



Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
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Rev. Dr. John Rickert, Pastor

OUR REDEEMER'S VOICE

JANUARY 2018

Our Epiphany Star



Back in summer of 2013, scientists announced the discovery what they called a "strange, pulsating star" (<https://weather.com/science/space/news/strange-pulsating-star-found-20130816>). It is located somewhere near the heart of the Milky Way, right by where they think a massive black hole is. The scientists were all agog, and hoped studying this new star would reveal some secrets about black holes.

As I read the reports, I noticed that not a single scientist concluded that this "new" star in the heavens marked the birth of any king, let alone the king of the Jews. Why should they?

Actually, the same thing happened when Jesus was born. A new star hung in the heavens. Countless people saw it, including many professional wise men and religious experts. None of them concluded that the "king of the Jews" had been born except those whose visit we celebrate at Epiphany. What made them so different?

To be honest, the Bible doesn't really tell us. However, we are told that these wise men came from "the East." The area called Mesopotamia was, in the Bible, called "the East." So, most likely, these wise men came from the Parthian Empire. The Parthians, basically, were an extension of the Persians, who had been defeated by Alexander the Great. When Persia came to power they conquered the Babylonians, and the Babylonians had conquered Judah. We all know the stories of some of the Jewish people taken captive, people like Daniel and his three friends. When the Persians came to power they allowed all the Jews who wanted to, to return to their homeland. However, many liked their new home and chose to stay. These people continued into the day of Jesus, keeping with them the Jewish Scriptures.

Wise men were expected to be versed in all knowledge, including the religious knowledge of other faiths. Therefore, at least some of the Parthian wise men would know the Old Testament because of the Jews in their empire. As such, they seem to have known the prophecy of Balaam recorded in Numbers 24:

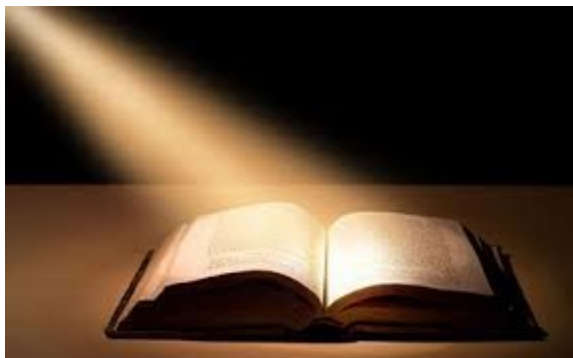
a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel (Numbers 24:17)

They understood this to mean a celestial star would announce the birth of a Jewish king.

Being smart men, they decided to go and see this king who was so important that even the heavens would announce his birth. However, being smart men, they decided they knew everything they needed to know. A king is born? Where else would he be but the capital city?



When they were disappointed by the fruits of their reason, they received an answer from Scripture. The child was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:5-6). So, while the star did hang in the night sky, only those who attended to the Word of God found Jesus. Shoot, even the shepherds, who certainly saw the star, needed a word from God to direct them to the manger.



To this day, that is how God works. He works through his word. We cannot reason our way to God, We cannot feel our way to God. We cannot meditate our way to God. God reveals himself through the Word. That is our Epiphany. That is how God manifests himself to us. So Luther once said in one of his Epiphany sermons, "The greatest and foremost skill—no matter who the person is—is to cling firmly to the Word and conceive of the things of God in no other way than as the Word tells us. For this reason we should accustom ourselves to know nothing about God and Christ apart from the Word."

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." (Colossians 3:16)

Blessings in Christ,
Pastor

Digging In The Nicene Creed Introduction, Part 3



So far we have done a quick background of the Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds. We have seen how the origin of those creeds are somewhat concealed in the mists of time. The Nicene Creed's origin is quite different. What we call the Nicene Creed is largely the product of two ecumenical (worldwide) councils. To understand the driving forces in the calling of these councils, and why they could not have been called earlier, we need to understand the history leading up to them.

While scholars debate the date of the first Easter, the dates they contend for all fall around the year 30, give or take a few years. Fifty days later was the first Christian Pentecost, often called the birthday of the Church. At this time Tiberius was the Roman Emperor (Reign: September 18, 14 – March 16, 37 AD). Obviously Judea, as a Jewish state within the Roman Empire, was still a going concern. As a result of a rebellion, Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 70 and the Jews were disbursed throughout the empire. The final vestiges of Jewish resistance ended with the fall of Masada in 73. This was during the reign of Vespasian (Reign: July 1, 69 – June 24, 79 AD). The general in charge of the Judean war was Titus, who followed Vespasian as Emperor (Reigned: June 24, 79 – September 13, 81 AD).



