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Monthly Newsletter of Hosanna Lutheran Church

March 2011

**We all have the same task: to be the face of Christ in the world.**

## A Few Words from Pastor John

### Stir the Soul ... Encounter God

The month of March brings a couple of unique opportunities for us to stretch and flex. You may be thinking right now, "What in the world is he talking about?" Well, let me explain...and invite you to come, see, and experience.

First of all, our Lenten journey begins with Ash Wednesday, March 9, when we gather for worship and hear the words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." I don't know about you, but those words have a definite tendency to stir my soul, shake me loose, and create an opening to encounter God anew. So I invite everyone to attend one of the two evening worship services on March 9 and start your Lenten journey by stirring the soul.

Throughout Lent, on Wednesday evenings, we will continue to create a "venue" that will hopefully be refreshing and challenging as we gather for worship at 7 PM, ending at 7:30, following the theme of "**Stir the Soul...Encounter God.**" Trust me, it will be unique! Fellowship opportunities also abound each Wednesday as we gather for a soup supper, provided by the Ministry Teams at Hosanna. And it is FREE! So please, come and see, experience God anew and grow in faith as we journey through Lent together.

There is another event going on at Hosanna during Lent and it is a pivotal moment in this time of our history as a mission. It is the "Forming the Future" leadership retreat to be held Saturday, March 19. It is the continuation of a process of answering the question, "What is **God's** purpose for Hosanna Lutheran Church? "There will be around 60 people gathering to do some serious discernment to answer that question and create a good and faithful "next step" to engage everyone at Hosanna (and beyond) to a clearer definition that will guide us into the future of our mission.

The Lenten journey and the retreat are connected and serve the same purpose, namely to create a refreshing encounter with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, once again, I invite everyone -- those who are missionaries serving through Hosanna's mission and those who might be reading this and might be a bit curious -- to come and see, come and experience God anew or even for the first time.

Pastor John

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## 95th Birthday Celebration for Cecil Young

Please send a birthday card to my dad for this special birthday. He will be 95 on March 13th. His address is: C/O Atria Cypresswood, 6611 Cypresswood Dr. Spring, TX 77379. Please indicate that you are from Hosanna to assist him in identifying who sent the card. Also, stop by the Atrium on Cypresswood March 13 at 2:30 PM for a piece of birthday cake. Thanks to all. Lois Heckart



## Habitat for Humanity News

**Habitat needs our help** to complete the Hamil Ranch Subdivision by the August 31 funding deadline. HFH received \$1.4 million in infrastructure funding from Harris County; however all homes must be completed and dedicated by that date or the money will have to be refunded.



The Hosanna House is on schedule to complete and dedicate in early April; however, interior work such as hanging cabinets and doors, installing baseboards, painting, etc. is still required. Please call Carley (281-820-2307) to determine when a crew is scheduled to do interiors. Or you may wish to work outside on other houses.

**Habitat's Tool Box Bash** is April 2 at Shirley Acres (off Kuykendahl). This is their major fundraiser and they hope to raise enough to fund 2 homes.

The Bash has various contests, silent auctions and good snacks in addition to the sit-down dinner. The prize for the raffle is \$5,000 to apply to a vacation of your choice. Raffle tickets are \$10 each or 6 for \$50 and Bob Dejmal has some for sale. Dinner tickets are \$100/plate and are available from Rachel Wright at 281-820-2307.

## April Book Discussion

Hosanna Book Discussion participants, we will have our next book discussion on Saturday, April 2 at 6:00 PM in the Conference Room.

The topic will be "Cane River" by Lalita Tademy. Five generations and a hundred years in the life of a matriarchal black Louisiana family are encapsulated in this novel that is based in part upon the lives, as preserved in both historical record and oral tradition, of the author's ancestors. Those who wish can adjourn to a local restaurant after the meeting to continue the discussion. Contact Nancy Agafitei 281-370-6810 or [nancy.agafitei@hcpl.net](mailto:nancy.agafitei@hcpl.net) for more information.

