



The Messenger
St. John Lutheran Church

155 Fairview Street
West Branch, Michigan 48661
Church Phone: 989-345-0120

Rev. Howard Travis, Pastor
Pastor's Home Phone: 989-312-4637

Web site: www.stjohnwb.org



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December

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PASTOR'S OFFICE HOURS

Monday and Thursday: 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Tuesday and Wednesday: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

No appointment is necessary – just stop by! Please call the office and make an appointment if these times are not convenient (345-0120).

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Dear members and friends of St. John,

You may have heard the terms **venial** and **mortal**, when someone was talking about **sin**. You may have never heard these terms used in the Lutheran church, and had concluded (incorrectly) that Lutherans never make distinctions about sins that are committed by baptized believers in Jesus Christ.

Let's begin by looking at the definition of each of these terms, as described by the first synodical president of the LC-MS, Dr. C. F. W. Walther:

"Venial sins... are sins that Christians commit without losing the Holy Spirit. They are sins of weakness or rashness and are sometimes called the 'daily sins' of Christians. Sins that expel the Holy Spirit and bring on spiritual death are called **mortal sins.**"⁽¹⁾

The next point that **must** be understood is that **any sin** may potentially become a **mortal sin**. By that, I'm saying that you must **not** think about your "pet sins" (like cursing, or having lustful thoughts, telling "little white" lies, etc., etc.) as being **harmless to your spiritual life**. In fact, it's **when** you think of these sins as "no big deal," "that God "certainly would not condemn me for such a trivial offense," it's then, in fact, that **you have lost faith in Christ, and are headed straight for hell**. In short, **all sin should terrify the Christian**.

Let's examine Jesus' own words that He spoke during His Sermon on the Mount:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-19, ESV).

First, we understand that **Jesus has fulfilled** all of God's Law and the predictions of the prophets, by living a perfect life, dying on the cross, and rising again on Easter. Jesus has satisfied the requirements of the God's Law as the perfect substitute for mankind. In effect, Jesus is the Second Adam that came to accomplish what the first Adam failed to do: keep the Law perfectly. The Second Adam's death was accepted as an atonement for the first Adam's failure (and all of his offspring's failures). All of mankind was reconciled to the Father in this redemptive act.

Now, all who believe in Jesus' atoning work on the cross (those who have faith in Christ), are **removed from the condemnation** that would have come upon death, because of their sinfulness. This is precisely where the **false Christian** finds comfort. He or she says, "Yes! Now, I can live in sin and not worry about ending up in hell when I die!" Wrong! (see 1 Corinthians 10:12, Luke 8:13, 1 Timothy 4:1).

The next two verses of our text show the **fallacy** of believing that **sin is "no big deal."** In verse 18, Jesus makes it perfectly clear that His fulfillment of the Law does **not** mean that **sin no longer matters to our Father in heaven**. Not even a little relaxation of the Commandments will be tolerated by God. Verse 19 continues with the understanding that the Christian who relaxes the Commandments to accommodate his or her sinful lifestyle, and then leads others to do the same, will be *"called least in the kingdom of heaven."* Walther states that *"least* means the most

condemned...That will be the sentence passed on them."⁽¹⁾ In other words, they are condemned to **eternal suffering in hell**.

The last part of verse 19, Jesus states that "*whoever does them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*" We, of course, cannot **do** the Commandments perfectly. But Jesus' perfection is imputed to us, because of faith in Him. In essence, we have been declared righteous by God – as if **we** had accomplished perfection.

Walther continues: "**A Christian grieves even over the smallest sins, but unbelievers imagine that they can 'escape from their crimes.'**"⁽¹⁾ Unfortunately for the unbeliever, Jesus says in Matthew 12: "*I tell you, on the day of Judgment people will give an account for every careless word they speak*" (v. 36). However, for the believer, each violation of **even a small**(or "pet") **sin makes our conscience shudder**. God leads us to "grieve" our wretched condition, sinfulness that hurts our Lord with even the smallest of infractions.

