



The

TRUMPET

December
2013

A Monthly Newsletter of **Our Savior** Lutheran Church

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER
AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST.

How to Have a Merry Christmas - only slightly revised!

1. Cards!

- * If they're not fun to send, *don't send them!*
- * If they *are* fun to send, send as many as are fun. Then *stop!*
- * If you want to stay in touch, send a card during boring February. You'll have time to enjoy it; they'll have time to read it, *and* they'll know they weren't just another name on your Christmas card list!

2. Presents!

- * Less with love really *is* more. I am so serious you wouldn't believe it!
- * **DO NOT BURY KIDS!** DO NOT bury kids under piles of loot. Do we *want* to turn excited, happy little children into sweaty, bored little zombies?
- * **DO NOT BORROW MONEY TO SPEND ON CHRISTMAS!** Christ is in charge of our economics. If He wants us to celebrate His birthday on the cheap this year, that had better be fine with us.
- * Last minute shopping? Be cool. Not all crowds are lynch mobs! Some crowds are merry throngs! Think of the shops in Charles Dickens! Pretend you're in A Christmas Carol! Pretend you're Bob Cratchit buying Yuletide stuff on Christmas Eve!! Now you are having fun, you bet!

3. Decorations!

- * Whatever looks like Christmas to you, do it. Then *stop!* Too much more is creepy, like you're a window dresser? Only you're not? Just compulsive? And exhausted? And Jesus wasn't born to put us on a treadmill? Okay?
- * *Interior* decoration (in our souls) is what Christ likes best. And you don't have to take it down after!

4. Food and Drink!

- * Make what tastes like Christmas, especially pickled herring. Then make a little more herring and *stop.*
- * Feasting: *good!* Gorging: bad! Not to mention the time, money, and strength blown on stuff nobody notices in the General Gobble.
- * (Not, happily, that I need to say this at all, but: Only unbelievers celebrate God's birth by getting high.)
- * If you don't *like* pickled herring, give it to your pastors. This is an ancient Yuletide tradition. See, the fish is an ancient Christian symbol, pickled and refrigerated to symbolize the preservation of pure doctrine, with onions emblematic of the bondage in Egypt, and given to the pastors in token of that time in the desert when they got tired of eating manna and complained and the whales fell all over the camp.
- * *Enjoy! Be merry!* Let Christ see us eating and drinking and enjoying being glad He came!

5. *Stuff to Ignore!*

- * Ignore other people's expectations. (It's not their birthday.)
- * Ignore nagging guilt about making Christmas perfect. Christmas *is* perfect, and our families will think so, too, when we celebrate it with gratitude and love. All the rest is BALONEY.
- * Ignore doom and gloom whining about how Commercialized and Secularized Christmas Is Getting. Instead ... think how satisfying it is that the entire Retail Industry depends for its life on the Celebration of your Savior's Birth! Think how nice it is that people who don't even know why still put up the decorations for His party. Think how amazing it is that for a month, anyway, people are going use pictures of Happy Families to sell stuff- isn't it nice that there's still a market for Happy Families? Think how many people are going to be in the stores listening to *our* hymns over the loudspeakers! You can't *buy* that kind of advertising! And think: They may not know Jesus, but they can't help making *some* kind of connection between "Happy Holiday", which they really need, and "Christ is born", which really happened. So, thank Heaven for the incredible PR, use it, and enjoy.

6. *Holiday Blues.....*

Even apart from the busy-ness or tiredness or false guilt we could get into, almost everybody has something about Christmastime that makes them melancholy. Hearing "White Christmas" or remembering people and times gone by - whatever. That's okay. Nostalgia and even sorrow don't have to turn into the blues. Whatever our melancholy thing is, look at it straight in the face and think: There's a *reason* why Jesus came. Look at what He *has* fixed and what He's *going to* fix. We've got a Savior, now, and so we've got a Happy Ending. It's gonna be all right.

7. *Santa-No!*

The Annual Sermonette about Kris Kringle

It's great to play "Let's Pretend" as long as all of us - including the kids - are in on the game. "Do I hear reindeer on the roof?" gets a giggle from the little guys, and it's a very cute way to tuck them into

bed before prayers on Christmas Eve. But don't let anybody in our families forget the difference between things that are real and things that are make-believe.

For one thing, there aren't any little gods. Who sees you when you're sleeping? Who knows when you're awake? Who knows if you've been bad or good? It's the LORD. (For goodness' sake!)

For another thing, how about *this* business: "He's making a list, checking it twice; gonna find out who's naughty or nice" - and who gets the loot. Whether we're five or fifty, being nice in order to get stuff is very slimy. We do not encourage that kind of imitation goodness.

For another thing more, it's not cute to take advantage of child-like faith. Yes, they believe whatever we say - think of that and tremble. So why should there ever come a day when they find out that what we told them just wasn't true? So what? So maybe they get the idea that it's okay to tell fables and believe them as long as they make you feel good. God forbid. So maybe sooner or later they'll wonder whether we were just trying to make them feel good when we told them about Easter and the Second Coming.