## From the TX-LA Gulf Coast Synod

**We want to hear from the youth of the synod!**

We are approaching our Synod Assembly quickly. This year's synod assembly is focused on inter-generational ministry and our discussions will focus on Kendra Dean's work in Almost Christian about the spiritual lives of U.S. youth. For the synod assembly, we would like to present research about the spiritual lives of youth in our synod.

To do this, we need our youth to complete a survey entitled **Our Christian Faith**. Its a very quick survey (takes at most 20 minutes to complete) by either printing a hard copy of the survey (see below) or take the survey online: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/tlgcsyouthsurvey>. Please complete the survey no later than **March 15th**. Mail the hard copy of the survey to Ben Remmert at Peace Lutheran Church, 6435 Fairmont Parkway, Pasadena TX, 77505. Click [here](#) for a copy of the survey.

## Team Hosanna Walkers and Rockers

### A Benefit to Raise Money to Feed the Hungry

**Be a walker or a rocker or a sponsor. Help feed the hungry.**

**Date:** Sunday, April 3

**Time:** 1:30-2:30 or 3 PM (you determine the end time)

**Mission:** Raise money to feed the Hungry (Locally and Worldwide)

**Who:** You and Your Family

**Host Church:** The Woodlands Christian Church, 1202 N. Millbend Drive



There is a shaded walking path across from the church for CROP Walkers to walk and raise money. We can also assist with setting an area for those who want to rock in their rocking chairs.

Go to <http://www.churchworldservice.org> for additional information and to have sponsors donate. Also check out the [Hosanna Team site](#)

[Pat Gibbons](#) will be glad to assist with any questions. "If I don't have the answer I'll find out."

Sign-up sheets will be available after worship on March 20 and 27 and you will be provided the sponsor sheets to use for donations.

If a sponsor would like to donate to another organization such as Lutheran World Relief or ELCA World Hunger, there is a section on the sponsor sheet or online to make the designation. If you decide on this option then 67.5% goes to that organization, 25% goes to Northwest Assistance Ministries and 7.5% will be kept by the Church World Service (CWS) for administrative needs.

If a sponsor does not designate, then 75% goes to feed the hungry around the World by the CWS and 25% goes to Northwest Assistance Ministries.

We (Mission Focus Team) thought designating the money raised by HLC to ELCA or Lutheran World Relief was a good idea. But, please designate to an organization you wish. You can designate the larger portion to NAM for their continuing needs in addition to the 25% they are going to receive.

**Make it a family day and celebrate that you have this chance to help others as well.**

## **Mission of the Month Noisy Offering**

**Sunday, March 20 - Lutherhill Ministries**

**Matt Kindsvatter from Lutherhill will join us for worship March 20 and will conduct a special Kids Church.**

Lutherhill is a year-round retreat center where people of all faiths are welcome to come and enjoy our 85 acres of wooded and wide open spaces. Facilities are available for swimming, games, high ropes adventure course, RVs, tent campsites and other activities. Wooded areas abound for hiking or just sitting down and relaxing among our beautiful live oak trees.

Located between Austin and Houston, just outside of La Grange, TX, Lutherhill sits atop the highest point in Fayette County and is well known for beautiful sunsets and an incredible view of the surrounding countryside.

People have enjoyed Lutherhill since 1954 as a place to worship, study, and play together. Come for a relaxing day or weekend, or stay longer if you like!



**Lutherhill Ministries serves all these groups and perhaps yours too:**

- Individuals and families seeking a quiet place to reflect, renew and recharge.
- Congregations for adult, family or youth retreats.
- Groups, large or small for overnight or day retreats.
- Congregations at their facilities for Day Camp.

### **What We Offer**

- Housing in a variety of accommodations.
- Food service or facilities that allow groups to cook for themselves.
- Recreational facilities, including a challenge course, pool, and pond.
- Friendly customized service to help you plan your event.
- Professional staff to lead worship, team-building activities and recreational activities.

See the [Lutherhill website](#) for more information or to sign up for an upcoming retreat.