This leads us to understand that there is **no such thing as a sin that is venial by nature**. For *every* sin has the potential to lead us to reject God's call to repentance, reject His loving counsel, and instead choose a life of eternal separation from God (allowing our natural, sinful condition to rule and reign in our hearts). **Then, what makes a sin venial?** Our faith in Christ that has **separated that sin from us**, as far as the East is from the West (see Psalm 103:11-12). We live in a state of grace, blanketed by God's forgiveness! In truth, we are forgiven of that sin even before we have a chance to ask God for forgiveness. Forgiveness is instantaneous!

What makes a sin mortal? It's *the* sin (big or small) that leads to acts of continual, willful sin (a state of unrepentance). The Holy Spirit has fled the body after this mortal sin, and that person is lost in sin.

For those of you who have "come to terms" with your "small" sins, St. Paul states: "*work out your own salvation with **fear and trembling**, ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*"(Phil. 2:12-13). There is **no sin** that, once committed, should leave you with **no worries, no regrets**.

And when you feel condemned, that not even Jesus could forgive you of your lifetime of sins, understand this: "*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will scarcely die for a righteous person— though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation*" (Romans 5:6-11, ESV).

May God continue to work repentance in you, that you may know His peace and joy, and are able to wait with anticipation for His glorious return. Amen.

Pastor Travis

⁽¹⁾ C. F. W. Walther, *Law and Gospel, How to Read and Apply the Bible, A Reader's Edition*, CPH: St. Louis, c. 2010, Thirty-first Evening Lecture: June 12, 1885

SOCIAL MINISTRIES

FOOD TRUCK – Our next free food give-away will be January 26th. There will be a sign-up sheet in the fellowship hall for help needed to set-up and clean-up and distribute the food on that date. We are collecting donations of personal hygiene items and cleaning products to distribute at the Food Truck give-a-ways. Individuals in need cannot purchase items such as shampoo, soap, deodorant, toothpaste, or household cleaners with their Bridge cards even though they are needed. A collection basket will be in the fellowship hall for donations. We very much appreciate the support we get from all of you! Very blessed to be a part of this church family! Questions can be made to Lisa or Bev.

PRAYER MINISTRIES

Prayer Warriors are always needed!

Prayer Angels... Please keep your students in your prayers and drop them a note to let them know you are praying for them. *Any questions or concerns? Contact Adele Travis, at 430-6011.*

Praying for you... Have you received a postcard in the mail recently that said, "The Congregation has prayed for you"? As part of the ongoing prayer ministry here at St. John, we pray for the spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing of our members. We also lift up the ministries and outreach of this congregation on a daily basis. If you are interested in praying for these concerns, December Prayer Sheets are available in the Narthex on the cart next to the Portals of Prayer.

LADIES AID

MEETING – The December meeting will begin with lunch at Rancheros at 11:30 A.M. on December 11th with the meeting to follow at the church at 1:00 P.M. We would welcome any and all ladies of the church to come join us!!!

ORPHAN GRAIN TRAIN– In late October, the following items were delivered to the Michigan Branch of Orphan Grain Train in Sebawaing: 77 Quilts, 8 Baby/Lap Quilts, 13 Fleece Blankets, 15 Crocheted Afghans, 12 Dozen Prefold Diapers, and 62 Backpack School Kits.

BLANKET PROJECT – The ladies are working on making fleece blankets similar to fleece blankets with tied edges. We have a newer method of securing the edges and could really use some help! We invite any ladies or men that would like to help, to please join us on Mondays at approximately 12:00 Noon. The project requires no standing or bending over. It is totally a sit-down project!

FAMILY FARE – "Direct your Dollars" – As of November 19th, we have collected 36,892 dollars in receipts. Remember, you must use your "Yes Rewards" card or give them your phone number for the purchase to count as a "Direct Your Dollars" receipt. We have had some receipts recently that didn't count due to not using the "Yes Rewards" card!

