. Pass out the white paper and scissors to each child, and instruct the children step-by-step in creating their own beautiful snowflakes out of plain sheets of paper.

Ask: How is Charlie Brown's tree or your snowflake's humble beginning like or unlike Jesus' humble beginning as a baby in a manger?

Excerpted from **Movie Clips for Kids: Faith-Building Video Devotions, Group Publishing (www.group.com)**

Book Review

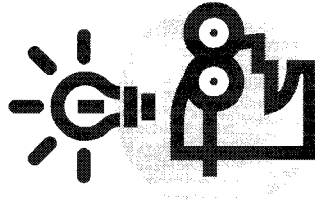
*The Christmas Conversation Piece
(Creative Questions to Illuminate the
Holidays)* by Brett Nicholas and Paul

Lowrie is a book of 300 questions to pose and ponder during a season of deep reflection and unabashed merriment.

Published by Ballentine Books (ISBN 0-

345-40712-1) *264 Great Outreach Ideas For Individual*

Christians and for Churches is one of those books that have some wonderful ideas that are incredibly easy to implement. We use it a lot for families groups of all ages! Their seasonal events section is excellent! One idea they suggest is a "Seasonal Inreach". During Advent, active folks from the congregation can contact inactive members by phone, e-mail, snail mail or personally (always the best way!) and invite them to the Christmas Eve services. If they worship, follow up with another visit, taking the opportunity to talk about the true meaning of that church festival. Joel Heck edits the book and its distributed by Concordia Publishing House (ISBN 0-570-04615-7)



BRIGHT IDEA: I was there!

This idea could work well with Sunday school classes or other groups (women's and men's Bible study, choir, etc....) involved in the church! Have groups choose different characters in the Christmas story. Then have each group write and present a drama based on that character's account. You could videotape each drama and encourage folks to take it home to show their families. Or better yet, show the video as part of your Christmas pageant or during a coffee hour or special congregational meal!

**Pastor's
Corner**

**The main thing is to keep the
main thing the main thing.**

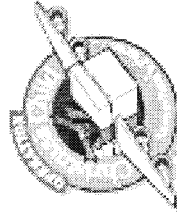
Think about it.

CHRISTMAS SERVICE PROJECTS

During this time of year, people are encouraged to reach out to others with the love of God. Here are a few easy ways you can do that:

ANGEL TREE: Many organizations sponsor angel trees. It's a simple idea. If your church would like to begin one, phone a service organization like the Salvation Army or Head Start and get the names of some children or families who are in need. Usually they will provide you with a few ideas of what the child would like for Christmas. As a family or class, buy presents for the child or children and deliver them to the tree. Set a date for the presents to be brought to church and then deliver them to the organization. Many department stores and malls have this set up already.

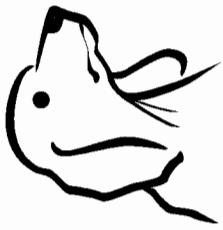
OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD: Operation Christmas Child brings joy and hope to children in desperate situations around the world through gift-filled shoe boxes and the Good News of God's love. This program of Samaritan's Purse provides an opportunity for people of all ages to be involved in a simple, hands-on missions project while focusing on the true meaning of Christmas—Jesus Christ, God's greatest gift. Along with shoe box gifts, millions of children are given Gospel booklets in their own language. In 2003, we collected over 6.6 million shoe box gifts worldwide and distributed them to children in some 95 countries. For more information, check out www.samaritanspurse.org.



CHRISTMAS TREE ORNAMENTS: Decorate some Christmas ornaments and deliver them to the homebound in your congregation. Not only will bring cheer to them during the holiday season, they will know they're not forgotten by their church family. A variation on this idea is to make applesauce and decorate the jars to give as presents!

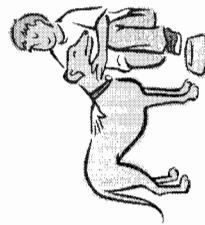
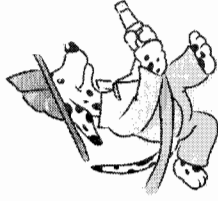
THINGS TO LEARN FROM

A DOG



You know, when you come right down to it, our dog, Jedi is one smart pup—even though she's thirteen! Here's some tidbits I've learned from her and some of her friends:

- ~ Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joyride.
- ~ Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure ecstasy.
- ~ When loved ones come home, always run to greet them.
- ~ When it's in your best interest, practice obedience.
- ~ Let others know when they've invaded your territory.
- ~ Take naps and stretch before rising.
- ~ Run, romp and play daily.
- ~ Eat with gusto and enthusiasm.
- ~ Be loyal.
- ~ Never pretend to be something you're not.
- ~ If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.
- ~ When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by and nuzzle them gently.
- ~ Thrive on attention and let people touch you.



