



Inside

Christmas Program
Page 9

Mission & Outreach Prayer Team
Page 4

Special Worship Services
Page 3

Turkey Dinner
Page 2

PUBLICATION DEADLINES:
Messenger of Light
noon, December 15
for the January issue

Illuminations
1:00 p.m. Tuesdays
for all weekly newsletters

Fan into flame the gift of God within you.
2 Timothy 1:6

Ablaze – Faith & Action

January 25, 2009 – February 22, 2009
Pastor Randall Neal

On January 25, 2009, we will begin a five week congregation-wide effort to expand our own faith in Jesus Christ and explore ways we can share that same faith with others. Our theme will be: Ablaze – Faith & Action.

I. GLOBAL WORSHIP & MUSIC

Music is one of the universal tools cultures and peoples from around the world use to express their religious beliefs and cultural identities. Each week during our Ablaze effort Katie Wareham, Zion's Director of Parish Music along with Pastor Neal will lead us as we explore and experience a variety of music, praise, and worship styles used by various global Christian churches, especially those heavily represented in our own Hopkins area.

***Latin America * Africa
African-American * Asia
*Global Music Festival***

II. TABLE TALKS

led by Pastor Neal
For the five weeks of our campaign Pastor Neal will lead a Bible Class series beginning Sunday, January 25th at 9:40 am in the Fireside Room (#104). Each week he will lead a lively discussion based on the people and customs for the featured culture that week. Some religious cultural churches like to bounce and sway in dance, hands clap different rhythm patterns, and voices cry out "Hallelujah" praising the name of the Lord. Other groups prefer a slower and quieter approach.

Is one more God pleasing? The insights and applications of this study are relevant in our time. Grab a cup of coffee and join your friends around the table for a lively session each Sunday.

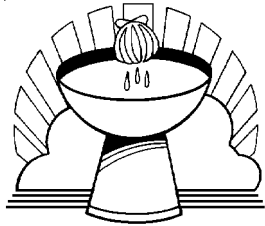


III. ACTION TEAMS

– Twelve (12) member teams who plan and implement a mission/outreach/servant event/effort will be formed. Five (5) weekly planning sessions beginning Wednesday, January 28th from 6:30-8:00 pm in room #104 (Fireside Room) will be led by Teresa Hassing, Zion's Director of Media and Office Assistant. During the five weeks Teresa will lead these teams through the formation of a plan to the actual carrying out of the event/effort. Some possible plans may include: (a) serving at Our Savior's Lutheran Homeless Housing project in Minneapolis (b) Managing a Christian tract/information area at Bethesda Thrift Shop in Hopkins. (c) Assisting with Latch-key kids in our area one afternoon a week from 4:15-6:00 pm. (d) working with the Somalian, Mexican or other immigrant populations in the Hopkins area. (e) others

WHAT IS ABLAZE? Is the name created by the LCMS to define the overall efforts by congregations and partner church bodies to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with those who do not yet know Him. The goal for all churches involved is to reach 100 million unreached and uncommitted people with the Gospel by 2017, which is the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.

Official Acts of Zion



*Jaidee Keyana Goehring
November 23, 2008
(daughter of
Nick & Niya Goehring)*



*Naomi "Nikki" Maybell Laub
August 16, 1927 - November 2, 2008*



As I See It

by Padre Howie Krienke

Linda and I have been enjoying our new home theatre with the wide screen and incredible sound! Our house has a set of new Wellington windows and I can watch the Vikings lose on our new wide screen TV. So much of this was provided by the generous gifts for the entertainment center from the congregation and additional cash gifts from many people. Thank you wonderful people from Zion. We hope to invite you over to see it!

On Martin Luther's birthday, November 10, I had surgery to receive the radioactive seeds for my prostate cancer treatment. It was my first tyme under general anesthesia! Quite the experience. Praise God I was 65 before my first major treatment. Because of the radioactivity of my body I cannot be in contact with our grandchildren, be around kids under 18, or pregnant women for four weeks. Hence my low profile, I tear easily as I think of our little ones, Henry, William and Alexa.

I will be able to enjoy them as we spend our first Christmas in Arizona this year. So that's how I see it! God bless you and all your loved ones!