During this time the Roman Empire had no official position concerning Christians. They were typically granted the same privileges and exemptions as Jews, being considered another of the many Jewish sects. This doesn't mean it was all sunshine and butterflies for the Christians. Persecution did exist, typically from two sources. The first source was from Jewish leadership (Acts 4:1-3; 9:23-25; etc.). The second source was for economic reasons (Acts 19:23-41).

In the very early years of the Church the Christians tended to remain in Jerusalem. This made sense at many levels. First, the great events of salvation history (Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and the first Pentecost) happened in Jerusalem. People could go and check out the empty tomb for themselves. Second, the Apostles were in Jerusalem. People could hear about Jesus from the very lips of his earliest followers. This, however, meant that Jerusalem was where the earliest violent efforts to suppress the Christian Faith began. As a great persecution of Christians began, believers scattered, carrying the Gospel with them (Acts 8:1-4). This was the beginning of the Gospel breaking out of its Jewish context. Before long the great persecutor of the Church, Saul, became a believer himself and became the

great "Apostle to the Gentiles," St. Paul. With the influx of Gentile believers, issues developed. The first council, often called the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), was convened to settle the issues. This established the principle of councils as a way of settling disputes.



Things took a decidedly evil turn for the Church when Nero was emperor (Reign: October 13, 54 – June 9, 68 AD). In order to divert suspicion that he began the great fire of Rome (64 AD), he blamed the Christians. Rounding up as many as he could, he executed them in exceptionally cruel ways. This set the precedent of the Roman Empire as being opposed to the Church. Nero's successor, Domitian (Reigned: September 14, 81 – September 18, 96 AD), began the first empire-wide persecutions of Christians. For the next 200-plus years, to be a Christian was to be an outlaw. Christians continued to share their faith, but every time they did so they were risking prison, having their property confiscated, slavery, and even death.

The Apostle John died sometime around 100 AD. He was the last of the original twelve apostles to die, and the only one to die of natural causes. With his death, the Church could no longer settle issues by appealing to an Apostle.



The Church took root first in major cities. The Christians in these cities then reached out to outlying areas. Naturally then, the city church became the major church in the area. The leader of such churches became known as "bishops." All bishops were elected by their people and approved by all other bishops, thus ensuring the continuation of the teaching of the Apostles (approved by the other bishops) and the support of the people (elected by the people). Whenever an issue developed in a bishop's area of responsibility, he was expected to settle it. This was often done by calling a regional synod (council). These could be conducted under the Roman radar with reasonable safety. In order to ensure the passing on of the teachings of the Apostles, these bishops and councils promoted regional creeds. The Apostles' Creed is basically the regional creed endorsed by Rome and spread throughout the western part of the Roman Empire.

Skip ahead now to the 300s. Constantine I (the Great) was emperor from July 25, 306 – May 22, 337 AD). In the year 313, the Edict of Milan was issued, which made Christianity a legal religion. Constantine also supported the Church, though he didn't make it the state religion. Conversion was strictly voluntary.



We need to go back now to the idea of areas with bishops providing the general oversight to the churches in their area. One of the early main cities for Christianity was Alexandria, in Egypt. Under the bishop's oversight was a city named Baucalis. They had a presbyter (what we might call a pastor or preacher) named Arius (250 or 256 – 336 AD). He developed new ideas that rejected the Triune nature of God and that Jesus was true God, begotten of the Father before all time and begotten of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit in time. These are key teachings of the Bible on which our salvation hangs. Alexander, his bishop, sought to correct him, but he refused correction. A regional "synod" or council was called. Arius refused to listen to them. Things were spinning out of control. Arius had at least two things going for him. First, he apparently was a dynamic preacher, and was able to sway many. Second, he was a talented musician. He composed many catchy songs that carried his false teachings, and people accepted the words without consideration because the songs were so easy and fun to sing. The followers of Arius came to be called Arians and his teachings called Arianism (not to be confused with Aryanism).

