Immanuel

 Church 129

 Shining God’s light for 129 Years

 **Immanuel Church Newsletter December 2020**

**Pastor Pete’s Pen**

**Christmas**

Every year it’s the same, but there is always something new or different. For over 50 years we have had the same menu for Christmas dinner. But Vi always tries to sneak a new recipe on to the table. I remember one year when we gave the turkey the day off and prepared a prime rib. It was marvelous, but we were given a kind appreciation from our family followed by a holiday exhortation to bring back the turkey.

This year Vi has already sent out the menu to our family members. I noticed that only favorite, time-tested holiday fare was listed. However, I’ve noticed her spending more time going through recipe books. I wouldn’t be surprised if she didn’t take the opportunity to introduce a new dish to her family.

We always purchase a live Christmas tree. We started that tradition when our daughter was a baby. We began our excursion by having a cup of hot chocolate and maybe a donut hole or two. Then walked the rows of trees, looking for that perfect tree. That’s when I discovered the principle of Christmas tree shopping. We looked at hundreds of trees, choose some candidates, but each one just not right. But, as soon as another customer began to show interest in “one of our trees” then that tree moved to being the “tree of choice”. Mission accomplished.

Vi grew up in a home where her Dad, being an engineer, would construct some complex, mechanical, outdoor decorations. Synchronized, body and animal parts moving – so festive that people would drive by her home to see what Heiko had put together for this season.

I didn’t realize that her Christmas celebration expectation included an outdoor expression of yuletide cheer. Not wanting to be embarrassed I began to place lights on our roof as well as in a number of trees on our property. Using a ladder was time consuming so I rented an automatic lift that I could operate from the upper basket. It saved a good amount of time until the year the machine became “unbalanced” due to the weight of its payload. With lights flashing, buzzers buzzing and the machine tilting somewhat hazardously, I finally brought the lift safely down. For the past five years our neighborhood landscaping company has put our outdoor lights up. Now all we have to do is plug them in.

It is fun to prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas. But it’s more important to prepare our hearts and minds to commemorate and celebrate the Babe Incarnate, Jesus Christ who was born in Bethlehem.

Whether you have an elaborate or a more simple preparation, you must stop sometime and ponder the real meaning of our Christmas celebration.

Beginning with the angel Gabriel’s announcement to Zechariah and Elizabeth that they would have a son, and the incredible story surrounding John the Baptist’s birth. The angel telling Mary that she would conceive and bear a Son and the faith and humility she examples in proclaiming that she is a servant of the Lord. Joseph’s story of devotion to his faith yet he heard the call of God and yielded his will to God’s will.

The inn keeper, the angels, the shepherds, the wise men, King Herod – the cast of Christmas characters that God assembled – so that He could show the world, show us, his amazing love. The Christ child, described in Philippians 2 – preparing to enter human time and space, to take on the mission of redemption of sinful mankind.

I hope you’ll take time to reflect on God’s love for you, His gift of His Son, and all the benefits that stream to you because He loves you in Christ Jesus. May each of us respond by giving Him our hearts and lives.

**Merry Christmas from Pastor Pete and Miss Vi.**

Dear Immanuel Church Friends, Warm greetings to you all and Merry Christmas!

In a year that has brought us extra time to reflect on what is important to us, December brings memories of past Christmases and hope for Christmases to come.

I’ve noted before that I enjoy thinking about what life was like in Russia for many of our ancestors, and this time of year is no different. But this year I’ve also been thinking about what many of us remember from growing up in Lincoln and attending Immanuel in the 50’s, 60’s, 70’s, and 80’s.

In the Volga region, the people celebrated Christmas with many traditions. It is no surprise that their lives were integrally centered around their faith and their churches. I found it interesting to learn that children in the German Russian villages typically had a Christmas program on Christmas eve. It often started at 4:00 p.m. and consisted of singing songs, and reciting “pieces” or little poems or verses all meant to praise our Savior. At the end of the service each child was given a small gift from under the Christmas tree that was filled with gingerbreads and paper wrapped candies. These candies were called “konfekt”. I still remember when Papa Loos (my Grandfather) would give us grandchildren similar candy. He also called these candies “confect”. They were rectangular shaped candy with a crunchy outside and a soft fruity filling. The candies were wrapped in white paper with colorful pictures of various fruits. I still remember how beautiful those wrappers were. These candies were certainly a treat and something special.

