

## December 1, 2024

**This Week:** 9:30 a.m. Reading Service\*  
2:30 p.m. Rev. Maljaars\*\*

\*No classes after the morning service

\*\*Please stay after the afternoon service

There is a singalong and question and answer time after the evening service in Sioux Center with Rev. Maljaars.

**Next Week:** 9:30 a.m. Catechism Reading Service (LD 7a)  
6:30 p.m. Advent Reading Service

**Monday:** 7:30 p.m. Congregational Meeting

### Advance Notices:

-**December 13 Post High School Group** event starting at 7:00 p.m. We hope to have a Malawi (Timotheos Mission) presentation. The location is 3270 Fir Ave, Rock Valley. For more information please contact Beth Kelderman (605-987-7881) or Kourtney Rozeboom (712-460-2466)

-**December 15** services with Rev. Slingerland

-**December 24** 7:00 p.m. Rev. Witvoet Christmas Eve Service  
-All the Lord willing-

**Collections:** Today: 1<sup>st</sup> General Fund Next week: 1<sup>st</sup> General Fund  
2<sup>nd</sup> NAGMission 2<sup>nd</sup> Emeritus Fund

**Advent Puzzles** for the children are available in the narthex

### We Remember in Prayer:

-Our widows and lonely ones, our families, prodigal sons and daughters, and those with hidden crosses.

## MEDITATIONS

### Christ in Christmas

“Lets put Christ back into Christmas”, the bumper-sticker read.

But how is this to be done? Was Christ ever in Christmas? How did Christmas originate and progress? If Christmas is legitimate, what ought it mean to us today?

The Roman Emperor Constantine was first to order Christmas to be observed in the West in the 320s A.D. By 350 most of Western Christendom accepted Dec. 25 as the date of Christs birth. Already on Dec. 25, 386, in delivering the Christmas homily in Antioch, Chrysostom claimed the commemoration of Christs birth as the

foundational, best, and root feast from which all other Christian festivals grow forth.

Since the fourth century, Christmas has been generally observed throughout Western Christendom. The Puritans form a notable exception. Refusing to practice any custom lacking direct Biblical mandate, they pushed a law through English Parliament in the 1640s forbidding the celebration of Christmas and requiring everyone to work on December 25. The law was revoked in 1660 when Puritan leadership was overthrown.

In addition to the lack of Biblical mandate, Puritan opposition was partly due to the long-standing and continuous associations of Christmas with questionable Christian or pagan religious ideas and practices.

Examples of this are numerous: Santa Claus was adapted from St. Nicolas, a bishop who died in Asia Minor in 341 and whom legend depicts as a miracle-worker and anonymous donor. The Christmas tree, a symbol of eternal life and protection from evil, was borrowed from the non-Christian druids in northeastern Europe. St. Francis of Assisi, a 13th-century mystic renowned for his preaching to animals, introduced the manger scene.

Unlike the majority of Christmas traditions, family gift-giving (when devoid of the Santa Claus concept), and the sharing of Christmas cards are of more recent date and do not appear to be associated with significant pagan notions.

Presently, the dramatization and commercialization of Christmas is obviously excessive. The bumper-sticker message strikes an authentic note. In fact, it may well assist us in grappling with how to handle Christmas. After all, is not Christ the essence of Christmas? Do our children recognize Christmas as a day for gifts, trees, lights, and cards or do they associate it with remembering Christ's coming?

Among our Reformation and Post-Reformation forefathers, the continental Reformers and other Protestants agreed with Puritan objections to the *abuse* of Christmas but not all did with their conclusion of *disuse*. Rather, they defended the observance of Christmas and worship on December 25 for two prime reasons: first, as a countermeasure to pagan festivities (much as Reformation Day worship intends to supplant Halloweens paganisms); second, *and more importantly*, to emphasize the deeper truth inherent in the doctrine of the Incarnation, namely, salvation by grace via the sent God-man Savior.

Their two-pronged goal is still relevant today: Christmas pagan festivities must be pushed into the background by bringing the heartbeat of Christmas to the foreground: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Lk. 2:14).

Christmas is the commemoration of the world's greatest miracle: the birth of Jesus Christ. The birth of Christ unveils an incredible

mystery; it preaches unspeakable gospel: good news, glad tidings: the Messiah born of a woman! The Prince of Glory, a Baby in a manger! The Almighty One, a little Child! The Infinite One, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh! The Son of God now the Son of Man! The Creator born of the creature; He who made the world and is above the world, came into the world! He whose dwelling is in the heavens, let down into the smoke of sin and hellishness on earth! He who thunders in the heaven, crying in a lowly manger! The Immortal Son, clothed with rags of mortality! The Eternal, a Child of time! He who made man after His image, Himself made in mans image! The invisible God, made visible in Bethlehem!

Christmas spells God taking our flesh, dwelling in it with His divine fulness, and opening through that flesh His gospel treasures of sovereign grace by being Savior, Redeemer, Kinsman, Elder Brother, and Shepherd, thereby paving the way for that flesh to become more glorious than angels.

All this for unworthy sinners!

Chrysostom was right: Christmas is the root feast, for it is not only the door to Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha, but also to the empty tomb, to Mount Olivet, to the right hand of the Father, yes, to everlasting bliss. In the acorn of Christmas, lies the oak of Gods full-orbed salvation.

The heartbeat of Christmas is the good news of salvation from the Father through the Son for waiting shepherds and lost sinners.

This essential heartbeat, to become mine and yours, must be applied. Our hearts must personally beat by, and reverberate with, this Christmas message. ~ adapted from the Banner of Truth

Here is God's *love* in *giving his Son for the world*:—1. The great *gospel mystery* revealed: *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son*. The love of God the Father is the original of our regeneration by the Spirit and our reconciliation by the lifting up of the Son. Note, (1) Jesus Christ is the *only-begotten Son of God*. This magnifies his love in giving him for us, in giving him to us; now know we that he loves us, when he has given his *only-begotten Son for us*, which expresses not only his dignity in himself, but his dearness to his Father; he was *always his delight*. (2) In order to the redemption and salvation of man, it pleased God to *give his only-begotten Son*. He not only sent him into the world with full and ample power to negotiate a peace between heaven and earth, but he *gave him*, that is, he gave him up to suffer and die for us, as the great propitiation or expiatory sacrifice. It comes in here as a reason why he *must be lifted up*; for so it was determined and designed by the Father, who gave him for this purpose, and *prepared him a body* in order to it. His enemies could not have *taken him* if his Father had not *given* him. Though he was not yet crucified, yet in the determinate counsel of God he was *given up*. ~Matthew Henry on John 3:16

# NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION

**Sioux Falls, SD**



*The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Psalm 126:3*

Services at 9:30 a.m. and 2:30 or 6:30 p.m.