

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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## Pastors:

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**December 18, 2022**

*4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent*

## Coming Events

Dec 18 4:00 Christmas concert **Siion Church**  
Luther Bells performing.  
Coffee after concert.

Dec 23 – Jan 8 Both offices closed

Dec 24 2:00 Candle Light Service **Regent St.**

Dec 25 10:00 Finnish Worship Service **Voima**

Dec 28 2 – 5 Pr Rautiainen & family **Regent St.**

Jan 1 10:00 Finnish Worship Service **Voima**  
11:30 English Worship Service **Regent St**

**In our prayers** Leena, Eero, Ron, Ruth, Marilyn.

## Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that hinders our faith, that eagerly we may receive your promises, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## First Reading “**Isaiah 7:10 – 16**”

<sup>10</sup>The Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, <sup>11</sup>Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. <sup>12</sup>But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. <sup>13</sup>Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup>Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. <sup>15</sup>He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. <sup>16</sup>For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.”

## Psalm 80:1 – 7, 17 – 19

<sup>1</sup> Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.

<sup>2</sup> In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up your strength and come to help us.

<sup>3</sup> Restore us, O God; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

<sup>4</sup> O Lord God of hosts, how long will your anger fume when your people pray?

<sup>5</sup> You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have given them bowls of tears to drink.

<sup>6</sup> You have made us the derision of our neighbors, and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

<sup>7</sup> Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

<sup>17</sup> Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one you have made so strong for yourself.

<sup>18</sup> And so will we never turn away from you; give us life,

that we may call upon your name.

<sup>19</sup> Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

## Second Reading “**Romans 1:1 – 7**”

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup>which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, <sup>3</sup>the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup>and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup>through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, <sup>6</sup>including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, <sup>7</sup>To all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## Gospel “**Matthew 1:18 – 25**”

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” <sup>24</sup>When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, <sup>25</sup>but had no marital

*relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.*

*The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.***

## **Sermon**

*By Rev. Charles Nolting  
“A Little Faith”*

Today, the gospel of Matthew introduces us to Joseph. Now, Joseph was pretty much in a position in life many of us would like to be in: fairly young, has a budding and promising career, he’s a good and noble person, respected in his social circles, and best of all, he is engaged to an attractive young thing – not something one always achieved in a time when most marriages were arranged by the wider family.

And when we meet him, Joseph was all prepared to have a good future. A career, a wife, and the promise of a future family. One would think the stars had all lined up for him. He would have it all – well, as much as one could have coming from a backwoods place like Nazareth. But life looked very promising for him.

And then, just when everything seemed perfect, the bottom fell out of it all. Mary informed him that she was “with child”, and Joseph knew fully well that he’d had nothing to do with that.

I suspect we can at least imagine how he felt, because I’m sure we’ve also had times when we’ve watched our most carefully laid plans fall to pieces. When I was in my late teens, my parents would make an annual pilgrimage back to the hallowed land (you know, Germany), and leave one of my brothers and I in charge. What that meant was that I had the use of a vehicle for whatever I wanted, and some of my friends thought it would be a good plan to run across the border to Alexandria Bay New York, to party one Saturday night. I had access to a car, so I could drive.

Unfortunately, (or perhaps fortunately), my brother got wind of the plan and squashed it. There was no way I was taking my parents car across an international border, even though back then it wasn’t much of a big deal. I suspect he had visions of both the car and myself being impounded, and how would he answer to my parents on that one? My dream had been squashed.

That’s a very mild case, I know, and you have probably had something more severe happen in your lives. But think about how you felt, and how Joseph must have felt. He may have had feelings of betrayal and anger. In a single stroke, his dreams have been dashed. What was he to do?

For Joseph, (who appears to have had a level head on his body), the most logical thing would be to move on to a carefully thought out plan B. We may note how he had made up his mind as to what to do. He wasn’t going to cause a scene, he wasn’t going to rant and rave to anybody who would listen, he would just quietly end the relationship.

Now we all know that at this point God staged an intervention in the form of an angel who came to him in a dream. But what if there had not been an intervention, or what if Joseph would have dismissed the dream - how might the story have turned out? Going by the social norms of those times, Mary and the baby might have been tossed from her house and the two of them may have been beggars living on the street.

The effect of that dream Joseph had made all the difference in the world. Yes, he could have simply dismissed it, but from somewhere deep inside he believed and trusted that the messenger actually was from God, whom he appears to have trusted. And that faith and trust made all the difference in the world. If he could push away his own pride, he could change his feelings, and still have the spouse he longed for.

Of course, that didn’t mean that life would go down the same course as Joseph had planned it out. What it meant is that instead of being known as a good carpenter in an out of the way village, Joseph has become known to most of the world, for centuries. It meant that instead of being known as the father of a pleasant family, Joseph would be the guardian of the one who began the Christian family. By having some faith, even when he felt his world was falling apart, Joseph became so much more than he ever imagined he could be.

So, what does this mean for us? It means that, like Joseph, the way we imagine the future may change if we are faithful. It also means that, like Joseph, we are not asked to have a supernatural faith, but a quiet faith that tells us that regardless of how our plans may have to change, God may have something bigger in mind for us in the long run. If things start to go downhill, keep in mind that God always has a plan for us, even when things aren’t looking all that promising.

When we are in the midst of difficulties or confusion, God asks us to believe as he asked Joseph to believe. God asks us not to fall into despair or give up, but be people of faith, even if it seems like the future might be falling apart. And, as difficult as it might seem to believe, God doesn’t ask us to believe the impossible, but rather asks us to believe that Jesus is indeed sent for us to be Emmanuel, God with us. That’s all we need.

If we really truly believe that Jesus is God with us, then we can rest assured that God will take care of us; just as God took care of Joseph and Mary through all their trials. Let’s take that little bit of faith we have, and let’s invest it for big results. God is with us indeed! Amen.

## **Prayers**

As we prepare for the fullness of Christ’s presence, let us pray for a world that yearns for new hope.

God our shepherd, let your Spirit move with power throughout the church. Give discernment and wisdom to our bishops, pastors, deacons, and lay leaders. Take away our fear, so that we serve and love, confident that you are guiding us. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our source, awaken us to the beauty of the earth and the marvelous variety of life. Unite humankind in repairing and caring for your creation. Protect creatures and habitats in peril due to rising seas and warming temperatures. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our vision, raise up leaders in every nation who dream of freedom and justice for all people. We pray for the work of international organizations that promote peace and human rights, especially Amnesty International. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our helper, come to the aid of all who cry out to you. Shelter migrants, refugees, and those fleeing war and famine. Bring relief to individuals and families experiencing hunger, homelessness, or impoverishment. Comfort any who are isolated or lonely. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our Emmanuel, you are with us in our life together. We give you thanks for gathering us in worship and fellowship, and we remember those who cannot be present. Watch over those who travel. Heal the sick and speed their recovery. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God our hope, you bring life out of death, and you promise to be our God forever. Shine upon the faithful who now rest in the fulfillment of your promise and bring us also into your blessed reign of peace. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of our longing, you know our deepest needs. By your Spirit, gather our prayers and join them with the prayers of all your children. In Jesus' name we pray.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. **Amen.**