But bottom line: *CHRIST ORDERS US TO TELL THE TRUTH - ALWAYS, ABOUT EVERYTHING.*

Now, maybe you've got friends or relatives who'll think you've gotten into some extreme cult - so extreme that it won't even let you lie to your own kids! Yes, well, Jesus put His lambs in *your* arms, not theirs. They may get plain steamed, because they've done Santa all their lives and now you mean to tell them they've been *wrong*?!? The proper answer is, "Well, yeah, Mom. Me, too. But nobody makes a mince (apple, pumpkin, whatever) pie like *you!*" (*Big smooch.*)

It helps if we don't get all judgmental about poor old St. Nick. We've got bigger fish to fry. (If anybody starts on about how Santa Claus* is actually an ancient evil god, and S-A-N-T-A and S-A-T-A-N are the *same letters mixed around!!!*... just sit on them till they get over it.) And we don't need a crusade to enlighten all the kids on the block. There are a lot worse legends around than the jolly fellow who makes old age, white hair, and, uh,... *portliness* look good. Let's just make sure that our own

kids know Santa Claus is pretend. And then read them "Twas the Night Before Christmas".

* Actually, if you really want to know, Santa Claus used to be St. Nicholas, a real bishop from Asia Minor and a terrific Christian who was wonderful to poor kids. (Actually, there's this total legend which I am totally not making up about how he brought this kid back to life after he'd been cut in little pieces and pickled, like herring or something.)

7. *Serious Concerns About All of the Above!*

* If I only do what's fun, I'll be ready for Christmas in a week or two. What'll I do with all my extra time?

* If there's no Santa, no treadmill, no guilt, no exhaustion, no indigestion, and no debt, how will I know it's Christmas apart from the fact that I don't usually bring pickled herring to the pastors?

* See below.

8. *How to Be Merry!*

* Do ONLY the fun stuff and enjoy it to pieces.

* Take advantage of "no-work" merriment

1. See "The Nutcracker."

2. Go look at the store decorations *without shopping*. When you're not shopping, the crowds are all part of the set decorations, like you're in a Christmas movie. The trick is just, no shopping. FREE.

3. Rent woosily sentimental Yuletide movies: [A Christmas Carol](#), [It's a Wonderful Life](#) ("No, kids; angels aren't like that at all"), [Scrooge](#), [A Christmas Story](#) (funny), [Miracle on 34th Street](#) (When the guy says, "Faith is believing when common sense tells you not to" - that's the only time in their lives when kids are allowed to roll their eyes. Roll your eyes *together* - as a family.)

4. Invite somebody for Christmas. FREE.

5. Send Christmas to people without it: *The Christmas Gift for Missions*, at Church, Sunday 12/22.

6. The Imago School's *Lessons and Carols*. 12/19, 7:30 PM at Trinity Congregational, Bolton. FREE.

7. Have Advent devotions with the kids. FREE

8. Serve Christmas Dinner at the VFW (and *lots* of other places!). FREE

9. Buy pickled herring now and give it to your pastors. Give your pastors your pickled herring. Pickled herring, pastors, happiness. Pickled

10. Skate, sled, go walking in a winter wonderland. FREE.

11. Give a *lot* of money to people who are broke.

12. Sing and worship and take Innocence, Love, and Immortality. FREE.

Advent Sundays: 10:00 AM and & 7:00 PM

Midweek Advent Vespers Wednesdays 7:00 PM

Christmas Eve Worship 7:00 PM December 24

Christmas Day Communion 11:00 AM, December 25

Please, beloved: Make it simple, take it easy, have it all.

Merry Christmas, Pastor

P.S. One more time, the pickled herring stuff is, as always, just a little holiday humor. Every year I tell you that and every year Ann's all, "Tell them again, Michael," because otherwise you might think that an ordained clergyman was, like, begging for fish like a seal or something, and then you might take me seriously and then there I'd be, surrounded by quarts and quarts of a high-protein and surprisingly low-cal treat which my mother used to make for me before the angels took her to Heaven - I'm actually an orphan - usually found in the dairy case in jars. (I don't mean that I'm usually found in the dairy case; I mean the herring. Vita is a dependable brand and so is Nathan's. Okay, the sour cream variety is not low-cal, but it is to die for.) So, okay: There is no ancient Yuletide tradition of bringing pickled herring to your pastor. I hope that's clear. And I hope Ann's satisfied.

As for me, it'll be Christmas soon and I'm an orphan. But that's okay. Don't think about it. Also, Pastor Den, who also loves pickled herring (but is not an orphan and isn't even pastor here anymore but up in Manchester with totally other people) will be happy to pick up any herring that anybody might want to leave with me. For him. Not that he's really asking for anything for himself, of course. He just can't stop thinking about this orphan he knows. Which is the real Christmas spirit, as I have told him many times.