The false teachings of Arius began to spread throughout the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Oddly, the Edict of Milan that legalized Christianity probably helped this. Constantine was greatly troubled by this development. A fractured Church would not help keep the empire stable (something any good

"There was once when he was not (he was not)

He was made and not begot (not begot)

So hang this sign on the weeping willow tree:

There was once when he was not (he was not)!!"

ruler wants).



The Church already had the example of the Jerusalem Council, which spoke with authority for the entire Church. It also had the example of regional synods (synod means "walking together" and the use of the word for a council accented the intended outcome: unity). Before Constantine, no worldwide (ecumenical) council had been called since the Apostles. The reasons are clear. First, it would be too dangerous for that many Christian leaders to gather in one place. With one blow the Roman Empire could deal a deadly blow to the Church. The second was simple economics. The Church had spread far and wide. The churches farthest from the meeting site simply would not be able to afford to send their representatives. With the Edict of Milan, the danger of such a mass meeting was removed. Constantine determined that the Church should have an ecumenical council to settle the issues that were troubling the Church, and he offered to pay all the expenses, including traveling expenses for all bishops who could come.

Thus the stage was set for the first ecumenical council, held in Nicaea. Next month we will continue with this introduction to the Nicene Creed. Until then, may "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14). Amen.

Pastor



Some Thoughts From LHM:

Immanuel— A Devotion By Rev. Kathamuthu

In today's devotion I would invite you to reflect on the name Immanuel, which is found in Matthew 1:23b, "... and they shall call Him Immanuel, which means God with us." There are three things about that Name I would like to share.

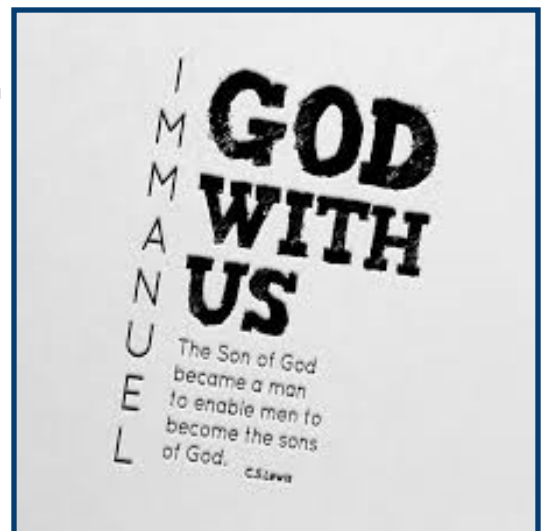
First, the name Immanuel tells us that God is present. Scripture tells us God is in heaven. Moreover, He is beyond the comprehension of human beings. It is this concept that keeps God away from us. However, in the Person of Jesus Christ, God comes near to us. In Jesus, through His life and death of sacrifice we see the love of the Lord in a way no other religion can share. It is that love which brings us to and keeps us with the Lord.

The second thing I would like to share is that God became a true Man person in Jesus Christ. The rationale behind Jesus becoming a Man is to communicate and save the world's lost sinners. This is a great truth of the Gospel narrative.

Since Jesus is a person replete with personal qualities and acts, He is able to act upon our lives. He understands our inner struggles and problems, our confusion and contradictions. In the midst of all these struggles, God's personal care and forgiveness becomes ours through Jesus. The Savior's transforming presence calls believers to a life of gratitude, which ought to inspire our lives in this New Year.

Finally, the name Immanuel brings to the fore the providence of God. The general providence of God tells us the Lord has continued to be involved in the existence and the welfare of the world. All things on earth move and have their being because of this ongoing commitment of God.

At the same time, God's special providence -- His saving providence -- has come to us in the Person of Jesus:



Immanuel. The redemptive work of God in Jesus Christ is solid proof of God's love and security for man.

In Jesus we are given divine, blood-bought hope that Jesus is able to keep His people secure and safe from the forces of evil. No matter what this year may bring, we can rejoice knowing our days and our eternity are based on God's faithfulness. It is a faithfulness that will -- because of Immanuel -- always remain unchanged.

By the Holy Spirit's power, may your faith grow from strength to strength. May the presence, personality and providence of God be upon you and your family throughout this year.

