

# THE MESSENGER OF HOPE



## The Newsletter of Hope Lutheran Church

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The Baptism of our Lord through  
the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

January 2005



## WORDS OF HOPE

### *Reflections from Pastor Curtis Aguirre*

Just after Christmas, a natural disaster of gigantic proportions unfolded around the eastern Indian Ocean. A powerful undersea earthquake, caused by a sudden, 1,200 km long movement of two pieces of the earth's crust along a seismic fault, sent enormous waves surging onto the shores of Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Indonesia and several other countries. Tens of thousands of people drowned. Millions have been left destitute. The world community has rallied with an outpouring of aid and other support (see Charity of the Month for one way for you to participate).

Such disasters were once called 'acts of God', and indeed on insurance policies they still are. While centuries ago God was the only way to explain such natural catastrophes, we know better today. These events (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and related occurrences) are part of the natural structure and cycles of planet earth. In a sense, the earth is alive, ever moving, ever changing. While that change usually happens slowly, almost imperceptibly over a human lifetime, and therefore allows us to get on with our lives as though there were no planetary change, sometimes it comes suddenly, unleashing forces that are beyond our power to control. We as creatures are dwarfed by the magnitude of these events, and can only try to survive, cope, recover, move on, and maybe even learn from them.

I remember in February of 1971, just before my eleventh birthday, emerging from a deep sleep early one morning, thinking that my mother was shaking me awake, only to open my eyes and see, feel, and hear that the entire room was shaking and rattling. Immediately the dire predictions we often heard on Los Angeles area television stations, that California would one day fall into the ocean, came to mind. In that moment, that was my thought: the Pacific Ocean would soon be surging up our street and we would drown. I jumped from bed to run to my mother, only to trip and fall to the floor from the sharp, intense movement of everything. I

crawled out into the little hallway of our apartment. My mother came crawling out of her bedroom. I curled up like a turtle on the floor and she put herself over me. All around there was the sound of crashing plates and glasses being flung from cupboards. The building creaked and groaned. And always there was a deep, ominous rumbling. The shaking and rumbling and crashing seemed to go on forever. In my mind's eye I kept picturing a great wall of water speeding down our street. Terror! Nothing to be done! The end was coming!

And then it stopped. A few more clinks and little crashing sounds from a cup or a plate, and then there was utter, eerie silence. We were alive! There was no ocean outside our windows. Our neighbourhood sustained only broken glass and shattered chimneys. Elsewhere, however, freeway overpasses had collapsed, crushing people in their cars. A veterans' hospital crumbled into a pile of rubble. Hundreds died. One of the city's reservoirs threatened to burst and cause further disaster. Fortunately, it did not. The earthquake was a big one, though we were told that it wasn't THE big one.

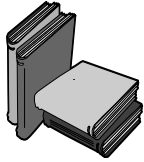
These disasters are part of being alive and living on planet earth. The act of God always follows these disasters, when people are moved to heroism, daring, and compassion to save others, to pull others out of danger's way, sometimes even endangering themselves. The act of God happens when people open their pocket books, their pantries, and sometimes their homes, to help the survivors. Those are the acts of God. In those times the image of God in which we are created shines forth.

Now, of course, some people also take advantage of these disasters to use and exploit people, preying on their vulnerability and their neediness. Corrupt officials find ways to get rich from the misfortune of others. Once 'ordinary' people are suddenly overcome with criminal intent, looting, hoarding, scamming. Here we see the power of sin, the 'turned-in-on-self-ness' which plagues our human race.

In the Lord's Prayer we pray, 'Save us from the time of trial'. Natural disasters are a time of trial. In these

kinds of events, we often see people for who they are: raw, without the veneer of sociability, boldly heroic, stoically enduring, emotionally paralyzed, or brazenly self-serving. As we have been learning from the media reports, many have passed the test, often revealing unknown mettle and resolve to help others. But there are also others in whom the image of God is badly tarnished and needs cleaning.

Yes, God, save us from the time of trial; but when it does come, help us to pass the test, not only for our sake, but for the sake of those whom we will help. Amen. /



CATECHISM EXCERPT  
FOR JANUARY 2005  
**The Sacrament of  
Holy Communion**

**What is the Sacrament of Holy Communion?**

*Answer:* It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and drink.