Annual Christmas Turkey Dinner Wednesday, December 10

sponsored by Zion's Youth Ministry

The dinner begins at 5:30pm. Everyone is invited! We are serving Turkey, Stuffing, Mashed Potatoes, Corn, Cranberry Sauce, Salad, Dessert and beverages. A freewill offering will be taken. Money will be used to help support youth attending Zion sponsored events in the coming year. Our local Thrivent chapter will be matching donations up to (and possibly over) \$400.

Zion's Needy Families Christmas Fund



Zion's Board of Human Care is asking for contributions to enhance the Christmas celebrations of families of Zion. Please mark a pew envelope "Zion Needy Families Fund". We are seeking these donations until December 14. Please help if you can.



**Monthly Financial Summary
October 31, 2008**

Actual	Projected	Actual total	Projected total
<u>Month</u>	<u>monthly</u>	<u>to date</u>	<u>to date</u>
\$64,566	\$75,449	\$633,705	\$754,490

EXPENSES (\$876,653 = projected annual – 2008)

Actual	Projected	Actual total	Projected total
<u>Month</u>	<u>monthly</u>	<u>to date</u>	<u>to date</u>
\$73,285	\$73,054	\$719,582	\$730,540

Current bills due but not yet paid = \$55,116

General & Mission Offerings for October = \$53,819 (\$64,702 projected per month; \$14,931 per week)

Building Fund Offerings for September = \$12,693
(Our monthly mortgage payment is \$10,747; \$2,480/wk)

Building loan balance = \$1,247,486

The Blessing Tree

Zion has something new to help us thank God for our blessings. We have a tree placed in the Gathering Area and the only decorations on the tree are lights. However, under the tree are baskets full of Christmas ornaments, as you enter the Gathering Area, think about the blessings you received during the week. Place an ornament on the tree in remembrance of your blessings. And yes, we can place an ornament each week that we enter God’s house. Let’s fill the tree with ornaments as we thank God for all He has done for us!



From The LCMS Foundation

How can I avoid income tax and simplify my giving at the same time?

Federal legislation has opened new stewardship opportunities to strengthen ministry! The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 allows an individual over the age of 70 1/2 to make a gift up to \$100,000 from an individual retirement account (IRA) to ministry without increasing taxable income.

The gift to ministry also counts toward the individual’s minimum required distribution. This provision in the legislation is sometimes called the IRA Charitable Rollover.

If you are interested in taking advantage of this special rule contact your IRA account administrator for the necessary paperwork to complete the transfer.

To ensure that the transfer qualifies, the check from the IRA account administrator should be received by the ministry by December 31, 2008, or at the very least mailed to the ministry with a U.S.P.S. post-mark date of December 31, 2008 or earlier.

Please contact The LCMS Foundation if you have any questions by calling 1-800-325-7912 or visit our website www.lcmsfoundation.org.

Special Christmas Services

<i>Advent I Worship</i>	Wednesday, December 3	12 Noon & 6:30pm
<i>Advent II Worship</i>	Wednesday, December 10	12 Noon & 6:30pm
<i>A Night in Bethlehem</i>	Saturday, December 13	
	Festival	3:00 p.m.
	Music Worship Service	5:00 p.m.
<i>Advent III</i>	Wednesday, December 17	12 Noon & 6:30 p.m.
<i>Christmas Eve Worship</i>	Wednesday, December 24	4:00 p.m.
<i>Candlelight Worship</i>	Wednesday, December 24	10:00 p.m.
<i>Christmas Day Worship</i>	Thursday, December 25	10:00 a.m.
<i>New Year’s Eve</i>	Wednesday, December 31	5:00 p.m.

These services are in addition to our regular Saturday & Sunday Worship Services. Please join us.

Music Ministry

Dear Friends at Zion,

Thank you so much for the prayers, thoughtful cards, and words of support and encouragement during my surgery recovery! The love of Christ is so evident here! My surgery went very well and the recovery is also progressing well. God's peace to you!

In Christ,
Katie

Christmas Choir

If you love to sing to the Lord, you are invited to join Zion's 2008 Christmas Choir. All adults and high schoolers are welcome.

