

Visions of Hope

December 10, 2017



F4356 State Hwy 97
Edgar, WI 54426

Mission Statement:

Hope's Mission is to teach the Bible and follow Christ's example by giving back to the community and those in need

Website:

hope4centralwi.com

Sunday Worship
9:30 am

Sunday School
8:45-9:30 am

Communion
1st, 3rd and 5th Sundays

Pastor:

Mark Reiff

pastorreiff.hopechurch@gmail.com

920-634-1246 (cell)
715-352-2555 (church)

Secretary:

hopelcsec@gmail.com

Duties List

December 17

December 24 (Cantata)

Ushers

Gary Ludwig

Leroy Syring

Daryl Mueller

Keith Bauman

Greeters

Pam Ludwig

Ken & Rose Schilling

Readers

Acolyte

Madison Borchardt

Riley Bauman



One of my favorite Advent observances is a gift that I received from the three Swedish Lutheran Churches that I have served over the course of my pastoral ministry. Each of these churches celebrated Sankta Lucia on the third Sunday of Advent. Her commemoration day is one of the four Saint's days that help to clarify the deeper meaning of Advent. The other three commorative days are St. Andrew (November 30), St. Nicholas (December 6), and St. Thomas, Apostle (December 21).

Sankta Lucia (St Lucy) is celebrated and observed throughout Scandinavia on December 13, the day of her martyrdom. The story of Lucy is a story of courage and faith in the midst of persecution. Although she was born into a family of privilege she ran afoul of the official religion of the Roman Empire by becoming a Christian. She was betrothed, as a young woman, to an equally young and vain nobleman. But it was he, her betrothed, who betrayed to the Roman authorities because she was "squandering" (as a disciple of Christ) her dowry and inheritance by helping the poor, the sick, and needy. When she was brought before the Emperor Diocletian she refused to deny Jesus and refused to recant her faith in him. Diocletian had her beheaded.

Because her name means "light," she very early became the great patron saint for the "light of the body" – the eyes. Her day reminds us of the powerful teaching of Jesus in Matthew Chapter 6:22-23:

"The lamp of the body is the eye. It follows that if your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be filled with darkness. If then, the light inside you is darkness, what darkness that will be!"

How did this young Sicilian maiden become so popular in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark? Well, I guess, if you had ever been in either of those three countries in December when the sun rises around 10 am and sets before 3 pm with only five hours of daytime light we might understand the appeal of the Saint of light. But there is also a marvelous legend that surrounds Lucia.

One medieval winter, so the pious legend goes, was particularly severe in Stockholm. Food supplies and other necessities of life were running low. Famine quickly overtook the city and diseases that ravaged the people. The community offered prayers to God for deliverance and their prayers were miraculously answered.

Having had a vision of a city in despair, a maiden from the south arrived in the city's harbor with supplies to feed the hungry and to meet their every need. It was Lucy, the Saint of Light, who came to them in their darkest hour. The people rejoiced and the city was saved. God had sent a deliverer.

To this day, Lucia is celebrated throughout Scandinavia during the darkest time of the year. In most households and in churches (and even on Scandinavian Airlines) a young woman is dressed on December 13 in a white flowing gown, signifying purity, with a red sash as the mark of martyrdom, and adorned with a crown of lit candles to proclaim light in the darkness. As she enters the home or church or plane she brings food and refreshments to the family, the church, or the passengers. It is a wonderful way to remember and honor God for the miracles of life that shed light in our darkness. It is this God of grace who comforts, sustains, and nourishes us.

In the churches where Lucia is observed, it was always a time of giving witness to our faith in Jesus Christ by redoubling our efforts to serve others in His name. On the third Sunday of Advent (usually the Sunday nearest the 13) the people of the congregation bring offerings of food for the poor which were carried in baskets to the altar by Lucia and her helpers. At the end of the service this special offering is blessed and then carried out to be distributed to those in need. All of this, even the special Scandinavian coffee hour after the service, helps the community of faith to understand its calling in Jesus Christ to be like Lucia – shedding light in the darkness and serving the needs of the "least of these," our brothers and sisters in need.

Lucia, like the other saints of the Advent season, helps to inform us, in these four weeks, "to seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" as we look to have Him born anew in us on Christmas day. Observe this Advent Season by honoring the light of Christ, which was given to you in your baptism, and by sharing that same light with those who sit in darkness.

Pax Christ, Lux Christi,
Mark Reiff+

.Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2).

We could probably surmise that the wise men were a little more on the ball than Gary was during the skit on Sunday. But that skit does point out that we need to look for and follow the "star", Jesus, during this Advent season.

The Wise men had come a great distance to find the new born King. They had followed the new star as far as Jerusalem when, for some reason, they stopped following the star long enough to inquire of the King, "saying, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?'" We don't know why they stopped; the star had guided them thus far. Nevertheless, they did stop to ask directions, but apparently received none (I am willing to bet, they were non-typical men of their time). But when they left King Herod, the star once again became their beacon to guide them to the baby Jesus.

We don't know how long the Wise Men's journey had already been or how long it had taken them to reach Jerusalem and finally Bethlehem. We can expect that it was about two years, judging by the context of Matthew chapter two; which puts Jesus close to two years old by the time the Wise Men reached Him (not quite the baby in the manger scene that we are so familiar with), but the Nativity scenes all show the wise men in attendance at the time of birth. The point being, however, is that the journey was long. The Wise men traveled many nights to get to the point they were when they came to Herod.

