

The Valley Evangel

Serving the Members and Friends of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, Arizona

December 2010

Inside This Issue	<i>From the Pastor's Desk</i>	<i>Christmas Choir</i>
<p><i>Devotion: Living for Jesus: In the Light of God's Greatest Gift Page 2</i></p> <p><i>Anniversary CelebrationPage 2</i></p> <p><i>The Christian Conquest of Pagan Rome Page 3, 4</i></p> <p><i>Calendar.....Page 5</i></p> <p><i>About Our Church Page 6</i></p>	 <p>Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel! The Advent season is upon us. In the secular marketplace, the time frame of the season of Advent is already a part of the Christmas season – or more precisely the Christmas <i>shopping</i> season. But in church, Advent serves its own special purpose, in preparing our hearts <i>for</i> Christmas. In Advent we think of the yearning of God's Old Testament people for the coming of the Messiah. And we think of the yearning of our own hearts for the continual coming of Christ to us, in his Word and Sacraments.</p> <p>Special services of Evening Prayer (Vespers) will be held at 7 p.m. on three of the Wednesdays of Advent: December 1, 8, and 15. Our meditations for these services will be based on the words of the much-beloved Advent hymn, "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel." This hymn, in the form in which we sing it, is based on an earlier medieval hymn. It draws on much Old Testament imagery, and applies this imagery to the church.</p> <p>Please join us, and learn and grow with us in these services. May the Lord also bless us in such a way that whenever we sing that hymn again, for the rest of our lives, we will sing it with a greater understanding, a deeper appreciation, and a higher devotion.</p> <p>– Pastor Webber</p>	<p>Choir rehearsals in preparation for the Christmas Eve service will be held before the Sunday morning services on December 5, 12, and 19. Please speak with Carol Webber if you are interested in participating.</p> <p>The starting time will be 8:30 a.m. (Please plan to arrive at the church a little bit before then, so that you can be in the sanctuary and ready to sing at 8:30.) We welcome new singers in all voice parts. Please consider joining us for this important effort to enrich our church's celebration of the Lord's birth!</p>
Worship and Study Times	<i>Ladies Guild News</i>	
<p>Sunday Divine Service: 9 a.m., Refreshments after the Service</p> <p>Sunday School/Adult Bible Class: 10:30 a.m.</p> <p>Thursday Internet Study Group: 7 p.m. (Contact Pastor Webber for log-on information, or attend in person at his residence)</p> <p>Friday Bible Study: 10 a.m. at the Muth residence</p>	<p>The ladies will be serving soup and sandwich suppers on December 1, 8, and 15. Serving will be from 6:00 to 6:30 p.m., before the Wednesday evening Advent services at 7 p.m. Everyone is welcome!</p> <p>Church Christmas decorating will be done after the Bible class on Sunday, December 12. After the decorating pizza will be served. Please consider helping with the decorating. It is a good time for fellowship, and is rewarding.</p> <p>There will be a sign up sheet for funds to help purchase the poinsettias to decorate the church. The Ladies Guild will purchase the plants.</p>	
Newsletter Staff		
<p>Editor: Pastor David Jay Webber</p> <p>Editorial Assistant/Layout and Design: Erica Olson</p> <p>Production Assistant/Printing and Distribution: Sarah Kissinger</p>		
		<p>Angie Kohlgraf, President</p>

Devotion: Living for Jesus: In the Light of God's Greatest Gift



Our devotion for this month focuses on “God’s Greatest Gift,” which, of course, is Jesus Himself. His birthday on December 25th is such a wonderful cause for celebration! As we hear again the story of His Birth, we stand in awe of God’s amazing love for us, that He would send His Son to be our Substitute, and live in perfect obedience to God’s Law for us. As we gaze into the manger in Bethlehem through the eyes of faith, we also know that Jesus came to be our Sacrifice, to lay down His life willingly, as the innocent Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world – yours and mine, too. And through the life, death and resurrection of this little Baby, we know that we have a forgiveness and salvation that is sure and complete in every way. Such amazing love of the Father for you and me, shown in His Greatest Gift to us, is also the motivation and the power for all we do for Him.

One of the best-known Bible verses is John 3:16: “**God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.**” Please notice the progression: first, God’s Greatest Gift is given in love for the whole world; then comes the response of Spirit-worked faith, believing in Jesus as God’s Son and our Savior. In this Season where love is so often shown most lavishly to those who already love us, may we stand in awe of the Father’s Gift of Jesus – His Greatest Gift, given to the whole world before any of us loved Him, given to us whether or not we would receive His Gift in faith, and love Him in return.

What does Christmas mean to you? Whether it is a time to celebrate the birth of your Savior and Lord as God’s Greatest Gift to you in the blessing of

the Holy Spirit; or whether you hardly know Jesus and haven’t really stopped to consider Him: may the blessings of this Season – His joy and peace – be yours now and always through Jesus, God’s Greatest Gift.

Please join us for worship this Christmas Season. And if you do know Jesus as God’s Greatest Gift, thank God for that knowledge! Please share that Good News with someone you love. They just may receive it through the blessing of the Holy Spirit, as the Greatest Gift they have ever received, too!