Rehearsals: (must attend both)

- Thurs., Dec. 18, 7:30pm
- Tues., Dec. 23, 7:30pm

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service:

- Warm-up at 9:00pm
- Prelude music starts at 9:40pm
- Candlelight Service at 10:00pm

Contact Katie Wareham, 952-938-7661, with any questions. Hope to see you there!

“Carol Our Christmas”

Carol our Christmas, an upside-down Christmas:
Snow is not falling and trees are not bare.
Carol the summer, and welcome the Christ Child,
Warm in our sunshine and sweetness of air.

Sing of the gold and the green and the sparkle,
Water and river and lure of the beach.
Sing in the happiness of open spaces,
Sing a nativity summer can reach!

Shepherds and musterers move over hillside,
Finding, not angels, but sheep to be shorn;
Wise ones make journeys, whatever the season,
Searching for signs of the truth to be born.

Right-side-up Christmas belongs to the universe,
Made in the moment a woman gives birth;
Hope is the Jesus gift, love is the offering,
Everywhere, anywhere, here on the earth.

by Shirley Erena Murray of New Zealand

“Regardless of where they live, many sing of Christmas from the perspective of North America and Europe. Perhaps Christina Rossetti expressed this perspective best in her famous hymn “In the Bleak Midwinter” where “Snow had fallen snow on snow.” I recall being in the airport in Lagos, Nigeria just before Christmas in 1989. It was sweltering and the air conditioning was not working. After waiting for my delayed flight for several hours, I heard over the airport sound system the refrain of “I’m dreaming of a white Christmas”—something that Nigerians have never experienced. While they may seem appropriate examples of liturgical inculturation from a Euro-North American perspective, it is in fact unlikely that snow fell in Palestine at the time of Christ’s birth.

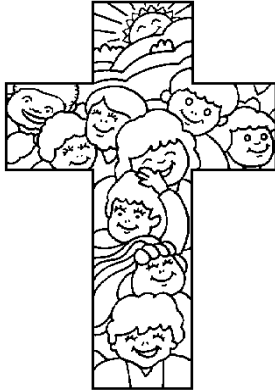
“What is important is that those who sing at Christmas sense that God was made flesh for all people in all places. “Carol Our Christmas” places the Incarnation within the culture of [the composer’s] homeland of New Zealand, a land in the southern hemisphere where Christmas is celebrated during the summer. Falling snow gives way to green foliage. Like the shepherds in Palestine at the time of Christ’s birth, the shepherds of New Zealand shear their sheep at this time of year. The message of Christ’s birth has cosmic implications regardless of where we view it from earth.”

(Excerpt taken from *Halle, Halle: We Sing the World Round* by Michael Hawn.)



Mission and Outreach Prayer Team

meets Thurs., Dec. 18, 1:30pm. Join us as we pray for God’s mission around the globe and Zion’s involvement in outreach at home and abroad. Please contact Carolyn Bachman, 952-935-5909, or Katie Wareham, 952-938-7661, for more information or if you have any specific prayer requests.



Children's Ministry

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them. For the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:14

Sunday Morning 9:40am -10:40am

Sunday School is the place for making friends and learning how God's love makes every day better! The teachers will get your kids into the Bible, so the kids can get the Bible into their lives.

*During both Worship Services and the Education Hour, the Nursery is open and staffed.

Sunday School Schedule

Sunday, **December 21** and **Sunday, December 28** for Adults and Children remain the same time. Children's Classes are modified. **Grades K - 5th are meeting in Room 207. Pre-K and younger the Nursery will be open and staffed.** Classes resume as usual on **January 4**.

Christmas Service Celebration

Practice is scheduled for:

Saturday, Dec. 6th 9:30am-11:30am

- All children in the 3 Yr. Old Class – through 8th grade.
- Narrators in Senior High
- All manger scene people

Christmas Service Celebration will happen Saturday, December 13th at 5:00pm

Baby Jesus Haystacks

Make haystacks to represent baby Jesus lying in the hay in the manger. This is really easy. No oven involved, just the microwave.