- ~ Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.
- ~ On hot days, drink lots of water and lay under a shady tree.
- ~ When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.
- ~ No matter how often you're scolded, don't buy into the guilt thing and pout. Run right back and make friends.
- ~ Bond with your pack.
- ~ Delight in the simple joy of a long walk

- Taken gratefully from the internet

6. **A team builder is willing to co-operate.** The blended family is not a dictatorship. Leading by example is always the best way to raise children anyway.

7. **A team builder is willing to accept uncomfortable momentary circumstances** in order to build a good working relationship. Shouldn't we all! But this is especially true in the case of the blended family. It may take longer to accomplish a "family goal" . . . but in the end, it's worth it!

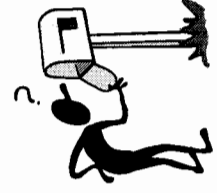
8. **A team builder recognizes the value of trustworthiness.** All children are naturally suspect of blended families initially. That means, Mom and Dad, your credibility is being graded on a much tougher scale the second time around. Be trustworthy -- and be willing to trust your children and stepchildren. Don't make earning your trust too difficult for them.

9. **A team builder does not coerce or manipulate.** Rational persuasion goes much further than step-parent force any day.

10. **A team builder will commit to the consensus of the group.** The only way for a blended family to really "blend" is if each member buys into the concept that this is, in fact, a family now. Especially in this case, the whole is not greater than the sum of the parts.

Team building is a great concept to use to help your blended family "blend."

(Excerpted from the book, *Resolving Conflict in the Blended Family* by Tom and Adrienne Frydenger.)



"It's in the mail!"

No, really, it is! If you got this newsletter from a pastor or a friend, and would like your own copy, just contact the synod office at (814)-677-5706 and you'll be put on our mailing or e-mail list!

Tips for helping your blended family blend better!

Jim Burns, Ph.D.

Outside of the land of television and movies, so-called “blended families” face tremendous challenges. Whereas Hollywood can help their “make-believe” families “blend” rather nicely, real life isn’t always so kind.

When a couple remarries and there are children involved, it’s crucial for this new family unit to really feel like a family. In *Resolving Conflict in the Blended Family* by Tom and Adrienne Frydenger, the authors suggest that one of the most effective ways for creating that sense of family is the “team building” concept. Here’s how it works –

1. **A team builder values other people.** If there are step-children in the home who feel their opinions don’t matter, they’ll be less likely to want to be a part of this new blended family unit.
2. **A team builder isn’t quick to judge the opinions of others.** They know that these differences aren’t necessarily right or wrong – just different.
3. **A team builder views these differences as opportunities for growth.** They provide a healthy variety of thought for creative decision-making. They’re also good starting points for conflict resolution – a must in the blended family!
4. **A team builder is able to identify his own goals and interests.** Nothing will sink a blended family faster than irrational thinking on the part of either or both spouses.
5. **A team builder wants to involve all conflicting parties in the resolution process.** Ever tried planning a “blended family vacation?” It’s an exercise in “conflict resolution” at its best. Better to get all opinions, gripes, scheduling issues, etc... on the table early in the process.

Small-Group Tips:—6 Ideas to Increase the Global-Mindedness of Your Small Group

To get people involved in the church around the world, we must stir them to think about global realities, cross-cultural relationships, and a world much bigger than our own.

1. Turn down the back collars of shirts, blouses, and sweaters, and pray for the countries represented by the labels in your clothes. *Operation World* by Patrick Johnstone is a good resource for prayer information.
2. Get an up-to-date map, choose a country per meeting, and pray for Christians living in those countries.
3. Take a group field trip to a local mosque, Hindu temple, or synagogue and try to interview the religious leader. Don’t make this an evangelistic effort, but simply learn about the beliefs of others.
4. Go to an ethnic restaurant and seek out the owners or hosts with the goal of interviewing them about their culture, their religious beliefs, and—if they are immigrants—their experiences in your country.
5. Assign group members specific countries or nationalities to be researched on the Internet, asking the members to bring a one-page summary to the rest of the group.
6. Go together to a Christian worship service that is different from yours either culturally or ethnically. Use this opportunity to remind yourselves that God’s people constitute a broad range of races and ethnicities. Reflect on Revelation 7:9 in the worship experience, and remind yourselves that you are part of God’s global village.

