Does Christmas Really Make a Difference in Our Lives?

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 2017, sitting in church at the 8:00 service, Kerry Oxford’s son is looking at the stained glass window of the nativity on the front gospel side of the church. Baby Jesus is lit up. It’s dark outside, no light is shining on the window, and yet, Baby Jesus is lit up! He leans over to tell his brother and ask if he sees it too. It’s Christmas Eve, we’re celebrating Emmanuel, God with us, and Baby Jesus is lit up!

On December 9, 2018, 7:40 in the morning, second Sunday of Advent and there is an amazing sunrise as I walk over to the church from Shepherd’s House. The church is lit up as we prepare for worship; as we prepare to hear the words of John the Baptist reminding us to repent and prepare ourselves for the one who is more powerful than he is. The light is coming into the world and our church, Emmanuel, God with us, is lit up. Everyone arriving for 8:00 church that morning is talking about the sunrise and the brilliant rainbow that had been in the sky.

The Light has come into the world and the promise to each of us and to our world is that the darkness will never be able to overcome it. What does that promise mean for us? By nature of our baptism, when we are “sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever,” that light of Christ resides within each of us…and the darkness can never overcome it! I like to think of it as a pilot light that is guaranteed to never go out. The light of Christ resides within each of us and we are sent out into the world to bring light to the dark places. “This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine!”

Has the season of Christmas had any impact upon us? How have we become aware of God’s light in our lives and in our world in a different way this year as we reflect on what Christmas means? Or we can ask the question a different way, focusing on our church’s name, Emmanuel, God with us, since Christmas is really like our churches saint day. How was God with us? How did the Light shine and light up my life and how did I let the little light of mine shine?

Join me in taking some time as we approach Epiphany to reflect on how you’ve been “lit up” this Christmas season, or your three Emmanuel’s: how God was with you, was with the Emmanuel community, and was with the larger world. Here are some of my reflections…
• **With me:** Christ came to me 5 days before Christmas in the form of a man trying to get back home. We sat and talked in my office amidst a very chaotic morning and the light shone in the darkness.

• **With Emmanuel church:** The stories of light around the Christmas baskets this year: Julianna deciphering that “Papa Troll” was actually shorthand for “Paw Patrol”, Terrye being guided by the light to get a donation of a bicycle to replace one that had been stolen, someone picking up their basket and bursting into tears when she was given a box of brownie mix and telling Kerri her story that this year she would be able to bake with her kids. The light shown through those who donated the money, those who shopped and shopped and those who wrapped and wrapped and wrapped letting God’s light shine into the lives of those who would have had very few gifts otherwise.

• **With the larger world:** As I write this, it’s only December 21st so I’m still waiting expectantly and hopefully for ways that I see the world “lit up” this Christmas season!

As you reflect, maybe you’d be willing to share your thoughts or photos with Kerri or me for next month’s newsletter so that we can all benefit from the stories of how the light has come into the world, and how we have been lit up. That will help all of us enter the season of Epiphany ready to look for God to show up and be made manifest in our lives.

Epiphany blessings and my love to you and yours!  *Christy*

**Emmanuel Opens Our Doors for Joyful Advent and Christmas Music**
The afternoon of Dec. 16th, about 70 people gathered for a wonderful respite of joy filled Advent and Christmas Music. It was followed by a simple time of connecting with one another through hospitality and refreshment. We were very grateful to collect $154 in a freewill offering to help support the ministry of the Food Cupboard at Emmanuel. It was a truly blessed afternoon and everyone went away more filled-up with Christmas joy then when we had arrived. A huge thank you to Tom Collins for having the vision and carrying it out, for our choir for working so hard in order to offer this gift to the community and for the other musicians who so readily offered their gifts that afternoon, Charlotte Pierce’s recorder ensemble and Wilbur Jensen and Steve Krajcir who played trumpet duets.