- 1 package choc chips
- ½ cup peanut butter
- 4 cups chow mein noodles
- mini marshmallows

Melt choc chips and peanut butter together for 1 min in microwave, stir, and microwave for additional 1 ½ min until melted. Add chow mein noodles and stir with 2 spoons/ forks as tossing a salad.

Drop onto waxed paper.

Add a marshmallow to represent baby Jesus.

What's Up! Wednesdays

What's Up... What? It's the new format for kids on Wednesday evening from 6:30-8:00pm. As we learn of the all the earthly things God has given us and by using the gifts of our minds, hands and imagination we'll have a hands on, eye-opening, or just one of those "**WHAT'S UP**" with that evening. Mark your calendar for Wednesdays!

- **Grades Kdgt through 5th Grade.**
- **Scripture Seek and Find**
- **Activities and games focused on the Scripture Lesson for the Night**
- **Have a "project" that reflects the Scripture Lesson from baking, carpentry, sewing, drama, rockets, model making, and more.**
- **Parents and adults will have the opportunity to participate and have fun with us.**

So What's Up with Wednesday – Come and experience for yourself and you'll leave thinking — "**WHAT'S UP**" next week!!"

Wednesdays at Zion

No classes or After School at Zion on December 24 or December 31. **Classes resume January 7.**



Youth Ministry

Zion Student Ministry Information and Upcoming Events

Zion Student Ministry Mission Statement

To create an environment where youth are encouraged to grow in relationships to God and others and learn to spread the love of Christ.

As of today, Zion's Student Ministry has earned over \$78 – just from people searching the web and shopping using the GoodShop Link. Do you buy shoes, clothes, electronics, or flowers on the web? If you do that through Goodshop, our Youth Ministry would earn a percentage of your purchase. If you have questions about what to do, contact Lisa Day.

Calendar Stuff

Events for All Youth

2009 Summer Juarez Mission Trip

Registration Deadline – DECEMBER 1 (Or, for you Spanish speaking friends it would go something like this??? La Matrícula del Viaje de la Misión del verano Juarez Fecha Tope – 1 de diciembre) God is so amazing for giving us this wonderful opportunity to serve Him in Mexico and this is a great way to THANK GOD for everything He has done for us. If you are in 8th-12th grade, this trip is for you! We will also be taking applications to fill 2 “Junior” counselor positions. If you have graduated High School but will not be 21 in August 2009, consider filling one of those positions. Talk to Lisa for more information.

Youth Mission Trip Chaperones are wanted. If you over 21 and are interested in hearing more about adult expectations and the trip, please talk to Lisa Day.

Youth and Adult HELP is needed for our Annual Christmas Turkey Dinner. All youth are asked to bring a pumpkin dessert (pie, bars, etc.). In addition to bringing a dessert, we REALLY need workers. On Wednesday, come to Zion as soon as you can after school – to help finish decorating, setting up, working in the kitchen, and then serving. Parents and other adults are MORE THAN WELCOME to lend a hand as well. Proceeds will be divided between those youth families who volunteer (based on the hours you actually work).

Confirmation Ministry

Confirmation Classes START AT 6:30pm

except during Lent and Advent Wednesdays. On Parent nights classes start in the church – and will still start at 6:30pm, on non-parent nights, classes start at 6:30pm in the Fellowship Hall. Please be respectful - your help is appreciated in making sure you are here on time.

The Confirmation Advent Schedule is used for the 3 Wednesdays in December (3, 10, & 17): Come for Worship at 6:30pm and then go to the Fellowship Hall where Lisa is leading ‘interactive’ classes on the New Testament. These classes are also part of our Confirmation Ministry and attendance is taken.

NO CONFIRMATION classes will be held on December 24 and December 31 – and our Regularly Scheduled Classes resume on January 7, 2009 in the Fellowship Hall.

Confirmation Parent's Night is not schedule for December. The next Parent's Night is Wednesday, January 14.

Poinsettia Facts...

Christians use them to represent the Star of Bethlehem.

They are tropical shrubs, which have about 100 different species and reach heights of up to 12 feet tall in their natural habitat.

The Aztecs used them to dye clothing and cure fevers.