Merry Christmas to you, and a Blessed New Year in Jesus!

Produced by the ELS Board for Evangelism

Anniversary Celebration

On Reformation Day, October 31, we observed the 25th anniversary of the ELS home mission effort that laid the groundwork for the eventual establishment of our congregation. After several months of exploratory work by mission developer William Kessel, Christ the Cornerstone Lutheran Church was formally chartered in 1985. (The congregation underwent a reorganization in 1996, when the name Redeemer Lutheran Church was chosen.) Dr. Kessel, the original pastor, was not able to be present for the anniversary celebration, but he provided photographs and other materials that were used in a historical presentation for the occasion. Additional photographs from these earlier years were provided by Marcia Brekken. An Oktoberfest-theme luncheon was also enjoyed.



The Christian Conquest of Pagan Rome

The Roman world was brutal and generally indifferent to suffering. Sympathy and mercy were weaknesses, virtues anathema to those of Rome. The ancient world was both decadent and cruel. The practice of infanticide, for example, was widespread and legal throughout the Greek and Roman world during the early days of Christianity. In fact, abortion, infanticide, and child sacrifice were extremely common throughout the ancient world.

Cicero (106-43 BC), writing in the period before Christ, cited the *Twelve Tables of Roman Law* when he wrote, “deformed infants should be killed” (*De Ligibus* 3.8). Similarly, Seneca (4 BC-AD 39) wrote, “We drown children who are at birth weakly and abnormal” (*De Ira* 1.15). The ancient writer Plutarch (c. AD 46-120), discussing the casual acceptance of child sacrifice, mentions the Carthaginians, who, he says, “offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds while the mother stood by without tear or moan” (*Moralia* 2.171D). Polybius (ca. 200-118 BC) blamed infanticide for the population decline in Greece (*Histories* 6). Historical research reveals that infanticide was common throughout India, China, Japan, and the Brazilian jungles as well as among the Eskimos. Dr. James Dennis, writing in the 1890s, showed how infanticide was common in many parts of Africa and was “well known among the Indians of North and South America” (*Social Evils of the Non-Christian World*, 1898). Suffice it to say, for much of the world and throughout most of its history the culture of death and brutality has been the rule, and a culture of life, love, and mercy has been the exception. It is to the cause of this exception that we now turn.

In roughly AD 27, a young Jewish carpenter – in an obscure Roman outpost – began to preach and teach, saying he was the Son of God, the savior of the world, the promised Messiah of the Jewish Scriptures. He claimed to be a king whose kingdom was not of this world – a kingdom without end. This king – Jesus – would

validate all that had been revealed to the Israelites: there was a God and this God, who was hidden from the world, was a personal being who had made mankind in his image because he desired a relationship with mankind.

And so this Holy God further revealed himself – becoming incarnate. God became flesh and dwelt among us to do what only he could do: reconcile the chasm between God and man that sin had caused.

God would implement his plan for reconciling man to God, man to himself, man to man, and man to creation. Suddenly, a radically new conception of reality, the world, and life would take hold. A new ethic and morality would challenge the old. All life would now be understood as precious, the intentional gift of a loving God. The kingdom of God was inaugurated on earth! A new day had dawned, and those who had been drawn into this kingdom began to think and act in new ways. They would strive to live and act in obedience to their king – not their flesh and not their culture.

These early Christ-followers did not organize special interest groups or political parties. They never directly opposed Caesar; they didn’t picket or protest or attempt to overthrow the ruling powers. They didn’t publicly denounce or condemn the pagan world. Instead, they challenged the ruling powers by simply being a faithful, alternative presence – obedient to God. Their most distinguishing characteristic was not their ideology or their politics but their love for others. They lived as those who were, once again, living under the rule and reign of God, a sign and foretaste of what it will be fully, when Christ returns.

They expressed their opposition to infanticide by rescuing the abandoned children of Rome and raising them as their own – an enormously self-sacrificial act at a time when resources were limited and survival was in doubt.

Following the end of the Punic Wars in 146 BC, the breakdown of marriage and the family had begun in earnest. By the time of Christ, Rome was a pornographic culture.

(continued on page 4)

The Christian Conquest of Pagan Rome (continued from page 3)

Marriage was a “loose and voluntary compact” (Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* 2:813). Sexual licentiousness, adultery, marital dissolution, and pornography were widespread. It was into this depraved cultural context that Christians would introduce a radically new and different view of life, sexuality, marriage, and parenting. In contrast to the Roman concept of *Patria Potestas*, according to which fathers had the right to kill their wives and children, Christians taught husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church. *Eros* gave way to *agape*.

The early Christians, acting in obedience to Christ, began to care for the poor, the sick, and the marginalized. So alien were their charitable acts and self-sacrificial lives that the Romans referred to them as “the third race.” In the centuries to follow, even though Christians were still a demographic minority, their care of the poor and sick would serve as the first steps in achieving cultural authority. By being seen as those who reached out to, and cared for, the weak and suffering, the early church would establish its “right to stand for the community as a whole” (John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* p. 8). Sociologist James Davidson Hunter points out: “because Christian charity was beneficial to all, including pagans, imperial authority [political authority] would be weakened” (*To Change the World* p. 55).