**Where is this written?**

*Answer:* The holy evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and St. Paul write thus: In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. Again after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

**Pastor Curtis' Commentary:**

On the spectrum of understandings of Holy Communion, Luther was somewhere in between the extremes of, on the one hand, the Roman Catholic Church, which taught and teaches the complete change of the elements into the literal body and blood of Christ, and, on the other hand, the Anabaptist movement which understood the Lord's Supper to be largely a symbolic act of remembering. Luther's position, which also became the official position of the Lutheran churches around the world, is best summarized as "the teaching of the true presence". Christ is truly present in, with, and under the elements of the bread and the wine. As in baptism, the physical element used in the sacrament does not change. The power lies in the word and promise of God. Next month I will unpack this last point more expressly. /

## PEOPLE AND PLACES

*(Back by popular demand, this is a column highlighting events and people in our congregation. If you have any suggestions for including in this, please drop a note in the Pastor's pocket by the downstairs entrance to the church.)*

**Looking Back at December:**

December is always a busy time, as people prepare for Christmas. At Hope Lutheran we had several events in that spirit of preparation.

For Dec. 10, Charlie Fox and Verna Conway organized the third monthly Friday night coffee house at Hope on a Christmas theme. Performers from as far away as Qualicum Beach, and as close as our own congregation brought music and recitation. The next day Charlie and Verna organized a Tea and Concert, also on a Christmas theme, with two featured guest vocalists. Though the turnout was a bit thin, those who came had a wonderful time. Thanks to Charlie and Verna for putting so much work into these events. Nice decorating, too!

On Sunday the 12th at the 9:30 service, Carolyn Iles organized a simple and delightful telling of the Christmas story for the children to put on for the congregation (with a little help from the teens). Thanks to all who helped and participated. It was great!

That evening, the Youth Group and several adults went Christmas Carolling to six different homes of congregation members. As they drove from one part of town to another, they also did a little Christmas lights viewing. Carolling is always a great way to get into the spirit, and help others to do the same.

On the 13th, the ELW held their annual Christmas lunch. Frieda Kalack put together an excellent program of readings and singing, reviewing the Christmas story in a deeply Biblical and theological way. Pastor Curtis concluded the time with a presentation on the meaning of Christmas. Thanks to all who helped pull the meal together, and decorate the room so beautifully.

On the 21st, some of the youth got into the spirit of the season in a different way: they volunteered at the '7-10 Club' at St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church, preparing food for needy people. Some of the group had to peel and chop onions for two hours! That's some serious commitment and service.

After all the preparation, comes the celebration. Our four Christmas Eve services were all well attended. Nothing

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**FROM THE CHAIR**

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*Jan Nilsson*

Blessed technology?

We celebrated Christmas Eve with three of our children in typical Swedish fashion this year again. This means a table set with rice porridge, meatballs, thin bread, limpa, pickled herring, cheeses and other delicacies. Sadly, lutefisk is something that we have stayed away from for a few years now. I have tried to have it adopted as a tradition but to no avail. It is only I who crave it so I'm the lonely voice crying in the wilderness. So lutefisk is now only an empty spot on the table.

After we had eaten of all the food on the table and were satisfied, actually more than satisfied, we dragged ourselves down stairs to open the presents. Thanks to the technology of a beautiful artificial Christmas tree, and thanks to cable, channel 4 with a beautiful fire and a large TV screen, we had a beautiful setting in our family room.

Reflecting on the kinds of gifts we exchanged this year technology was front and centre. The parents, Rosina, and I were ushered into the 21-century with a DVD player from our daughters. Being considerate girls they also included a couple of DVD movies. Also being clever girls and so we wouldn't forget our age, the movies were from the 50s and 60s. Great quality, great movies even in black and white.

This is the second year that our eldest son has celebrated his Christmas out of province with his family there. So we were excited when we received a phone call from Alberta and our son telling us that they had received a web cam for Christmas. "So dad" I was told "all you need to do is to register on MSN and make contact with us via the Internet and presto you can see us." And we did. There they were smiling at us in full colour moving in real time. I even got an air kiss from my granddaughter. That was great. I understand that there is a web-cam coming in the mail to us from out of province. Can't wait to use it.