**Make some noise and impact lives.**

## **While We're on the Subject of Lutherhill...**

Dear Friends of Lutherhill,

It is with mixed emotions that I announce my resignation, effective March 15th, 2011, as Executive Director of Lutherhill Ministries to accept the position of Philanthropic Advisor with Lutheran World Relief/Lutheran Malaria Initiative.

It has been a remarkable honor to serve this amazing ministry over the last 7 years. I am so thankful for the trust you have shown to me and to this ministry, through your generous support and participation. I have been privileged to participate in this ministry and in your lives for this small period, and I could never appropriately thank you for your service and support.

As I reflect, I am deeply proud of what has been accomplished in Christ's name over these years. In 2004, Lutherhill served just over 3,000 people, in 2010 that number was 7,457 people touched by the love of Christ through this ministry. That growth, made possible in part by: 9.22 acres of new land, a sewer system, a water system, the Carby Chapel Center, six new cabins, and the Broesche Family Retreat Center; is really a mark of your support and generosity. As I go, I ask that you continue your support for Lutherhill.

As Lutherhill continues in its mission to be, "A place for all people of every generation, to experience the love of Christ in unique settings and new ways", I am confident that with your support its success will continue! I am confident that God will lift up new leadership and give new expression to the leadership currently in place!

Our Board of Directors is comprised of some of the finest business and church leaders across our Synod and is led by Mrs. Cynthia Piland, who has served the board for 7 years. Our staff is led by Associate Director for Program Matt Kindsvatter who has been in his position for over 10 years; and Associate Director for Operations, Kristin Albers Lamm who has been in her position for over 8 years. The leadership of Lutherhill will undoubtedly keep this ministry stable and focused on its mission working through our existing strategic and facility plans to insure continued growth.

Details of the plans for opening a search for the next leader of Lutherhill will follow soon, from our Board of Directors. Any questions can be directed to Cynthia Piland at [Board@lutherhill.org](mailto:Board@lutherhill.org) or by calling 979.249.3232. Direct contact with me can be made at [Evan@lutherhill.org](mailto:Evan@lutherhill.org).

As I look forward with excitement to the opportunity that lies ahead for my family and myself, I also look back with a thankful heart; and give praise to God for Lutherhill.

God's Peace,  
Evan Moilan

## March Seniors Outing

Saturday, March 12 - We will attend the Radio Music Theater production of **A Fertile Farewell**. This is RMT's last production as it is closing forever on April 30. Sign up in the North Narthex.

**Coming in April...** The Train Museum in Rosenberg, a perfect outing for railroad buffs. Details later.

## Welcoming Newcomers

by Pastor Keith Anderson, [Lutheran Church of the Redeemer](#) in Woburn, Massachusetts.

Congregations often define their success in welcoming visitors by the number of people that actually become members.

At our congregation we have shifted the focus to improving the quality of our welcome, and it feels like maybe we're onto something. We've found our way mostly through trial and error -- and listening carefully to the feedback of our visitors and newest members. These are the top 10 things we have learned about welcoming newcomers to our congregation over the last five years:

### **Everyone is different and nothing is very straightforward.**

This is our mantra. There is no one pattern for the way people enter, engage and join our congregation.

Every person and every situation is different. We try to honor that and not insist on uniformity. This requires flexibility and improvisation on our part, but it enriches our understanding of welcoming and the beauty and diversity of the body of Christ.

### **Expect new members.**

Previously, we waited until we had a critical mass of newcomers to schedule a day to welcome new members. Now, at the start of the year, we schedule two dates a year to welcome new members -- in the fall and spring. This has helped us move from a mindset of "if people come" to "when people come." That approach has extended into Sunday mornings as well. We confidently expect that there will be someone new and plan accordingly.

### **Maintain an expansive idea of community.**

You don't have to be a member of our congregation to be part of our community. Thanks to the Internet and social media, people are part of our community long before they arrive at church - if they ever come. They have a sense of who we are, what we do and how we live the gospel through our Web site, Facebook page and Sermon Blog.

### **No classes.**

We don't have new-member classes. Our only welcoming event is a brunch that we have a few weeks before welcoming new members in the spring and fall.

The brunch is always a graceful event. New people can meet each other and meet current members of the congregation.