MITTEN TREE - Will be in the fellowship hall in December. We will be accepting mittens, hats and scarves, both hand-made and store bought. In addition to the mittens and hats, we will again be collecting underwear (boys and girls sizes 4-8). There will be a basket under the tree for that.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

*Listen, listen God is calling, through the Word inviting,
Offering forgiveness, comfort, and joy.*

Choose a study...And, come grow in God's Word with us!

Sunday Mornings

8:30 a.m. - A Longer Look at the Lessons – Prepare for worship by taking a closer look at the Bible readings for that Sunday's service.

Monday Mornings

10:00 a.m. - We will be finishing the book of James and starting our study of 2 Samuel during the month of December. If you missed 1 Samuel, no Problem, come join us for part 2.

Tuesday Evenings

7:00 p.m. - Women's Bible Study at Jane Tennant's home. A deeper look at Baptism through the Lutheran Difference Bible Study series.

Please note: Men's Tuesday evening Bible Study and Wednesday Morning Breakfast will not meet this month. They will resume meeting in January.

Sunday School Happening

*And the angel said to them, fear not, for behold,
I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.
For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is Christ the Lord.*

Luke 2:10-11

Good News of great joy! That's the message the angels brought to the shepherds. A Savior has been born in a stable in Bethlehem. *Go see!* And, then go share this good news. Yes, it's December and the Sunday School children will be hearing the true story of Jesus' birth from God's Word. Starting with the Angel's visit to Zechariah, then to Mary, and finally to the shepherds. And, all the details in between. It is definitely good news for us and all people. *Jesus our Savior was born!* He came and lived a perfect life, then died on the cross with our sins. But, He did not stay dead, three days later He rose from the dead. Then He ascended into heaven and from there He will come again to gather all believers to live with Him forever in heaven. *Such good news!* We are His redeemed children, sins paid for in full by His precious blood shed on the cross for us. And, for that we can join the angels in praising God and saying...

*Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased.*
Luke 2:14

Upcoming Dates and Events

"Good News" Our Family Christmas Program: Come join us on Sunday, December 23rd at the 9:30 a.m. Worship Service, as we share the "Good News" of our Lord's plan for salvation with you from the fall into sin to the birth of our Savior.

Singing and Ringing Choirs: We will be forming a singing and ringing choir for December 23rd and the Christmas Eve Worship Service. Practice will take place directly following our Advent Worship Services.

Cookies are needed...for the Children's Christmas Program on Sunday, December 23rd at 9:30 a.m. If you are baking and willing to donate about 2 dozen cookies or more for fellowship following the program, please sign up on the signup sheet by the kitchen door, and bring them when you come to worship on the 23rd.

COULD YOU HELP SUPPORT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION?

We are providing Student Leaflets instead of Arch Bible Story books to our Sunday School students this year. We are looking for donations to cover the cost of the student packets. The cost will be \$8 per quarter or \$32 for the entire year. Please put your check or money in an envelope, label it "Sunday School Student Packets", and place it in the offering on Sunday or put it in Jolene's mailbox.

EVANGELISM / OUTREACH

Prayer cards are being sent letting you know that we are praying for your well being. I would like to challenge each of us to invite our family and friends to visit us for a Saturday evening or Sunday morning worship service and invite them to enjoy some fellowship with us after service Sunday morning. Who knows one invitation could potentially lead to another member joining our church family. Wouldn't that be wonderful!!

I have created an event for our Take Two and one-half day for Dec. 15, 2017 following children's Christmas program practice. Children from our congregation and the community have been invited to attend so parents can take 2 1/2 hours for themselves.

There are plenty of car window decals still available. Check with Dennis if you are interested and would like one or two.

There has been a Thrivent Grant applied for and approved to help purchase advent devotions for our Sunday school children.

Giving Thanks! Through a Thrivent Grant, we were able to purchase and distribute children's Seek and Find Advent devotion books to the day cares in the area. And, share the "Good News" with this community.

