

The journey to Christmas

We find ourselves in the familiar hustle and bustle of December. For some it is a month of fun and celebration, and for others it is a struggle just to survive and get to the end.

For Christians, the Advent season holds both of these extremes.

The journey to the stable, to the birth of the savior, is often

focused on just that – the birth of Christ. It is a journey though, and the weeks – the journey to get there – cannot be skipped over.

I keep thinking of the the words, “Are we there yet?” You might be picturing a

child in the backseat of the family vehicle on a road trip. It may be true that you have just left town, but the question is already being asked. At the beginning, the question hints at the excitement of the journey. It’s that bounce in your seat kind of excitement of waiting for good things to come.

We are looking forward to the destination, so we ask the question because we just can’t wait.

Farther down the road, the novelty of the trip is wearing off. The snacks have all been opened, and the next rest stop is at least an hour away. It is taking too long to get to where we are going. Is it really going to be worth it? It might be best to just stop and rest or even turn around rather than pushing through.

Hang in there! If we check our maps and watch the signs, we are encouraged to keep going. It is not that far. The signs begin to change and we see pictures of where we are headed, and the tone of the question changes again.

Are we there yet? This must be the place! Let’s never leave!

Advent is a trip like that too. We decorate our homes and our churches to reflect a new season. The colors change and we add more lights and candles to illuminate the way forward.

The first week of Advent, as

we light the candle of hope, our strength is renewed. It has been a long year for all of us, so a hope-filled promise gets us in the car and on the road. We are excited to begin the healing journey of Advent.

In the second week, John the Baptist tells us that we need to prepare the way. The word “preparation” makes sense, as we all have long lists of things to get done before the big day. It is a different kind of preparation. We are thinking of physical tasks, but John is encouraging deep spiritual changes.

It seems like too much, a detour that we do not want to take. It is necessary though, because old roads will not get us to where we need to be, which is a place of readiness to be in the Lord’s presence.

John says we need to repent and ready our hearts to make way for Him. The Scripture readings are harsh. Repentance is not the type of work that we want to focus on.

Our schedules are filled with parties and caroling. It seems like there are not enough hours in the day to do all that we need and want to do.

Worldly preparations consume us to the point that we are in danger of forgetting the whole point of Christmas Day. The maps that we are using are not going to get us to the place that we intended to go when we began the Advent journey. A detour, an adjustment, is needed.

The Scriptures tell us that the words and the signs from the prophets are true. Get ready and prepare, because Christ is coming!

Are we there yet? Not yet. Has the journey begun? It started before we even knew.

Will it be worth the trip? Definitely.

In this season of preparation, may we adjust our focus so that we can help the Spirit work through us. The signs of distress and despair of the past two years must be scrubbed away and replaced with hope and joy. May our journeys change not just our own selves, but the world as well.

The work continues.

Jen Matthees is the pastor at Grace United Methodist Church in Pequot Lakes.

Crosslake Lutheran Church lists its Christmas services

Crosslake Lutheran Church will host five chances for members to join in celebrating the Christmas season, including Blue Christmas Service on Dec. 14, Celebrating Christmas Together on Dec. 15, two Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship services Dec. 24, and A Service of Lessons and Carols on Dec. 26.

► **Blue Christmas Service:** 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 14

While the anticipation of Christmas is a source of joy, it also a challenge. For many, the coming of Christmas brings connection with pain and suffering from loss due to death or relationship struggles with loved ones. It is physically darker, intensifying mental health struggles.

This service will not ignore these or other issues as participants gather around a Lord who entered, and enters, the darkness of our world and our lives bringing

accompaniment and hope.

► **Celebrating Christmas Together:** 6:15–7:45 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 15

If you are a Sunday morning worshipper, you may not be aware of all the elementary-aged children, middle schoolers and high schoolers along with their families who are worshipping and learning about God’s abundant love on Wednesday evenings. And, if you are usually at church on a Wednesday, you may not know the people who gather on Sunday to sing praises to God.

In many ways, the church has two very unique and vital congregations worshipping each week. Church leaders want to bring these two groups together during the Christmas season to Celebrate Christmas Together with a meal, cocoa bar, cookie decorating and a fun, interactive, meaningful worship experience, all in the Fellowship Hall.

► **Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship:** 3 and 5 p.m., Friday, Dec. 24

Both services will offer the proclamation of light and life coming into the world in the birth of our Savior. Now, more than ever, we need to be connected with the original Christmas gift, Jesus.

With traditional carols, Scriptures, communion and candlelight, worshippers will be connected with our God Emmanuel, God with us, God for us, bringing hope and peace, joy and love.

► **A Service of Lessons and Carols:** 9:30 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 26

On this day after Christmas Day, the cooking is done and presents are opened. It is time to relax and reflect. Bring your need for R and R to this unique service as we hear the promise of God’s activity told and lived out through listening to our favorite readings and singing our favorite carols.

Nisswa church lists Christmas services, holiday celebrations

The Way to Bethlehem Musical Extravaganza featuring Lutheran Church of the Cross of Nisswa’s Senior Choir, Bells of Praise, King’s Kids and Cross Kids will be

held at 9 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 12, in the Celebration Center.

Christmas Eve services will be at 2 and 4 p.m. in the Sanctuary and at 6 p.m. for

an outdoor drive-in worship in the back parking lot. Check the Lutheran Church of the Cross of Nisswa’s website and Facebook page for any updates.

SENIOR MEALS

The Senior Nutrition Program still offers a nutritionally balanced meal at 11:30 a.m. Monday–Friday in Pine River and Crosslake, but people must pick them up at the door at Heartland Apartments, 445 Snell Ave., in Pine River, or have meals delivered by Meals on Wheels.

To order a meal or Meals on Wheels in Pine River, call 218–587–2921. To order a meal by noon a day in

advance or for Meals on Wheels in Crosslake, call 218–692–4271.

The suggested voluntary donation is \$5 per meal for those over 60 and \$8.50 for those under 60. Menus are subject to change.

Meals are served with bread, margarine and low-fat milk.

Dec. 13–17

► **Monday:** Orange chicken, brown rice, Oriental vegetables, mandarin oranges.

► **Tuesday:** Beef goulash, peas, tropical fruit, garlic breadstick.

► **Wednesday:** Beef and bean burrito bake with lettuce, tomato and sour cream, pears, dessert.

► **Thursday:** Chicken fried steak and mashed potatoes with gravy, warm cinnamon apple slices, dessert.

► **Friday:** Fish patty with tartar sauce, bun, cheesy hashbrown, baked beans, peaches.

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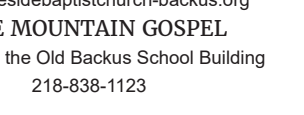
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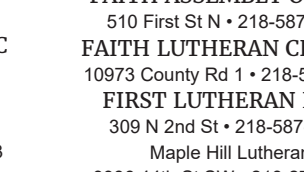
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