Events for Sr. High Youth Only (Grades 9-12)

Sunday JAM - for 9th-12th graders - is led by Mike Schumacher. Mike is using Nooma videos and other creative resources throughout the year to help you grow in knowledge and faith. Sunday JAM will not be held on December 28.

Wednesday JAM – Kate Dressel is leading this group again. This class is currently looking at “Jesus Did It” a Bible Study in a Can – it’s an “Experiential Multimedia” opportunity complete with hands on activities and prizes. This is also open to all 9th-12th graders and their friends. On December 3, 10, and 17, you will meet after church until 8:00pm. Wednesday Jam will not be held on December 24 and 31.

Winter Retreat

A Sr. High Overnight Event at Camp Omega

This two day event will allow high school students to grow in the Christian Faith while having a blast with other youth from Minnesota. Activities include snow tubing with tow rope, broom ball, Christian growth, games, singing and devotions. You can either download the REGISTRATION FLYER from www.campomega.org or pick one up from Lisa Day.

You will register with Camp Omega.

Transportation arrangements will only be made for those who talk to Lisa on or before December 21. I won’t be able to make transportation arrangements for you if you don’t inform Lisa.

Dates: December 29, 6:30 pm to December 30, 2008, leaving Zion at 4:30 pm on Monday with a stop on the way down for dinner (bring money for this), and returning at about 4:30pm on Tuesday.

Cost: \$32 per participant

2nd Annual LUTSEN Snow Retreat

Again, we are traveling to Lutsen this year to enjoy the snow – either skiing, snowboarding or just having fun ‘up north’. The dates are January 16-18, 2009 (Friday-Sunday). There is no school on Monday so we are staying a little later than last year. We are leaving at 4pm (or as soon as possible) on Friday and return at about 9:30 pm on Sunday. Cost is \$160 (not including ski/board rental).

This includes all meals on Saturday and breakfast/lunch on Sunday, 2 nights lodging, 2 full day lift tickets, swimming & hot tubbing at the Grand Marais Recreation Center, and transportation. Need to Rent? Handle this on your own before we leave: go to www.lutsen.com ; click on “Plan & Buy”; select “Rentals”; decide what you want and finish your purchase online(this saves time and money). Pick up a liability and registration form from Lisa. Forms and money must be turned in by January 7.

Events for Jr. High Youth Only (Grades 6-8)

Sunday Jr. JAM - DARE TO BE DANIEL – Our Director of Student Ministries, Lisa Day, is very excited to be teaching our 6-8th graders this year. We are currently looking at the bold witness of Daniel and discovering from him some ideas for our lives that can help us stand firm and share our faith in Jesus Christ. Classes are from 9:40-10:40 on Sunday mornings.

Confirmation Information - don’t forget to read the important Confirmation Information listed in this section.

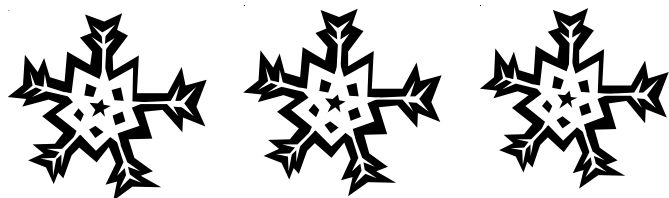
Winter Daze!

A Jr. High Event at Camp Omega

Come to Camp Omega for a fun filled day. Activities include snow tubing with tow rope, broom ball, Christian growth, outdoor games, singing and devotions. Either download the REGISTRATION FLYER from www.campomega.org or pick one up from Lisa Day. TURN YOUR REGISTRATION and Money in to Lisa Day on or before December 21. I won’t be able to make transportation arrangements for you if you don’t register by that time.

Dates: December 29, 2008 Leave at 8:45am; Return at 4:15pm.

Cost: \$12 per participant



Treasure Seekers

A Ministry for Young Adults

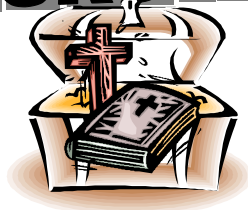
Winter Sleigh Ride

What: Winter Sleigh Ride & Bonfire~

When: Saturday, December 6th

Time: 3:00-6:00pm

Where: @ Rock Isle Sleigh Rides, 8050 Hwy. 5, Waconia



*** ALSO! Join us each Sunday at 9:40 for Faith Cafe~ Room 208, Coffee & Bible Study!

Save the Date!!