We find that integrating new members into the congregation happens more naturally and more fruitfully through conversation, visitation, involvement and developing relationships. **People don't want to hear about it; they want to experience it.**

### **Enable people to participate right away.**

Our congregation used to have an unspoken waiting period for participation. People would regularly be members for months or years before being asked to take a leadership role.

Now, we encourage people to get involved before they are members. We believe that you don't need to be a "member" before you can start living out God's calling in your life.

**Not joining does not equal failure.**

The end result of welcoming is not necessarily membership. If someone only comes for one Sunday, then we have ministered to them in some way. If people are with us for awhile and decide not to join, we feel we've contributed to their discernment process.

If you make welcoming about membership, it's a setup for disappointment. Not everyone will join and there will never be enough new members. Make it about ministry instead and decide how you will measure success.

**Understand people's passions.**

Listen for the way God is calling people to live out their faith - at work, home and in the church. Set people free to follow God's call.

**The individual transforms the institution, not the other way around.**

We have a dream that one day, when we tell the stories of our congregation, we won't tell time by when pastors came and left, but when people came to our congregation - not "And then Pastor Anderson was called...", but rather, "Then Karen and Katie joined the congregation...." We expect newcomers to transform us, not for the congregation to make everyone the same.

**Everyone is a greeter.**

One of the best things we did to be more welcoming was to no longer have official greeters -- those people congregations place near the front door to welcome people.

By designating certain people, it lets everyone else off the hook. Now, it's a shared responsibility. Every Sunday after the service, as I greet people leaving the sanctuary, there are several members engaging visitors in conversation. It is a beautiful scene.

**Decide to be assertive.**

There's always a fear that you will drive people away if you are too assertive. That's a risk we are willing to take. Except for one or two exceptions in five years, this has never been a problem. Indifference and indecisiveness are far worse than assertiveness!!!

## **In the Footsteps of Luther**

### **Retracing Martin Luther's Journey From Erfurt, Germany to Rome**

Sarah and Andrew Wilson walked from Germany to Italy on foot. They logged more than 1,000 miles over 70 days and sustained no significant injuries, other than the usual aches and pains you'd expect from a long-distance hike.

Why the long journey? The couple wanted to talk about faith and Christian unity with people they met along the way.

Starting in Erfurt, Germany, Sarah and Andrew walked through Austria, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, ending their trip in Rome -- exactly the same route the then 27-year-old Martin Luther took 500 years ago for his pilgrimage there.

During his time, Rome was the center of Christianity. Luther, along with another Augustinian monk from Erfurt, was sent to Rome on business for the order. The trip was supposed to be a tremendous opportunity for the young monk. But, while there, Luther learned about the selling of indulgences for forgiveness, which didn't make him happy. He was shocked by the immorality, ignorance and flippancy of the Roman priests. Luther returned to Erfurt more troubled than ever.



*Erfurt Cathedral, where Luther was ordained in 1507*

Sarah and Andrew call their pilgrimage "Here I Walk," seeking to call attention to Luther and the importance of ecumenism. They set out on foot because "news traveled only as fast the human body could travel in Luther's day," says Sarah.

Conversations focused primarily on the relationship between Roman Catholics and Lutherans. Sarah says that the conversations were optimistic and uplifting, particularly among German and Italian Catholics.

"People who followed our journey also reflected a tremendous amount of goodwill about ecumenism, about theology and about Luther," she says.

"I think the most significant piece is that the ecumenical movement invites us to see each other in the light of God, overlooking neither our failures (nor our) virtues," says Sarah.

"Most Lutherans and Catholics remain unaware of the remarkable ways that their churches have drawn together over the past 50 years," she says. "Differences and disputes still compel greater interest than convergence and agreement."

"There is a real unity according to most people you meet among Christian churches," says Andrew. "The divisions that are part of ecclesiastical discourses don't play a large part in the lives of the people we talked to," he says.

The histories of Lutherans and Catholics are related, says Sarah. "Christ forgives us for all our sins and ecumenism invites us to tell the truth about

each other and our histories."

