

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

Have you ever consider the wonder of **a newborn baby**? Babies are totally reliant on their parents for everything. They are without a doubt the most helpless, and by worldly standards, the most inefficient creatures on the face of the earth. After all, they can't contribute to the economy. They can't earn their keep. They can't even take care of themselves. All they do is demand constant attention and care. But they're also the most precious, and wonderful gift that God can give to Christian parents. A newborn baby can be summed up with one word: **Potential**.

It must have been amazing, that evening almost 2000 years ago, when the angels appeared to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks. The idea that the promised Messiah, the one that people had been waiting for, for more than 2000 years, had finally appeared in the flesh. Speaking of *potential*: wow! – this child born to poor parents in a forgotten village in the middle of nowhere, promises to be the **savior of the whole world**. That's some pretty big shoes to fill. But this was no ordinary baby – this was God in the flesh – God made man.

Since the Garden of Eden, when God had created man in his own likeness, **man had the potential to be God's greatest creation** – His foremost achievement. After all, man was created to walk in the shadow of God's greatness – to praise Him, and to love Him and others with a perfect love that only God could bestow. Man was to be in constant and complete communication with God – a relationship that defies our mortal ability to fully comprehend it. But that relationship was severed by man's disobedience to his Creator. And the potential of man and woman was cut short in an instant. Man chose to live apart from God, separated by sin - a condition that a perfectly holy God could not allow.

And then, along comes the answer to the broken relationship between God and man: a baby lying in an animal feed trough. The potential for this new born was greater than most people of that day could comprehend. Only Simeon, a devout and righteous man, and Anna, a prophetess, appear to know the true potential of this child. Simeon responds to God, at the sight of Jesus: "*For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel*" (Luke 2:30-32).

Yes, the revealed Light has come into the world, and we have been brought from darkness to that very Light. Through our **baptisms**, we were born again. We became **new creations**, and **the potential for us** is greater than we can comprehend. God is working to help us live out our potential. He works through His Word and the Sacrament of Holy Communion to feed us and attend to our spiritual needs. He helps us to see our sinfulness, and points us to His forgiveness in Christ Jesus. He gave us our congregation as a place where we can grow in His wisdom and His knowledge. He's gifted us with physical, mental and spiritual gifts and abilities, and places us where we can use our gifts and abilities to His glory. God sees the true potential for us, and He releases that potential when we trust in Him, and step out in faith –seeking to bring glory to Him.

This Advent season is a time of reflection and potential. We reflect on our need for a Savior – we see ourselves honestly and correctly when we see ourselves as totally corrupt and unable to change by our own strength or willpower.

But **we see our *potential*** when we see what our Lord has planned for us: a new life in Him! **We ask God** to help us change, to turn from the sin that we know is damaging our relationship with Him and others. **We ask God** to prepare our hearts so that we can truly appreciate the fullness and richness of His love that manifests itself in a baby lying in a manger, and the God-man dying on the cross for us. **We seek to grow closer to our Lord**, so that our potential is made known – so that God’s will is accomplished in us. And over time, God reveals to use the great potential that He had planned for us since the beginning of time. May this Advent season be a time when your potential as God’s child is revealed in new and blessed ways.

Blessings to you, and a very merry Christmas,

Pastor Travis