How to Escape the Christmas Madness

by Rev. Hans Fiene

Advent is not pre-Christmas, you have been told. Advent is not a series of mini-celebrations of Christ's birth. It is a season where we focus on repenting of our sins and on waiting for the arrival of Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory and the Babe of Bethlehem.

That is, of course, all true. But let's face it: sometimes it's really hard to celebrate Advent the way you ought to when the demands of celebrating Christmas, both the true version and the secular version, are weighing you down. With parties and presents, candles and credit breathing down your neck from the moment Thanksgiving ends, it's not always easy to have the proper Advent frame of mind.

But Christ wasn't born of Mary to burden you with more stress than you already have. He was born of the Virgin so that He might carry all your burdens to the cross. The Word of God didn't become flesh to add more guilt to an already guilt-ridden season. He became flesh to take away your guilt by forgiving your sins through the shedding of His blood. And because the Jesus Christ at the heart of Christmas is also at the heart of the Advent season, His mercy and forgiveness always can and always will give comfort to those who hear His Word during the time of the Church year when we prepare for His arrival.

So if you find yourself overwhelmed on the First Sunday of Advent, unable to focus because you only managed to check off 50 percent of your door-buster Black Friday gift list, pause for a moment. Take a deep breath. Listen to the Gospel reading about Christ's triumphal entry. Listen to God's Word tell you about His Son arriving in Jerusalem as your king, as the One who now rules you in mercy and love through His Word and Sacraments.

This is the Jesus who did more than stand in a crowded line at four in the morning to give you His gifts. This is the Jesus who won the gifts of eternal life and salvation for you through His death on the cross and who now pours them out upon you in the waters of Baptism, in His body and His blood, and in the preached Word. So, on the first Sunday of Advent, when you need to step outside of the Christmas madness, take a moment to hear of Jesus Christ, who is with you now.

If you find yourself stressed out beyond belief on the Second Sunday of Advent, incapable of paying attention because you haven't finished your daughter's snowflake costume for her school's Christmas concert, or rather "Winter Extravaganza," relax. Listen to the Gospel reading about John the Baptist preparing the way of the Lord.

Listen to God's Word tell you about the One holding the winnowing fork. This is the Jesus who has done more for your daughter than completing her concert costume. This is the Jesus who will come again in glory to gather your daughter, you, John the Baptist, and all believers to His side on the Last Day. So, on the Second Sunday of Advent, when you need a break from the Yuletide overload, take a moment to hear of Jesus Christ, the One who will call you worthy of eternal life on the Day of Judgment.

If you look down at your fingers on the Third Sunday of Advent and find you've bitten your nails down to the quick because the Christmas bonus that you have depended on for the last five years to

buy your wife's present is going to be one-fifth its normal size, be calm. Listen to the Gospel reading about John in prison. Listen to God's Word tell you about the One who will give sight to the blind, life to the dead, and good news to the poor.

This is the Jesus whom God promised would be your Savior, regardless of your paycheck's size. This is the Jesus whom John the Baptist identified as the Redeemer of both rich and poor alike. So, on the Third Sunday of Advent, when you need to wake up from your Nativity nightmare, take a moment to hear of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who is coming soon.

And if you find that, on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, your head won't stop spinning about how you are going to pick up your parents from the airport, finish wrapping everyone's presents, walk the dog, and get everyone dressed before 7 p.m. on December 24, inhale. Exhale.

Listen to the Gospel reading about the angel's proclamation of the Christ Child inside the womb of Mary. Listen to God's Word tell you about Immanuel, God with us, who will soon be here to carry your burdens and those of all mankind.

So, on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, when you want to find relief from a season that has buried you in an endless pile of guilt and worry, take a moment to hear of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born to take your guilt and worry from you.

Advent is not pre-Christmas. It is not a series of mini-celebrations of Christ's birth. But Advent is a season of hope, a season rooted in waiting for the arrival of Christ's mercy. And so, whenever the demands of preparing for Christmas weigh you down and wear you out, Advent is always there to build you up by showing you the love of the Savior for whom you wait. Whenever the stress of celebrating our Lord's birth fills you with sin and shame, Advent will never fail to give you the forgiveness of Christ, whose birth we joyfully prepare to celebrate.

