


The Valley Evangel

Serving the members and friends of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, Arizona

January 2017

<p><i>Inside this issue...</i></p> <p><i>Open House/Brunch at the Webbers HousePage 3</i></p> <p><i>Baptism / Ladies Guild / Devotion Page 4</i></p> <p><i>Calendar..... Page 5</i></p> <p><i>About our Church..... Page 6</i></p>	<p><i>Worship and Study</i></p> <p>Sunday Divine Service 9 am; Refreshments after the service</p> <p>Sunday School/Adult Bible Class: 10:30 am</p> <p>Thursday Internet Study Group: 7 p.m. (Ask Pr. Webber for login information)</p> <p>Friday Bible Study: 10 a.m. at the Muth residence</p>	<p><i>Newsletter Staff</i></p> <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> 
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From the Pastor's Desk



On January 3, the new 115th Congress will meet in its first sessions – in the House of Representatives and in the Senate – to begin its legislative work. On January 20, a new President of the United States will be inaugurated, for a four-year term. And at some point in the near future, a new Supreme Court Associate Justice will likely be nominated and confirmed, to fill a current vacancy on the court. We will see before our very eyes a new beginning, of one kind or another, in each of the three branches of government that are established for our country by the United States Constitution.

With respect to the civil authorities, St. Paul gives this instruction to us and all Christians in his Epistle to the Romans:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is

owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.” (13:1-7, ESV)

It might seem odd to us to hear the apostle referring to government officials such as the Members of Congress, the President, and the Justices of the Supreme Court, as “ministers” of God. But that is what he calls them. And in the original Greek, it is the same word that he uses elsewhere in the epistle, when describing himself as “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God” (15:16). As Paul and other Christian preachers serve God and the church by overseeing the administration of the means of grace, and by dispensing the gospel and the sacraments to Christians within the spiritual realm; so also do political office-holders serve God and the country by overseeing the maintenance of public order, and by dispensing justice and protection to citizens within the civil realm. Both sets of activities, in both realms, are carried out in God’s name and by God’s authority. And just as God has established such positions of leadership and responsibility in these two realms, so too are those who serve in those positions accountable to God for the performance of their duties.

There are, however, some crucial distinctions to be made. Pastors and teachers in the church, according to their office, are not responsible for punishing wrongdoers in the larger society with temporal penalties. That is the responsibility of civil officers. The church’s only sword is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). And civil officers are likewise not responsible for carrying out the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the church. That is what the church’s ministers are called to do. And yet, as the people who serve in each kind of office carry out their respective duties, they are all doing the Lord’s bidding, and are serving God’s purposes. This is true just as much of political leaders as it is of religious leaders.

Leaders in the church are or should be accountable to God, by means of their submission to the Holy Scriptures, which provide a full revelation from God regarding the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Leaders in the state are not accountable to God in this way. Neither the Bible nor any other book of Scripture, from any religion, is an authoritative text for the civil laws of our land. Rather, the Constitutional officials of our civil government are or should be accountable to God by means of their submission to “the laws of nature and of nature’s God,” as the Declaration of Independence expresses it, through the use of proper moral reasoning, and in sensitivity to the voice of their conscience.

St. Paul also speaks of this proper basis for public moral order, when he writes earlier in the same epistle concerning what all people know about God by nature. He states that “what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made” (1:19-20). Further on, in a comparison between Jews who have the written Law of Moses, and Gentiles who do not, Paul adds that “when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness” (2:14-15).

What we learn from this, is that while the secular authorities are not responsible for carrying out the distinctive work and mission of the church, and therefore do not need to have the kind of qualifications or abilities that pastors and Christian teachers need to have, they nevertheless are doing the Lord’s work in their capacity as civil rulers, and are his “ministers” in that sense. This is also why we pray for our political leaders, just as we pray for our pastors and other church leaders. We heed St. Paul’s words as found in his First Epistle to Timothy:

“I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior...” (2:1-3, ESV)

Whether the President is a Democrat or a Republican, we pray for him. Whether the Congress is controlled by one party or the other, we pray for its members. Whether the Supreme Court’s recent decisions have leaned left or right, we pray for the Justices. We pray that God will give to those who serve in such governmental offices an ever deeper awareness of their duty to promote civic righteousness, to guarantee equal justice under the law for all people, and to pursue policies that advance public ethics and morality. And we pray that God will give them ever greater wisdom and courage, in knowing in their conscience what the right course of action would be in any given situation, and in fulfilling that course of action for the benefit of those they serve. When they do understand and appreciate their proper role under God, and are paying attention to God’s law as written on their hearts in their promotion of policies that are good for the society, we ask God to preserve them in that understanding. When they do not understand these things as they should, we pray that God would teach and guide them to better thinking, and to better decisions.