**The Magic of our Christmas Basket Outreach**
With full hearts and immense gratitude for those who donated money, gifts, and their time to our Christmas Basket Outreach this year, we take this moment to truly cherish the real meaning of Christmas. Here are just a few stories that were shared from when the baskets were picked up:

"It is always revealing to put the stories with the baskets when the families choose to share. Of the 3 families that collected baskets yesterday morning, 2 especially shared their thanks and their situations. The one family had had a fire in their apartment the week or so before the baskets were to be given out and
without our offerings the kids would not be having Christmas. The wife was so enthused about the toilet paper as they had just run out that morning. I don't know if you could ever be excited about TP unless you had none. The other wife came with a thank you note and handed it over before she received their basket. Her hubby has been in an accident in the woods and they are going to Eugene 2 to 3 times a week for therapy and just can not afford to give the kids a Christmas. She spoke of her faith and her church and it seems they are working hard to make things work."

"When the last family came in yesterday to pick up their basket, the mom began to weep over the brownie mix we put in each basket. She asked if she could hug me and all I could do was hug her back and tell her (in a light-hearted way) that I have the same reaction every time I see chocolate too. We shared a chuckle and then she asked if she could share a bit of her story with me. She shared that this time last year her family had suffered a major trauma and found themselves, among other things, homeless on Christmas Eve. They had very slowly been putting their lives back together the past year and had just barely been able to get into housing recently. The reason she was so emotional about the brownie mix is because she realized that THIS YEAR her and her 3 children were going to have this gift of being able to bake together again (a family tradition) for Christmas."

Homemade Christmas Cookies and Cards
Thanks to Payton and Pierce Davidson we have boxes of yummy cookies and cards ready to be delivered to our home-bound members. It's a simple gift that comes with the love from our community to those who have difficulty making it to church anymore. Emmanuel, God with us!

Thank you to the McKeown Family for the donation of the beautiful altar Christmas wreaths.
"**THIS IS MY CHURCH.** It is composed of people like me. We make it what it is. I want it to be a church that is a lamp to the path of pilgrims, leading them to the Savior who has given every mortal the eternal pledge, “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no ways cast out.” It will be, if I am. It will be friendly, if I am. Its pews will be filled, if I help to fill them. It will do a great work, if I work. It will bring other people into its worship, if I bring them. It will be a church of loyalty and love, of fearlessness and faith; and a church with a noble spirit, if I, who make it what it is, am filled with these. Therefore, with the help of God, I shall dedicate myself to the task of being all these things that I want my church to be. Is this your church?"

~Found by Loanne Lark in Fannie Westerholm’s (her great aunt from Finland) prayer book.

**An Emmanuel Bible Study**

It has been suggested by the presiding bishop, our bishop, Pastor Christy and Emmanuel’s congregation that we need Bible study. I am opening my home to a small group of ten people with an interest in sharing our understanding and revealed truths of God’s Word.

The study will be led by the intent, thoughts and questions of the group. A format and meeting times would be set at a first meeting.

Those interested in a Bible study should call me, Fran Whitaker, at 541-269-9430 in order to set a time and date for that first meeting. I may also be contacted through my email at fran990wh@frontier.com. Once a time and date convenient to the majority is established, those who respond will be contacted. ~Fran Whitaker

**Welcome New Toddler Program Teacher, Laura Whitmyer, to Emmanuel**

She shares with us, “I was born and raised in Coquille. I have 2 children, Rylee who is 7, and Emma who is 4. Although I obtained my CNA and have enjoyed working in the healthcare field, I have always had a love for children. At the age of 10, I started helping out in daycare centers and pre-schools with my step mom. Getting to watch children grow and learn has always put a smile on my face. I'm so thankful for this opportunity here at Emmanuel. Watching their little faces light up as their imagination comes to life in their art work just warms my heart. I'm excited to continue to build relationships, guide, and nurture the children one day at a time. The toddlers sure do know how to put a smile on my face!”