Julian the Apostate, the last pagan emperor of Rome, clearly understood the power of these Christians when he wrote the following:

These impious Galileans (Christians) not only feed their own, but ours also; welcoming them with their *agape*, they attract them, as children are attracted with cakes... Whilst the pagan priests neglect the poor, the hated Galileans devote themselves to works of charity, and by a display of false compassion have established and given effect to their pernicious errors. Such practice is common among them, and causes contempt for our gods (*Epistle to Pagan High Priests*).

Emperor Julian clearly saw the writing on the wall. The Roman Empire would not succumb to political upheaval or force but to love, the love of Christ. Julian’s dying words in AD 363 were “*vicisti Galilae*” (“You Galileans [Christians] have conquered!”).

Once imperial power was discredited by the superior life and ethic of the Christian community, the church would build upon its newfound cultural credibility and eventually ascend to the heights of cultural power and influence. And, Western civilization would become the most successful civilization in history.

If I am correct – and the history of the church bears this out – then the most effective approach to changing the culture in our day begins by being a faithful presence. Being faithfully present – obedient to God – in our families, our marriages, our neighborhoods and communities, and our vocations, a presence woefully lacking in the American church today.

I am reminded that our struggle is not against flesh and blood but “against the cosmic powers over this present darkness” (Eph. 6:12 ESV). And how did Christ conquer these powers? By coercive might or worldly conceptions of power? No! Christ overcame the world by the unanticipated and ultimate act of love and humility – he poured out his life on behalf of the world. May we do the same and pray the rulers of our age say on their deathbeds, “*vicisti Galilae*” (“You Christians have conquered”)!

– S. Michael Craven



Adapted from a lecture given at the Troutt Lecture Series on behalf of the Council for Life in Dallas, Texas, on October 7, 2010. © 2010 by S. Michael Craven. Permission granted for non-commercial use.

***Redeemer Lutheran Church
December 2010***

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
			1 Soup Supper serving 6-6:30 p.m. Advent Vespers 7 p.m.	2 7 p.m. Internet Study Group at/from Pastor's residence	3 10 a.m. Bible study at the Muth residence	4 Pastor Webber away for Doctrine Committee meeting and vacation
5 Advent 2 Choir practice 8:30 a.m. 9 a.m. SW with spoken Communion 10:30 a.m. AC/SS Guest Pastor: Paul Siegler	6 Pastor Webber away for meeting and vacation	7 Pastor Webber away for Doctrine Committee meeting and vacation	8 Soup Supper serving 6-6:30 p.m. Advent Vespers 7 p.m.	9 7 p.m. Internet Study Group at/from Pastor's residence	10 10 a.m. Bible study at the Muth residence	11
12 Advent 3 Choir practice 8:30 a.m. 9 a.m. SW with spoken Communion 10:30 a.m. AC/SS followed by Church Decorating; pizza will be served	13 Church Council 7 p.m. (rescheduled from Dec. 14)	14	15 Bible Study at ALRC at 10 a.m. Advent Vespers 7 p.m.	16 7 p.m. Internet Study Group at/from Pastor's residence	17 10 a.m. Bible study at the Muth residence	18
19 Advent 4 Choir practice 8:30 a.m.; 9 a.m. DS Ladies' Guild after the service 10:30 a.m. AC/SS Elders after AC, rescheduled from Dec. 26	20	21	22	23 Internet Study Group cancelled	24 Christmas Eve Bible Study cancelled Choir 6:30 p.m. Candlelight Service 7 p.m.	25 Christmas Day Divine Service 9 a.m.
26 Christmas 1 9 a.m. SW with Spoken Communion 10:30 am. AC (abbreviated) Brunch & Reception at Pastor's residence at 11:30 a.m.	27	28	29	30 Internet Study Group cancelled	31 Bible Study cancelled	

Abbreviations:

DS – Divine Service; SW – Service of the Word; AC/SS – Adult Bible Class/Sunday School

Divine Service – Full Word and Sacrament Service with Communion, on 1st, 3rd and 5th Sundays

Service of the Word – a brief spoken order of Holy Communion follows the public service on the 2nd and 4th Sundays

Refreshments are served after the Sunday morning Services

Redeemer Lutheran Church

7670 East Jomax Road
Scottsdale, AZ 85266

Pastor David Jay Webber

Phone: 480-585-7002

Or: 480-621-7394

Email: jaywebber@yahoo.com



First Class Mail

We're on the Internet!
redeemer.vze.com

Notice!

Audio recordings of Pastor Webber's sermons are posted on the Internet weekly and are linked through the church website.

They are published courtesy of
lutheransource.net



**Evangelical
Lutheran Synod**

About Redeemer Lutheran Church

Our mission is faithfully to preach the Word of God, both Law and Gospel, in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; correctly to administer the Holy Sacraments for the forgiveness of sins; and to reach out to those who have not yet come to faith in Christ Jesus.