What the civil authorities can always expect from the Christian citizens of the country, is an ongoing attitude of respect for them and their offices, and an ongoing solicitousness for their well-being. But what they can also expect from us, is that we will always be lifting them up in our prayers. We will always be asking God to shape their values, and direct their thoughts and actions, so that they will do as God wants them to do, and fulfill their purpose and calling under God in a conscientious manner. We will always be imploring the Lord on their behalf, to show our political leaders the importance of being humble before the God who created them, and who providentially placed them into the offices that they hold. And, as we pray for them, we also pray for ourselves, that our Father in heaven, whom we know by faith through his Son Jesus Christ, would give us greater clarity of thought and conviction in regard to these matters; and a greater commitment to loving and serving our neighbors in the larger society, within and through the political mechanisms that are in place in our land.

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34, ESV).

– Pastor Webber

Open House and Brunch at the Webbers

On Sunday, January 1, there will be no Sunday School or Adult Class. Instead, after the 9 a.m. Divine Service, the members and friends of the church are invited to an open house and brunch at the home of Pastor and Carol Webber in North Phoenix. Please join us as we together celebrate the beginning of the New Year, and our fellowship as a Christian congregation! Directions will be provided in church that day for all who want to come, and who need them.

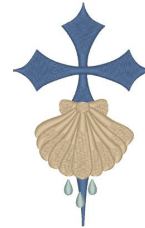
Epiphany Day Divine Service: Friday, January 6, 7 p.m.





Baptism

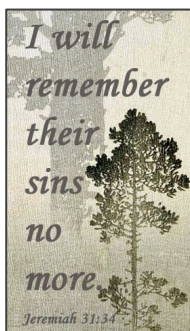
On Sunday, December 18, Arthur William Heine was baptized at Redeemer. His parents are Karl and Stanzie Heine. The Godmother was Arthur's aunt, Amy Webster. Welcome, Arthur, to God's family!



Ladies Guild News

The Ladies Guild held its annual elections, and the following appointments have been made: Carole Clingan will continue as President, Sue Muth will continue as Vice President, Erica Olson will continue as Secretary, Cheryl Hartigan will continue in Hospitality, and Angie Kohlgraf will continue on the Altar Guild. Marilyn Bonnell has been elected as Treasurer.

Devotion: Jeremiah 31:34, I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.



Cleaning stains can be a frustrating task because they can be very difficult to remove. One way to deal with a stain is to cover it up. You can paint over it, but it so often bleeds through again. If it's on the carpet, you can steam clean it, but after it dries it can come right back up. Frustrating!

Sometimes we act as if God deals the same way with our many sins. As if Jesus covers them only to have them come through again for us to be frustrated by their memory. Our mistakes from the distant past of our youth, our missteps from last year, our trespasses from the morning, these can all come back to the surface and affect us with guilt and shame.

But God assures us that he does more than superficially cover our sins. He does something far greater. He forgives them so completely that He forgets them!!! They are gone. It is as if they never existed. All because Jesus Christ took them away on the cross.

We have just entered a new year. Last year's sins are gone because of our Savior, Jesus Christ. How about the sins in this New Year? Oh they've happened already, and they will continue to happen. Old sins will tempt us. New sins will be lurking at home, work, on-line, etc. What are we going to do? We will lay them at the foot of the cross with a repentant heart remembering that God has forgiven us and remembers our sins no more.

Happy New Year!!!

<i>Redeemer</i>	<i>Lutheran</i>	<i>Church</i>		<i>January 2017</i>		
Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
1 Name of Jesus 9 a.m. DS SS/AC canceled Church Un-decorating Open House at the Webber home after the service	2	3	4	5 7 p.m. Internet Study Group	6 Epiphany 7 p.m. DS Morning Bible Study canceled	7
8 Baptism of Our Lord 9 a.m. DS 10:30 a.m. SS/Congregational Forum	9 7 p.m. Quarterly Voters Meeting at church	10	11	12 7 p.m. Internet Study Group	13 10 a.m. Bible Study at the Muth residence	14
15 Epiphany 2 9 a.m. DS Ladies Guild after the service 10:30 a.m. SS/AC	16	17	18	19 7 p.m. Internet Study Group	20 10 a.m. Bible Study at the Muth residence	21
22 Epiphany 3 9 a.m. SW with Spoken Communion 10:30 a.m. SS/AC	23	24 7 p.m. Elders Meeting	25	26 7 p.m. Internet Study Group	27 10 a.m. Bible Study at the Muth residence	28
29 Epiphany 4 9 a.m. DS 10:30 a.m. SS/AC	30	31				

Abbreviations:

DS—Divine Service; SW—Service of the Word; SS/AC—Sunday School/Adult Bible Class
Divine Service—Full Word and Sacrament Service with Communion, usually on 1st, 3rd and 5th Sundays, and on major festivals
Service of the Word—A brief spoken order of Holy Communion follows the public service usually on the 2nd and 4th Sundays

Refreshments are served after the Sunday morning Services.

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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.



We're on the Internet!
redeemerscottsdale.org

Audio recordings of Pastor Webber's sermons, and of entire services, are posted each week on the church website.