Arlen D. Besel – Ambassador



Through The Worship Window

The New Year Begins With Epiphany:

The word epiphany means appearance or manifestation and in the church calendar refers to the coming of the Magi to meet Jesus. That is the beginning of the Epiphany season which carries on into February,

Our attention is moved to Jesus baptism by John in the Jordan as He begins His ministry. Then follows the Lord's calling of His disciples, we first meet Philip and Nathanael.

But earlier Jesus had called Simon, Andrew, James and John.

Early in Jesus' ministry He casts out an unclean spirit which made everyone wonder at His power. Then follows a number of other healing actions that further raised His image among the public.

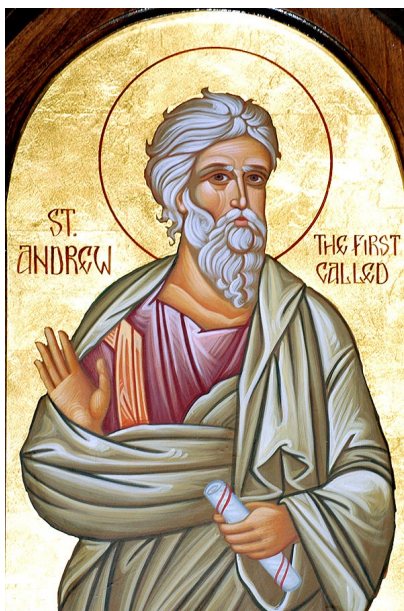
During the Epiphany season the Epistle lessons take us through an outline of the functions of the church body. We are also reminded of our need to be united in His death and resurrection. We are counseled in the proper life-style and some of the daily aspects of life.

In Epiphany the Old Testament reminds us that Christ is coming and the Gentiles will also benefit from His life and sacrifice. There is a brief reminder of God's work in creation. We meet Samuel who is called by God. And of course Jonah's experience reflects our need to listen and obey God's calling.

There are many references in the Old Testament to the coming Messiah and His role as the suffering servant and as our Savior and Redeemer.

Epiphany prepares us for the coming Lenten season.

Arlen D. Besel – Worship



"Evangelism"

John 1:41 - He (Andrew) first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ).

You know that Jesus gave Simon the nickname of Peter for his bold confession of faith, but I'm giving an A for the day to anyone who can share what moniker the early church bestowed upon his brother Andrew.

Wow, that's right! I didn't think you'd all get it. The early church called Andrew, "protokletos," which means "first-called." As you know, Andrew was first on the list of Jesus' disciples.

Now you know Andrew wasn't the kind of guy who stole the limelight. He was not the

sort of fellow who stood out in a crowd. Scripture paints him as a modest sort of man, always blending in to the background. On Pentecost his words aren't recorded for history, and the New Testament doesn't have any books named First or Second Andrew.

Andrew was never elected to be the chairman of the disciples' board. When we think of the great personages who have flashed across the pages of human history, when we remember some of the Bible's heroes of faith, somehow Andrew is almost always left out.

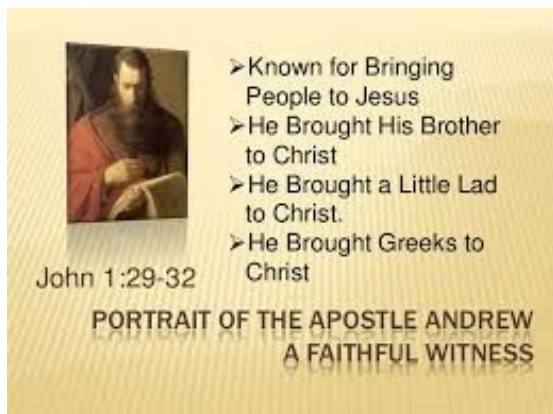
That's a shame, because Andrew had a friend.



Moreover, wherever you see Andrew in the pages of the New Testament, you will find him introducing people to Jesus, his friend, and the world's only Savior.

Andrew's story begins in Bethsaida -- a word that means "house of the fisherman." He was employed at the family business, and he might have stayed there forever if it hadn't been for the friend he met on the shores of the Jordan River. The first thing Andrew did after he got to know Jesus was hurry home to find his brother Simon and say, "Simon, come and meet my friend, the Messiah!"