When I saw the news of the natural disaster in South Asia on Boxing day, two days after our Christmas Eve celebration, I even more appreciated our time together. The early account of people missing or dead was in the thousands. Now this has been revised upwards in the tens of thousands. I also watched and listen to the account on line from the Swedish TV and Radio and there are still thousands of Swedes and Norwegians missing. The tsunami had hit at the height of the tourist season and many Scandinavians had flocked to Thailand mainly for the Christmas holidays. Likely they had celebrated on Christmas Eve too and now on Boxing day the unthinkable had happened. Could they have been warned?

A report that is very disturbing to me is that the Thailand authorities decided not to send the Tsunami warning, sighting concern that this would negatively affect the tourist industry. A warning urging evacuation being wrong was worse in their minds than no warning at all. Apparently the technology to detect the quake was there and the possible affect of it too but the experts didn't trust in it. A bigger concern to them was the economic affect than the saving of lives.

It is difficult to understand the meaning of such a disaster at any time but this disaster happened during the celebration of the birth of our saviour. It is supposed to be a time of joy, of giving and of family not a time of grieving. I pray for understanding and the assurance that people are more valuable than "the bottom line."

- Jan

**"We will never know who our true friends are until we call out in times of adversity."**  
*David Baird author of "A Peaceful Life"*

says Christmas more than people gathered together around the Christmas tree to hear the story and sing the songs of Christmas.

### Looking Forward to January:

January is the time when Church Council is preparing for the Annual General Meeting in February. There is a good chance you will be hearing about the needs for the functioning of Hope Lutheran Church in terms of time, talents, and finances.

### Looking Further Ahead:

Lent begins on February 9 (Ash Wednesday). Be watching for information about the 'Ash Tuesday' pancake supper and service on February 8, sponsored by the Youth Group and Confirmation Class.

Pastor Curtis plans to hold weekly Lenten Bible studies on the Tuesday Evenings of Lent, followed by 'Prayer Around the Cross', a type of evening service which developed at Holden Village, the Lutheran retreat centre/family camp in Washington state.

On Saturday, March 12, we will have the special privilege of hosting Rev. Daniel Erlander for an all day 'walk through the Bible'.

Easter falls as early as it possibly can: March 27 (the first Sunday, after the first full moon, after the spring equinox).

## CHARITY OF THE MONTH FOR JANUARY

*The following is an edited version of a news release from the ELCIC's Global Hunger and Development Appeal (GHDA):*

### **GHDA WELCOMES DONATIONS TO AID ASIA EARTHQUAKE/FLOODING VICTIMS**

Winnipeg, Dec 28, 2004 (ELCIC)--For Immediate Release

GHDA, working with Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR), is accepting financial contributions to help survivors of the catastrophic disaster that swept across parts of south and southeast Asia on Sunday. According to reports, more than 50,000 people died when a massive earthquake off the west coast of the northern Indonesian island of Sumatra triggered tidal waves that hit the shores of Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India, Thailand, Malaysia,

Maldives and Bangladesh. Thousands of people are still missing and hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced. The full extent of the disaster is still not known in more remote areas in Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia.

CLWR will respond through Action by Churches Together (ACT), a global alliance of international organizations. ACT members are already responding in Sri Lanka, India, and Indonesia. In Sri Lanka, where more than 18,000 people are said to have died, the National Council of Churches in Sri Lanka (NCCSL) reports that two truckloads of essential food items and water will leave today (December 28) for Muttur in Trincomalee and the other to Thirukovil in Batticaloa, two of the worst hit areas. In India, ACT member United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELICI) has sent three teams to the hardest hit area and will be assisting people in Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. CLWR has worked in India for many years.

A top World Health Organization official has warned that disease following in the wake of the devastation could kill as many people again. Dr. David Nabarro told a Geneva news conference today that an "influx of medical supplies and water treatment equipment is crucial to head off the looming health catastrophe." Children have emerged as the biggest victims of Sunday's quake-born tidal waves. "At least one third of the tens of thousands who died were children," said UNICEF spokesman, Alfred Ironside in New York.

People wishing to help victims of the disaster are encouraged to do so through GHDA/CLWR. Donations may be added to your regular congregational offering this week...marked "Asia Earthquake Flooding." When your donation is marked thus to a special appeal, GHDA forwards 100% to that project.

[Editor's note: You can also mark your envelopes 'Charity of the Month'.]

**The deadline for the February Messenger is Friday, January 28. Please send your submissions to Hope Lutheran at [hopeluth@nanaimo.ark.com](mailto:hoveluth@nanaimo.ark.com) or phone the office at (250) 758-1232.**