What are YOU doing for Valentine's Day? Coming to Zion for our Adults Night Out!!

What: Spaghetti Dinner & Entertainment

When: Saturday, February 14th @ 6:00pm

* Presented by Zion's Treasure Seekers

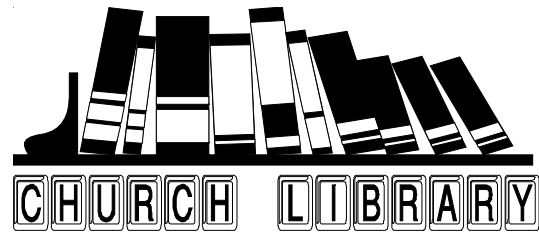
(A Group for 20-30 Something's) Watch for more details!



Our Lutheran History

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1 December 1523 | The Reformation began in Strasbourg, France. |
| 3 December 1483 | Nikolaus von Amsdorf, a friend and co-worker of Martin Luther, was born. Amsdorf fought for a faithful following of Luther's doctrines after Luther's death. |
| 6 December 1664 | The oldest congregation in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, St. Matthew's, New York City, was chartered. |
| 8 December 1849 | The Wisconsin Synod was organized as "die erste deutch evan-luth Synode von Wisconsin." |
| 8 December 1947 | <i>McCullum v. Board of Education</i> was argued before the Supreme Court. At question was the possible violation of the First Amendment by religious education in public schools. |
| 15 December 1789 | Congress amended the Constitution with ten amendments known as the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment protects the freedom of religious expression and outlaws any form of State religion. |
| 20 December 1552 | Katharina (von Bora) Luther, wife of Martin Luther, died. |
| 25 December 1521 | Andreas Karlstadt, pastor of the Wittenberg City Parish Church, gave Communion in German and allowed the laity to take the bread and wine in their hands. |

8



One of the larger collections in our Library is the Primary Children's section.. We have secular, as well as religious stories. There are a number of fine books concerning Christmas. One of these is "The Very First Christmas" by Paul Maier. We have a complete series of Bible stories published by *Guideposts* – one for every week of the year! There is also a series of Goosehill Gang books, plus many large picture books for reading aloud. You will find many other books of interest, including a Children's Bible. Some of these books are on display during December, as well as a few children's videos celebrating Christmas.

Special Note: Please do not block the Library desk or the various book and video displays with movie screens, video carts, or other equipment. It is difficult for the Librarian to move this equipment. Thank you for granting this request.

Thank You

Thank you to the generous people who donated to the *No-Bake-Bake-Sale*. We raised \$1,039.00! Praise God! The money will be used for kitchen care and Zion's Library.

Christian Women's Fellowship

Groups

a Night in Bethlehem™

A Hands-On Holy Land Experience
and Christmas Worship Celebration

Saturday, December 13

3 pm in the Fellowship Hall
Discover what it was like living in Bethlehem

Experience the streets of Bethlehem as Zion's Fellowship Hall is transformed into a different place and time. Imagine being counted for the census, strolling through the city with all of its sites, smells and sounds and visiting a Jewish home.

5 pm in the Sanctuary
Special Worship led by Zion's Music Ensembles

Celebrate the birth of the Savior with a Christmas worship featuring Zion's Sunday school choirs, adult choir, handbells and contemporary praise band.

 **ZION**
Lutheran Church & Early Childhood Center

241 5th Avenue North • Hopkins, MN 55343 • 952.938.7661



ZECC Ministry

Let's look at what is happening in our four "classrooms" at ZECC.

Snuggle Bunny Room – Infants

We moved one of our nap rooms to the room with the two sided window. Our two nap rooms are side by side and provide for better observations of our sleeping babies. Now if only we had window coverings for our outside windows to give the rooms a warm and cozy effect...