**Here is the book that was the center of Christy’s Christmas Eve homily.** An inspirational story with beautiful illustrations...a great gift for your kids or grandkids or for your family library.
Vestry Visibility - Jan 1, 2019

There’s a lot going on at Emmanuel as we enter the New Year. We have big changes and challenges ahead of us. Change always makes me nervous, sometimes in anticipation and sometimes in fear. But I have faith that God will guide us through these changes and Emmanuel will continue strong and vibrant.

Of course, we all know the biggest change facing us now and that’s finding a new priest to lead us as Christy heads into retirement.

Your vestry is hard at work on that process. It’s going to take time and hard work from all of us. Your help is needed.

If you are interested in helping find and select a new priest, you are wanted! There are 2 teams being formed: A Profile team and a Search team.

The **Profile Committee** will start soon putting together an up to date picture of our church and community. It’s a document that showcases the community we live in, our church, who we are as a congregation, our missions, what we hold important. The good news is that we have a 2013 profile that will help us a lot in putting together a 2019 profile.

The **Search Committee** work starts once the Diocese refers candidates to us. We are using a Bishop Lead process where those individuals interested in coming to Emmanuel go through the Bishop’s office to be vetted. From those candidates approved by the Bishop, the Search team decides who to interview and at the end of the process makes a recommendation.

This whole process, from Profile to Search to recommendation can take time – as long as 9 months to a year. Hopefully, and God willing, it won’t take that long. In the meantime, our plan is to use a system of supply priests and eventually an interim priest to provide for us pastorally. Our first supply priest, Peter Fones, is lined up and will provide services for the month of February. More information on our supply priests and interim priest will be made available as that information unfolds.

Finally, please mark your calendars for two important events:

**Jan 27th** – **Christy’s last service at Emmanuel and a Celebration** to mark her service to us. There will be a combined service at 9 am in the undercroft followed by a brunch to honor Christy. If you’d like to donate to a parting gift to Christy, your donations can be sent to the office or dropped in the collection plates on Sunday. Please make sure to mark that it’s for Christy’s gift.

**Feb 10th** – **Annual Meeting** – you might have seen this on a calendar for Jan 20th, but circumstances have caused us to move this to Feb 10th.

In closing, as we move into the challenges facing us this year, say a prayer for our guidance and success in our quest to find a new priest to serve Emmanuel. If you’d like to volunteer to help in our search please let me know – either email, phone, text or in person is fine.

Dave Laird, Senior Warden  dave@laird.net, 541.290.0352
Annual Parish Meeting and Potluck Lunch, February 10th
Following the 10:00 AM Service

This year the Annual Meeting of our church community will be held on Sunday, February 10th, following the 10:00 service. This is an important gathering of the whole community that celebrates our mutual ministry together as we look to the future and the beginning of this time of transition. We had originally talked about having the Annual Meeting on January 20th. Since one of the important items of business is the naming of the next senior warden by the rector, it seemed important to do that before Christy’s last day. We were all very grateful at our last Vestry meeting when we were told that Christy had asked Dave Laird to stay on as senior warden for 2019, and he had agreed. With that business taken care of we were able to move the date of the Annual Meeting to February 10th allowing more time for needed preparation.

If you’re new to Emmanuel you might be asking what happens at the Annual Meeting? It’s a time to gather and discuss the state of the parish. This year there will be some special reports from the Vestry about how we are organizing ourselves for the interim time between rectors. We will also conduct the regular business of the church. We will elect three new Vestry members and two delegates and alternates to convention. We will affirm and accept the budget developed by our Budget Committee, (Bob Huggins, Treasurer, Xandra McKeown, Finance Committee, and Pam Chaney, Vestry) and reviewed and approved by the Finance Committee and Vestry. We will hear from our Senior Warden, Dave Laird about the state of the parish and we will announce this year’s recipient of the award for Christian Service.

We will celebrate and give thanks to God together for the abundance we are blessed with. Please bring a brunch potluck item to share and come to help celebrate all that we have to be grateful for as a faith community. We hope to see you there!

~Emmanuel’s Vestry

**February Newsletter Submissions Deadline is Tuesday, January 22nd**