

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, December 12, 2023
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“Now Sing We, Now Rejoice!”

READING: Ephesians 5:15-20 – Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Becky and I attended our Choir’s Christmas Concert last Sunday. What a joy that was! There were carols we have known since our youth. There were new pieces we had not heard before. And there were even some funny songs (like “The Cold and Fugue Season”) and one with a “horse laugh” in it – “Sleigh Ride”. What a great way to start off our Advent season and a pointing ahead to Christmas.

I’m not a big fan of the radio stations starting continuous Christmas music immediately following Halloween. In large part my complaint is that they play mostly the secular songs like “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree” and “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer” – stuff like that. It also seems to be sort of a ploy to encourage early Christmas shopping. They want to “get us in the mood” for Christmas as early as possible. I think some folks are all “Christmas-ed out” by the time the day actually comes.

I don’t mean to be a Scrooge here. I’m just comparing what the choir concert celebrated to what the music on 106.9 celebrates. The Choir celebrated FIRST the gift God gave us in the nativity of his Son. They kept Jesus at the forefront, reminding all of us that He is central to all that we do and hear in this season. The secular radio celebrates first the Christmas SEASON and its TRADITIONS. Jesus, if and when he is mentioned, is of secondary importance. His birth is the origin of the holiday but to them, the season is bigger than the baby born in Bethlehem.

There is a real danger in all of this. We certainly must admit that in America, and indeed, around the world, the continuing trend is the secularization of Christmas so that Frosty the Snowman, Rudolf and his red nose, Santa, the Chipmunks, and the like so fill the senses of people that there is little or no room left for Jesus. The gift-giving, the parties, the treats, and all can over-shadow the real gift at the center of it all.

We Christians cannot allow that to happen in our lives, our families, and in our churches. St. Paul in our text could easily be talking directly to us in 2023. His warning not to be foolish and unwise, but aware of the times and ready always to hold up Jesus to the world is very timely. His admonition about drunkenness and debauchery also addresses our baser inclinations. People have not changed much over the last 20 centuries! Any excuse to party and be idiots is still very tempting to so many. Rather he speaks to us about where real joy can be found and true and worthy celebration can be centered.

Listen, I’ve got lights outside my house. We have two Christmas trees, poinsettias, traditional decorations of all kinds on two floors of our house. We will have such a stack of presents for kids and grandkids that the family tree in the basement will not be able to contain them all under its branches. We’ll have Christmas cookies and wine on the dinner table when we all get together. I love these things, too. But what I am trying to get across to you is that all of the traditions, all of the songs, all of the celebrating mean NOTHING without the Christ-child’s birth, his sacrifice on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead. CHRISTMAS without CHRIST is just a mess.

So you, Christian, sing the carols, the psalms, the hymns, and the spiritual songs of Christmas at high volume and with frequency. "Sing and make music in your heart." Give thanks to God the Father for the precious gift he sent to us in Bethlehem. Come and worship the Lord on the remaining Sundays and Wednesdays of Advent. Plan on attending a Christmas Eve service. Share the Good News with those who may still be sitting in darkness. Enjoy the secular trappings in modest doses and make sure everyone you meet knows you keep Christ at the center of your Christmas. Then your Christmas will be more than merry, it will be blessed. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- 1) SENIORS CHRISTMAS PARTY next Thursday, the 14th, noonish. Bring a dish to pass and if you want to take part in the Gift Exchange, a gift worth about \$15.
- 2) CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS SERVICE: Sunday, December 17, 10:30 service.
- 3) GIFTS FOR KIDS – we will be gifting children in needy families as is our tradition. Planning to serve 35-40 children. This only happens with your donations of cash and toys. You can use "Push/Pay" or an envelope that says, "Gifts for Kids" on it. New toys can be dropped by the office anytime until the 20th. Help us make it a Merry Christmas for kids in congregation and our community.
- 4) Since CHRISTMAS EVE falls on a Sunday this year, here is the service line-up:
 - * One morning service at 10:00 AM
 - * Christmas Eve – 5:00 PM * Christmas Eve – 11:00 PM
 - * Christmas morning – 10:00 AM