Have you ever noticed that when people come to know Jesus, they're filled with an urge to tell others about their newfound friend? True, sometimes we do so in an obnoxious way, and end up turning off our listeners. Sometimes we can be like our pal who buys a new car or computer and talks and talks and talks. Sometimes we can be like the grandmother who searches for victims to whom she can show her suitcase of grandchildren photographs.



But the fact is, Andrew knew, Christians need to share their friend with others.

In the rest of the New Testament, you will see Andrew bringing a boy to Jesus with some loaves and fishes. Or he, along with Philip, is introducing some Greeks to the Savior, after they had come and requested: "Sir, we would see Jesus."

Although the New Testament authors seem to neglect Andrew, Jesus knew -- as should we -- that without people like Andrew, there would never be people like Peter! That's because the real work of the church, any church, is not done just by people like Peter who get their names in the newspapers. It is also done by the millions of Andrews: the humble men and women who aren't afraid to say to a friend or family member "Come with me. I've found the Lord."

THE PRAYER: Dear Lord, I must confess *doing* evangelism can scare me. Help me see, and emulate Andrew who simply said to those around him, "Come, I've found the Lord." This I ask in Jesus' Name. Amen.
<https://www.lhm.org>

NEWS & NOTES

2018 Lutheran Marriage Encounter Weekends Announced

Your marriage relationship is one of the things in life that provides the greatest potential for happiness. Is yours living up to this potential? Please make 2018 the year you resolve to attend a Lutheran Marriage Encounter Weekend to learn how to maximize the joy and intimacy that God intends for your marriage. The following Weekends have been scheduled with one more to be added in Massachusetts in the fall.

- March 16-18, 2018 at Heritage Hotel Lancaster in Lancaster, PA. A newly-renovated hotel, home of the unique treehouse-inspired restaurant, "Loxley's."
- April 6-8, 2018 at Toftrees Golf Resort in State College PA. A peaceful resort surrounded by a golf course and nestled in the woods in the center of PA.
- September 14-16, 2018 at Spruce Lake Retreat in Canadensis, PA. A lovely hotel-style facility in a wooded area of the Poconos, an hour north of Allentown.
- October 19-21, 2018 at Olmsted Retreat Center. A stunning, hotel-style retreat next to Olmsted Mansion in Allegheny National Forest, 2 hours north of Pittsburgh.



Two nights lodging, 5 meals for each of you, and all supplies are included with your \$100 per couple registration fee, plus toward the end of the weekend you will be given an opportunity to make a confidential contribution of whatever amount you wish toward the continuation of the program. To be sure to get the Weekend of your choice, sign up at your earliest convenience by going to the website: www.GodLovesMarriage.org and paying the registration fee with your credit card, or marking the option to mail a check. For questions, or if you would like a brochure with registration form mailed to you, contact Northeast US Directors of Lutheran Marriage Encounter, Fred & Julie Schamber, at 724-325-3166 or fjschamber@comcast.net.

Jan. 19 — March for Life in Washington, D.C.



The 45th annual March for Life rally will begin at noon Eastern time on Friday, Jan. 19, on the grounds of the Washington Monument. Following the rally, the march will begin at approximately 1 p.m. on Constitution Avenue between 15th and 17th Streets.

Visit lcms.org/marchforlife for updates on how to join the LCMS delegation.

Pastor & Kitty hope to go, weather permitting. If you want to ride along, let them know!

BIBLE STUDY OPPORTUNITIES

Bible Class — A Commercial Message!

The Sunday Morning Adult Bible Class is about to begin an interesting study on the words in Ephesians 5:18; "Be filled with the Spirit" and by extension learn more about the Holy Spirit and his role in our lives. There is a focus on how we are to live our lives as committed Christians who have the Spirit as our guide.

This is an excellent opportunity to renew and strengthen our resolve and commitment to Christ. The class will begin on January 7 at 8:45 AM. Everyone is encouraged to consider this exercise.

Arlen D. Besel – Leader

Sundays
Tuesdays
Thursdays

8:45 a.m.
10:00 a.m.
10:00 a.m.

Topical Bible Study
Book of Revelation
Hymn Study

"Be filled with the Spirit" beginning this month
Continuing through the final book of the Bible
Study of an upcoming hymn, its theology & its history



Newsletter Information Date

Please have all information for the newsletter in to the office no later than the 20th of each month to ensure its inclusion. Thanks!