Rev. Hans Fiene, Pastor, Mount Calvary Lutheran Church, Denver, Colorado.

A Second Judgment?

Question: At death I believe that Christians, while absent from the body, are present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). At death unbelievers are forever lost. So judgment came at death. So how can there be any judgment at Christ's second coming (Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10)?

For all human beings, physical death-which is the penalty for sin (Rom. 6:23) is "the point of no return," "life's last portal" (*LSB 797*). The opportunity for repentance and faith comes to an end. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it: "*It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment*" (Heb. 9:27 ESV).

Those who die believing in Jesus Christ as their Savior will receive the gift of eternal life. To the believers in Smyrna the apostle John wrote: "*Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (Rev 2:10). At the moment of death, believers can be certain they will be "with Christ" (Phil. 1:23) as they await the resurrection. No such promise is given to those who remain in unbelief until they die. Rather, we hear the sobering words of Jesus: "*Whoever does not believe is condemned*

already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18; see 3:36). *“When the wicked dies, his hope will perish,”* says Proverbs (11:7). Although the New Testament does not use precisely this language, physical death for each individual sets in concrete God's judgment regarding that person's eternal destiny.

But the formal, public pronouncement of God's verdict - and sentence will take place in the final judgment when Jesus returns. *“He is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead,”* the apostle Peter declared in Caesarea (Acts 10:42). On that final day, following the resurrection of the dead, all people must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). To those who have believed in Him - having produced by the Spirit the good works that follow faith - Jesus will say, *“Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matt. 25:34). To those who have not believed in Christ and His Gospel (thus failing to do works that please God; cf. Rom. 4:22-23), the Righteous Judge will speak the frightening words, *“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matt. 25:41). The door has been forever shut (Matt. 25:10).

The Bible's breathtaking promise that *“He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us ... into His presence”* (2 Cor. 4:14) brings hope and peace to Christians who face death.

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CHURCH ANNOUNCEMENTS

2018 FLOWER CHART — A new flower chart for 2019 will be posted on December 6th. There are many opportunities to sponsor flowers for the altar. Please take a few moments to sign up for a special date. Remember, flowers are \$15.00 and the Ladies Aid would like them paid for when you sign up.

DECALS — Been noticing St. John window decals in the cars in the parking lot or around town? Want one for your vehicle/vehicles? There is no charge . . . just ask Patty Rohman or stop by the church office to get one.

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT — St. John Lutheran has entered into an agreement with AuSable Valley Community Mental Health that allows them to use our facility for certain activities during the week. Part of this agreement is that our congregational members will keep confidential the names of people that are using our facility. Please observe this agreement by never mentioning the names of people that you may have seen. Also, remind others of this agreement if you hear of a visitor's name being mentioned. Thank you for your cooperation. Executive Council.

Reminder: There is a box in the Narthex for giving to the **Ogemaw County Clergy Association**. This money is collected hygiene items, for the purchase of food, personal home heating fuels, and funeral expenses for people in Ogemaw Country that are unable to afford these necessities. Make checks payable to Ogemaw County Clergy Assoc. Thank you!

EMERGENCY PRAYER REQUESTS — St. John has developed a system that allows us to rapidly contact all members when a life threatening situation develops, requiring immediate prayers. We are requesting cell phone numbers (for text messaging) or e-mail addresses for all members. For those who don't use e-mails or text messaging, phone calls will be made. Please request a salmon-colored form from the office and return it when completed. Thank you.

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

12/04 – Eleanor Hanft
12/05 – John Curnow
12/05 – Shawn Darling
12/10 – Bill Pourcho
12/11 – Linda La Tulip
12/15 – Corey Bertossi
12/15 – Brei Anna Bertossi
11/15 – Anthony Bertossi
11/15 – Bret Bertossi
11/29 – Ervin Schilke