You will remember we learned earlier the Norka church could seat between 2500 and 3500 people. So there would have been plenty of room for the children’s service unlike the Christmas Eve programs I remember as a child. Growing up, on Christmas Eve our church was packed! Sometimes chairs needed to be set up in the aisles to accommodate the crowd. I remember standing in that small room outside the choir loft with butterflies in my stomach and feeling anxious about saying the “piece” I practiced over and over. I am sure the German Russian children felt the same way during their program.

The Christmas Eve programs in the Volga villages started early and so does our Christmas Eve program to this day. Our church continues the tradition of giving out a Christmas goodie “sack” to all who attend the program, just like they did for the children in Russia. I find that a wonderful connection to our past, don’t you?

Often, times in the German villages were quite difficult. These colonists led a much harder life than we do in so many respects. We have been somewhat spoiled by the blessings we have received from the Lord in this beautiful land of ours. The German Russian colonists had their faith and their families to help them through whatever happened. They looked to Jesus and He never failed them.

We do not know what will happen this crazy year. It breaks my heart to see traditions that have continued for hundreds of years being disrupted by this pandemic. But one thing that never changes is our God. We can cling to him for peace and assurance during these unsettling times. It is good to know we can still sing the magnificent Christmas carols our ancestors did. We may not be able to gather in person this year. But we can still cling to those God honoring traditions we love so much. I hope you all will take time to reflect on the reason we celebrate our Savior’s birth. This was a joyous time for them. I hope it is for you.

If you would like to learn more about Christmas traditions in the German villages in Russia go to [www.norkarussia.info](http://www.norkarussia.info). There you will learn so many wonderful facts about the German Russian villages and traditions. For example, did you know that many of their weddings took place between the Christmas and New Year’s holidays? Learn how they decorated their homes for Christmas, read about the special food traditions they had, and even about the folklore of Belznickel, the Christkind, and the Christmas Tree.

We Christians have a wonderful heritage and have so much to be thankful for, especially for our Savior who is “Wonderful”, “Counselor”, “the Mighty God”, “the Everlasting Father”, “ the Prince of Peace”. He is the Lamb of God, the Living Water, the Name Above all Names, Our Alpha and Omega. He is everything!

Frohliche Weihnachten an alle! (Merry Christmas to you all!)

Sherry Pawelko

**Guiding Light Ladies will not be meeting in December.**

**Heritage Club- We have not scheduled anything due to Covid for the rest of the year. Watch the Newsletters and Bulletins for any future Heritage Club activities.**

**Sunday School-**

**Children’s Sunday School**- Due to Covid, Children’s Sunday School will not be meeting prior to the 14th of December. At that time check the website to confirm.

**Adult Sunday School-** Due to Covid, Sunday School will not be meeting prior to the 14th of December. At that time check the website to confirm.

**Bible Study:**

**Lamb’s Club** (Ram’s welcome) Tuesday 10:00am in the Fellowship Hall. Currently is not meeting.

**Adult Bible Study**- Tuesday 6:00 pm in the Fellowship Hall. If you would like to attend via Zoom, you can contact Joe Jensen for details on how to do that.

**Prayers**

Donna Day

Marie Green

Nancy Loos

Harry & MaryAnn Schneider

Tim Hardt

Vangie Brehm

Esther Burback

Margaret Jones

Becky Schenaman

**Birthdays**

2 Olivia Owens

6 Dan Owens

12 Easton Anderson

14 MaryAnn Schneider

18 Katie Brock

18 Paul Krantz

19 Harry Schneider

20 Lewie Bokelman

20 Jordan Loos

21 Lea Brock

28 Payton Owens

31 Lauran Schroeder

Harry & MaryAnn Schneider

**Anniversaries**

30 Terri & Joe Jensen

**Immanuel Military Prayer**

Lord, please hold our troops in your loving hands. Protect them as they protect us. Bless them and their families for their selfless acts they perform for us in our time of need.

Please keep Immanuel’s Military and Law Enforcement Personnel and Families in your prayers. Let me know if I left anyone out, please.

Toby Rekart-Law Enforcement, Kyle Kelley-Military, Dustin Skinner-Military, Chance Huck- Military, Terry Wagner-Law Enforcement