

December 2022



From the Bishop:

I took the quilt to the cleaners to get washed. They looked at it and handed it back. If we touch this, they said, it will fall apart.

To most eyes, the quilt is nothing to look at. The bright yellow ducklings have long faded to muted colors. The binding is frayed. Happy, my dog from childhood, chewed holes in the fabric where stuffing came out and repair was never finished. (Happy did this to many sheets and blankets in my growing up years. My sisters and I called them "Happy holes." My mom did not.)

From the time I was a toddler, this quilt has held my laughter, tears, secrets, sleep, insomnia, sickness, health, anger. In darkness, this quilt surrounded me in warmth. Years later, my children were wrapped in this same quilt.

Long before my grandma quilted my "duckie" blanket and gave it to me, there was a young family without permanent shelter and a baby soon to be born. The village midwives came into the night to help birth a baby for a family unknown. They came to an unhoused couple, a foreign couple, a poor couple with no prospects or power. And yet, these midwives left their warm houses and their own families, bringing their own handmade blankets and strips of cloth as they participated in this baby's birth. And, when he was born, they wrapped this child and his mom in warmth.

We know this because we hear the angels' words to the shepherds, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." Surely if the baby was wrapped in bands of cloth, the child was also wrapped in blankets.

What a difference it would have been without these blankets, without these swaddling cloths, without these midwives. Without the skills and the gifts God gave to them. The vocation of midwife brought Jesus into the world. The hands and wisdom of these women wrapped him in swaddling cloths.

It is such an amazing story ... through God's invitation, and from Mary saying yes and Joseph saying yes and the innkeeper saying yes and the midwives saying yes – Jesus came.

Two thousand years ago, in a way no one could have imagined, God was with us in human form. Wrapped in blankets. Held in love.

What love, what grace, what beauty. Amazingly and almost inconceivably, in this little baby, God's love came and God's love continues to be among us through Jesus – Immanuel, Incarnate, God-in-the-flesh love. Embodied love ... for you and for me. Always.

I know that life is messy. Life is sometimes hard. Sometimes the world seems out of control and we are so small against so much of what is out there. And yet ... through something as small and vulnerable as a newborn baby, we are promised that God is here. Amongst us. And God's love is for everyone. Absolutely everyone. Regardless of your job or your political party, your anxiety or your income. Your ethnicity, your language, your gender, your situation in life. God's love is for you who celebrate this holy day and God's love is for those who don't. God's love is for those you are estranged from and those you embrace.

This Christmas and this year, may you feel surrounded by God's love and presence. In your laughter, tears, secrets, sleep, insomnia, sickness, health, anger - in darkness and in light may you feel God wrapping you into God's embrace ... like a worn, faded blanket that is covered in ducks and Happy holes.

Have a Blessed Christmas,
Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee



From the VEEP

Advent is a time of waiting, anticipating, and expecting. This year I find myself thinking about the expectant women of this Nativity story: Elizabeth and Mary – two cousins on either end of reasonable childbearing age, both touched and marked by God to bring forth new life against all expectations.

Elizabeth, of course, has had the longer wait. She has long lived with the shame of being barren. The angel speaks to Mary and Zechariah, but not to Elizabeth. Her husband's questioning of Gabriel left him mute. We don't know what, if anything, he was able to convey to Elizabeth about what was about to befall her. I wonder how long it took her to realize what was happening. I have a friend who, in her forties and after nearly twenty years of trying, became pregnant. Her menstrual cycle had always been erratic, so when she missed a period and then another, she thought maybe she was entering early menopause. Imagine her surprise when she went to the doctor and found out she was, at long last, going to have a baby. Shock, joy, anxiety, even a little fear. I think this may have been Elizabeth's experience, too.

And then there is Mary. Her pregnancy is even more of a surprise than Elizabeth's. How, she wonders can what the angel says be true? After all, she is a virgin. And what will her neighbors think? If Elizabeth has been disgraced because she was barren, will Mary be disgraced for conceiving? After Gabriel shares the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy with her, Mary journeys into the hill country to visit her cousin, who has been in seclusion. So, there they are, two women, one old, one young, sharing the experience of first-time pregnancy. Mary stays for three months, which must bring her very close to the time when Elizabeth gives birth. We don't know what passes between them in those months, but I suspect they were figuring out what to expect while they were expecting.

And as we wait, now, what do we expect while we are expecting? God is constantly bringing forth new life, new relationships, and new ways of being. Will we recognize the signs that the world is once again expecting? Will we disregard them as signs of our advancing years? Will we mistake the beginning for the end of life? Matthew and Mark both warn us not to be led astray nor alarmed by war, rumors of war, famine, and earthquakes because they are not the end, but rather the beginning of the birth pangs of the new age.

In this advent season, let us revel in the joy of expectant new birth. Let us wait breathlessly for the first quickening- the first movement of new life. Let us be alert. Let us endure the discomfort and pain as we labor. Let us not be afraid.

Here I'd like to plug an event and a book:

- Consider attending our second LiVE Retreat on December 3 at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church in Seattle: The Spirituality of Waiting ([learn more and register here](#))
- Anne Garrett, of my oldest friends (and fellow Lutheran) has just published *Hush: True Stories of Pregnancy-Related Death and Near-Miss in the U.S.A.* As we consider the metaphorical birth process this Advent, it is worth remembering that not all pregnancies are safe or healthy and that the maternal death rate in the US continues to be too high.

Here's what I or the Synod Council have been up to in November:

- Synod Council Retreat November 4-5 at Dumas Bay Retreat Center: In addition to learning about how our council fits into the three expressions of the church, learning about our strengths as leaders, and furthering our Intercultural Development training, we held a short business meeting.
- Continued participating in the learning opportunities provided by the LiVE Project, including the weekly FREE study on the book of Acts ([learn more here](#) and drop in any time!)

Kay Edgerton

Vice President of the NW Washington Synod

veep@lutheransnw.org