Dancing Ducklings – Young Toddlers

We have a new teacher to welcome – Ms. Denise Collins. Denise and Sheri are Co -Teachers and have transformed the room into a welcoming learning environment. I observed the Young Toddlers sitting on individual carpet squares for group time! It was a "Wow!" moment.

Busy Butterflies – Older Toddlers / Preschoolers

Did you ever hear of "the flip" method of putting on your jacket? Well Mr. Andrew is showing the children how to put on their own jackets. First lay the unzipped coat on the floor, arrange the jacket so the outer side of the jacket is on the floor and the lining side is face up with the collar of the jacket resting by your feet. Yes, the arms of the jacket seem backwards but stay with me... Bend down and put your arms into the armholes of the jacket and flip the jacket over your head. Is your jacket on? If not go back to the beginning and try it again!!

Fantastic Frogs – Pre-Kindergarten

Ms. Donna and Ms. Thelma are encouraging the children to start the homework habit and responsibility early. Our Pre-K children work on a specific project at home with Mom or Dad and then they have to remember to bring the completed project back to school to share their work with the rest of the class.

Extra News – I'd like to extend a special thank you to Darold Wold for painting my office, and rooms 105 and 107. The rooms look wonderful!

Also, a special thanks to Elizabeth Neal, ZECC's Administrative Assistant, for her special gift of rearranging and decorating. Thanks to Elizabeth my office looks and feels more spacious.

In God's Service,
Judy Fuhrman
Director

"Behold, God exalteth by His power: who teacheth like him?" Job 36:22

Angel Choir

Conducted by Carol Krueger

**Wednesdays during Advent
12 Noon
beginning December 3**

**The Angel Choir is
ZECC's Preschool and
Pre-Kindergarten
children.**



Hope to see at church!

Zion Early Childhood Center (ZECC)

*A nurturing and loving environment for the growth
and development of your child.*

Monday - Friday 7:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
(952)938-7661 ext. 21

Two Babes in a Manger

Author Unknown

In 1994, two Americans answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach morals and ethics (based on biblical principles) in the public schools. They were invited to teach at prisons, businesses, the fire and police departments and a large orphanage. About 100 boys and girls who had been abandoned, abused, and left in the care of a government-run program were in the orphanage. They relate the following story in their own words:

It was nearing the holiday season, 1994, time for our orphans to hear, for the first time, the traditional story of Christmas. We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem. Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger. Throughout the story, the children and orphanage staff sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word.

Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small paper square, cut from yellow napkins I had brought with me. No colored paper was available in the city. Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid strips in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel, cut from a worn-out nightgown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia, were used for the baby's blanket. A doll-like baby was cut from tan felt we had brought from the United States.

The orphans were busy assembling their manger as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat. He looked to be about 6 years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger. Quickly, I called for the translator to ask the lad why there were two babies in the manger. Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at this completed manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously. For such a young boy, who had only heard the Christmas story once, he related the happenings accurately—until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger.

Then Misha started to ad-lib. He made up his own ending to the story as he said, "And when Maria laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. I told him I have no mamma and I have no papa, so I don't have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I couldn't, because I didn't have a gift to give him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift."

So I asked Jesus, "If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?" And Jesus told me, "If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me." "So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and he told me I could stay with him—for always."

As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that splashed down his little cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed. The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon nor abuse him, someone who would stay with him—FOR ALWAYS.

Source: <http://www.gospelweb.net/christmasstories99.htm>

Keeping Christ in Christmas

M is for the Miraculous gift God gave to mankind.
E is for the Everlasting life He left behind.
R is for the Richest love He gave to you and me.
R is for the Redemption He blessed us with.
Y is for the Yearning to meet Him in paradise.

C is for the Child He gave us, His Son Jesus Christ.
H is for the Healing He gives to us.
R is for the Redeemer that is good and kind.
I is for the Innocence we lost in Eden.
S is for the Sacrifice He made for all.
T is for the Tenderness He shows in His smile.
M is for the Miracle of His virgin birth.
A is for the Adoration we give Him.
S is for the Satisfaction we receive in the end.

Source: by Ron Hollander as published in Lutheran Witness, Dec. 2007.