From “9 Ideas For Global-Minded Groups”, Paul Borthwick

STRANGE BIBLE FACT:

When Aaron and his sons were ordained, Moses had to put ram’s blood on their right ear lobes, right thumbs and right big toes. Exodus 29:20

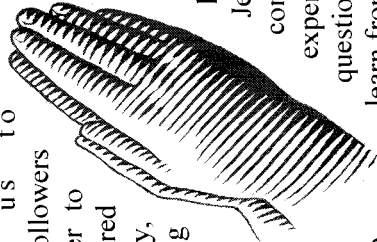
Why? I don’t know—ask your pastor!

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: PRAYER

As Christians we are called to pray, but many of us really don't have a prayer plan or an effective way to diligently pray. So, in an effort to get you up and on your knees, here are some practical ideas on how to begin, continue or jumpstart your time with God. The followers of Jesus approached him with a simple request,

"Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1)

Obviously, the followers were confused and wanted their teacher to help them in their prayer life. They wondered what Jesus might teach them. Most probably, these followers had witnessed Jesus praying in many places. Perhaps they had observed how prayer informed and impacted his life. Jesus embodied love and lived with a deep connection to God. How might they experience the presence of God in their life? These questions remain helpful today. Let us continue to learn from Jesus.



Prayer: A Conversation with a Loving Parent

Jesus shocked his disciples request for a lesson about prayer by beginning with the following words, "When you pray, say, 'Abba' . ." In a single word, Jesus changed our human understanding of prayer and our approach to God. This word 'Abba' can be translated by a familiar slang of 'daddy' or 'papa'. Abba reflects much more of a loving, doting parent who wants to hear the thoughts and feelings of a child. No longer does God need to be seen as a distant, inapproachable judge waiting to condemn.

Instead, we are invited to approach God in prayer like a child who speaks to a loving parent. We offer to God our joys, hurts, wonderment, confusion, disappointment and all that we experience in this life. We extend our thanksgiving to God who listens to every word - the ranting and raving as well as the praise and joy. Like young children, our words of prayer to God might be blurted in phrases, ramblings, or single words. Some of our prayers might flow in complete, complex sentences or perhaps like poetry. Other times, there are no words. The pain is too deep. Like children, we cry, point to our wounds and sigh in silence, because there simply are no words to express the depth of our pain. (Romans 8:26-27) Like a loving parent who listens to a child, God hears. Yes, God truly listens to our prayers!

Prayer: An Intentional Act

Luke in his gospel account of Jesus is very intentional of noting the relationship between prayer and key decisions of Jesus. Jesus prayed at his baptism (Luke 3:21), before he called the disciples (Luke 6:12) and certainly before he faced his own death (Luke 23:46) Not only that, Jesus prayed often (Luke 9:18). Sometimes he would withdraw to deserted places for prayer (Luke 5:16) or even hike up a mountain (9:28).

Thus we learn from the example of Jesus not just the words of prayer, but the attitude of prayer. Our lives are interwoven with prayer and prayer is interwoven in our lives. In addition, we are to be intentional about setting aside time and places for prayer, particularly before decisions.

— *Written by Robin McCullough-Bade*

READY TO GET STARTED? Here are some suggestions to help you on your prayer journey:

Take a TRIP with God

Ask the following questions:

T - Thanks: For what am I thankful?

R - Regret: What do I regret?

I - Intercession: Whom do I need to pray for?

P - Purpose: What is my purpose or plan? (this day, week, my life)

PARTS of Prayer

P - Praise

A - Ask

R - Repent

T - Thank

S - Share

All information for this article is taken from the ELCA's website. Visit them at www.elca.org

Is there something your church or family does that is just awesome? Then we need to hear from you! "The Fountain" is only as good as its contributors - and that's you! Drop us a line at 109 West Third Avenue, Warren, PA 16365, e-mail us at ibe.firstlutheran@westpa.net or call us at 814-723-6450 with your idea!