Build-A-Bag With Us!

You probably have a home with a roof, a working heating system, warm clothes, etc., but many in our area do not.



As Christians, we know that we will always have the poor with us, as Jesus said, but that doesn't mean we can ignore them; instead, we help all we can.

In the winter, it is especially important to help the homeless stay warm. We at Our Redeemer Lutheran do this by building sleeping bags to give to local charities. We recycle bedding and create warm, cozy bags and fill them with toiletries, hats, socks & prayers.

Come, join us on the first Saturday of each month at 10 a.m., and each Thursday at noon, and help make winter more bearable for the homeless in our midst.

Do You Really Know All the Hymns in Our Hymnal??

We continue to sing through *Lutheran Service Book* together, deciding which hymns we know and love, which ones we wish we knew better, and which ones we simply don't know. Join us after the worship service on January 28th and sing along with us, making a joyful noise to the Lord!



Serve the Lord with Gladness!

Most churches in the USA today have trouble filling volunteer positions. Why is this? Perhaps it is because we in this country feel our time is our own and we owe no one anything beyond what can reasonably be expected of us. This is not a Biblical concept! Just the opposite, in fact, is the case.



Our time is not our own; God gives us time, talent and treasures to serve Him, not ourselves. All that we have in this life were given to us; not earned or deserved! King David was reminded of this by God Himself. David wanted to build God a house, but God says that He will instead build David a house! God called David from being a shepherd and made him king; God used the gifts He gave David to bring glory to God. David, pondering such a promise given to him by God, said, "Who am I, O Lord God and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord God. You have also spoken of your servant's house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord God! And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God. Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it. Therefore you

are great, O Lord God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears." (2 Samuel 7:18-22)

God gives to each of us the things we need, the things to glorify God in this life. Use yours well; serve joyfully, serving well, in your everyday life and in the midst of this congregation. What office will you hold, what service will you give this year in this place?

BIRTHDAYS

17 Lucille Weikel
27 David Steltz






ANNIVERSARIES

6 Bob & Bonnie Johnston

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

January 2018

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Serving: Each Sunday – Pastor: Rev. Dr. John Rickert Bible Class: Arlen Besel Sun. Sch.: Robin Billy & Rebecca Tedal Organists: Julie Hockersmith, David Rash	New Year's Day 1 Office closed	2 Revelation Bible Study, 10 am	3	4 Winkel, Dover, all day; Build-A-Bag, noon	5 Pastor's day off; Pastor & Kitty on vacation	6 Build-A-Bag, 10 am; Pastor & Kitty on vacation
7  Bible Study, 8:45 am; Worship, 10 am; Pastor & Kitty on vacation	8 Pastor & Kitty on vacation	9 Pastor & Kitty on vacation	10 Pastor & Kitty on vacation	11 Build-A-Bag, noon; Pastor & Kitty on vacation	12 Pastor's day off; Pastor & Kitty on vacation	13
14 Bible Study, 8:45 am; Worship, 10 am	15	16 Revelation Bible Study, 10 am	17	18 Bible Study – Hymns, 10 am; Build-A-Bag, noon	19 Pastor's day off; March for Life, D.C.	20 Newsletter articles due
21  Bible Study, 8:45 am; Worship, 10 am	22	23 Revelation Bible Study, 10 am	24	25 Bible Study – Hymns, 10 am; Build-A-Bag, noon	26 Pastor's day off	27
28 Bible Study, 8:45 am; Worship, 10 am; Hymn Sing after service	29	30 Revelation Bible Study, 10 am	31 	Serving: 1/7 – Comm. = Arlen Besel Usher = Milt & Mitzi Steltz Lector = Hertha Langford Greeters = Milt & Mitzi Steltz Acolyte = Altar = Carla Fiske Flowers = Greg & Carla Fiske	Serving: 1/14 – Usher = Paul Hockersmith & Bob Johnston Lector = Kitty Rickert Greeters = Goitom & Noah Tedla 1/21 – Comm. = Kevin Gerzevske Usher = Arno Kissell & Loren Kline Lector = Gary Weaver Greeters = Kitty Rickert Acolyte = Altar = Robin Billy	Serving: 1/28 – Usher = Guitom & Noah Tedla Lector = Helga Kissell Greeters = Loren Kline