They probably knew they were getting close, especially since they would not be able to go much further before running out of land, and going into the sea. And thinking that they were getting close, they probably thought that someone in the kingdom already knew about the birth of their new king, and had probably already been to see Him and worship Him. So it seemed only natural for the Wise Men to stop and ask directions for the remaining stretch of their long journey. Bad idea, this is where the King got the idea to do away with any male children 2 years old and under. But this was all in God's plan.

There is a quote these days that has made its way to the faces of holiday cards and such. I'm not sure of its origin, but perhaps you have also seen these words, "Wise men still seek Him." And so it is true, for those who truly seek Him are truly those who are wise among men on this earth. But we know that even as the journey was long and wearisome for the Wise Men, so it might also be for us. Like them we become overjoyed at the appearance of the star, as we see it in the new birth that we find in our Lord. The first steps of our journey seem so very easy; our energy is high and our direction is clear. And so we take off toward our destination with great enthusiasm. Only we get lost along the way and need to seek directions. Repent, change direction so-to-speak. If we look to God for our direction, we will be sure to get back on the right path.

But the road becomes long, and it seems at times to be a tedious struggle to press on. It might even seem as though it would be easier to pitch a tent where we are and just stay there for a while--waiting for the star to speak to us rather than just shining. But we know we must press on. And it's the "wise person" that can see the pitfalls of the path they are on.

Then one day we feel that we are so close that everyone around us should know exactly where we need to go--that they too will be familiar with the destination for which we strive, and so we stop to ask directions. Then only to be disappointed because we presumed wrong in figuring out the course and the plans of God, or more likely God's plans somehow don't coincide with our plans. God's final destination for us might be different than what we were hoping for.

We need to put aside our presumptions, assumptions and interpretations of what we are doing and where we should be; and we determine again in our hearts to move forward in the same path that has always been laid before us. And we open our eyes once again to His direction and look for His star, and then we see--and we press on. And at once it seems we realize the journey is going to last us a life time.

Each one of us has a path for us that God has set before us. That path is lit by our personal star found in our relationship with the King of Kings. It may be that we spend hours going in circles rather than moving forward, and second guessing when we must keep moving ahead. In the same manner as we second guess God at times. But in the end we will discover, that so long as we keep God ahead of us, we shall reach our destination--God's will for us--discovered through His only Son who is the focus of our journey.

What is the star you follow today? Is it God's Son? Or has something distracted you from the journey that leads you onward to your Savior? Are we being distracted by our search for the perfect gift, and failing to see the gift that is already ours?

Your servant in Christ,
Rosie Schilling



I am writing to let you know how much I appreciate the Kwik Trip gift card that you sent me in the mail. As a college student, it is sometimes hard to come home as often as I would like due to lack of money. The gift card helped a lot and gave me the opportunity to come home for breaks. Also, thank you for all the love and support you give me as I am pursuing my degree at college. See you all soon!

Katelyn Krause

Hope's Happenings



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| Sunday: | December 10 | Attendance 100 |
| Offering: | Regular | \$1525.00 |
| | Building | \$10.00 |
| | Sunday School | \$9.00 |
| | Loose | \$47.00 |
| | Well | \$120.00 |
| | Sign | \$195.00 |
| | Mission | \$30.00 |
| | Total | \$1936.00 |

Sunday, December 24

NO 9:30 am WORSHIP

5:00 pm "Candlelight Vespers and Cantata"

Monday, December 25—"The Christ Mass"

9:30 am Worship

Sunday, December 31—"The Christmas Story"

9:30 am Worship

Sunday, January 7—"Return of the Magi"

9:30 am Worship

PRAYER CONCERNS: Please remember the following people in your prayers

Dennis Woik—cancer—friend of Chad Bender
 Stan Blaszkowski—internal injuries sustained in fall—Michelle Bauman's dad
 Marge Manecke—health issues
 Corinne Kane—friend of Cassi Bauman
 Linda Krahn—breast cancer—sister in law to the Kamenick's
 Mildred Imhoff—chemo treatment—Ken's mother
 Grace Schraufnagel—cancer—friend of the Streckert's
 John Hamann—home recovering
 Shyra Martyn—breast cancer—Randy and Sara's daughter-in-law
 Don Hanson—health issues
 Leroy Syring—recovering from a stroke
 Paulette Kroll—Myleloid Leukemia—receiving chemo treatments
 Bill Brayton—DeEtta Peterson's brother
 Dylan & Logan Weichelt—sons of Bryan & Stacey
 Sawyer Mueller—microcephaly—Daryl & Beth's son
 Jennifer Bohman—prayers of healing



The Bulletin Board

- There will be **NO Confirmation classes** on Wednesday, December 20
- There is **still room** to donate food items for our local pantries! Due date is December 17. Thank you
- **Saturday, December 16, 6:30 pm** Sunday School Christmas Program practice
- There will be **NO Coffee Hour** on December 17 and December 24
- **Sunday, December 17, 9:30 am** Sunday School Christmas Program
 - Cookie Walk following the Children's Program
- **Office will be CLOSED** December 25-28. There will be No newsletter that week.

Week 2 Advent Skit