Encountering fascinating conversations with people from all walks of life and visits to historical sites, both Sarah and Andrew believe that their pilgrimage remains incomplete.

"We've only gone halfway, Lutherans following Luther's path from a traditionally Lutheran land into the heart of Catholicism," says Sarah. "That's why we'd like to extend an invitation to our Catholic friends and fellow travelers out there to take the return journey."

*Sarah is an ELCA pastor serving as a research professor at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France. She is also editor of the Lutheran Forum. Andrew is a post-doctoral fellow at the Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Research and Dialogue, Geneva. He is also a member of the ELCA.*

## Hosanna's African Initiative

Hosanna sponsors two programs in Ngara, Tanzania under an umbrella organization known as the African Initiative. To aid us in matching your contribution to the program you intended to support, it would be helpful if your contribution was titled to the specific program as explained below.

### WomenCraft

WomenCraft is a community driven social enterprise that connects talented rural East African women with fair-trade markets. This program has allowed families to buy such basic needs as kerosene, soap and sugar. Also many families are saving their income so that they can buy and raise farm animals such as chickens, goats, pigs and cows - or turn their grass huts into houses.

If you would like to contribute to this effort, make your check payable to Hosanna Lutheran Church with the gift designated as "WomenCraft." Any gifts so titled will be used to benefit the program as determined by its leadership team. You may also designate how your gift will be used, as a member recently did. In this example, they titled their gift "WomenCraft Production Center."

**Read the latest issue of the [WomenCraft Newsletter](#):**

#### Highlights:

- 2010: A record year for SALES! Last year saw WomenCraft increase sales by 51%!
- WomenCraft is now a member of Makutano House, an enterprise committed to preserving Tanzanian art and culture.
- In 2010, WomenCraft artisans collectively earned more than \$26,000 USD in artisan payments.

### Kagera Scholarship Fund

The purpose of this scholarship fund is to provide academically qualified students who are orphaned ( have lost one or both parents) or who are in extreme poverty, with financial assistance. In Tanzania, a student's education is not paid for by the government after grade 6. The scholarship fund will enable these students to continue their education, which will allow

them to have prospects for the future and become contributing members of their society. Since this program began in 2005, it has served more than 150 students.

**To contribute to this program, simply make your check payable to Hosanna Lutheran Church with the gift designated "Kagera Scholarship Fund."**

## Evangelism

### Not Just "Shuffling Cards"

In seventeenth-century America, life was rural and community centered. The church and the town hall were close to each other in more ways than one. The church depended on the sermon and the sanctuary as the primary forms to accomplish ministry and that served people well.

But, times have changed drastically. Today, we find ourselves in an urban, mobile society where church and state are often opposed to each other, and where biblical and popular thought are increasingly at odds. The days when we could expect the world to come to us are over! Yet, that is where we expend our energy -- attempting to get the unchurched to come to us. We still operate under the assumption that with the right approach we can attract "seekers" to attend our church.

While there are those who will be attracted to a church by what it offers, most unbelievers won't. The problem lies in who those people usually turn out to be. The overwhelming majority are part of a migratory flock of churchgoers who seem to be looking for a place to land for a period of time. That isn't growth; it's simply a reshuffling of the same fifty-two cards. As long as we persist in our "come to us" mindset we become the "frozen chosen" who continue to see those who refuse to walk in our front door as beyond the reach of the Gospel.

### Mega-churches and entrepreneurial churches... the answer?

Superchurches emerged in the 1970s and, in the 1980s, it was the "entrepreneurial" church that became the model for success. The inspiration for the entrepreneurial church was summarized by George Barna: "The church is not making inroads into the lives and hearts of people. My contention ... is that the major problem plaguing the church is its failure to embrace a marketing orientation in what has become a marketing-driven environment." According to Leith Anderson, President of the National Association of Evangelicals, "More and more Americans are opting for 'full service churches' that offer quality and variety in music, extensive youth programs, diverse educational opportunities, a counseling staff, support groups, single's ministry, athletic activities, multiple Sunday morning services, a modern nursery and ... other services and programs." Such churches were described as "spiritual shopping malls" with a wide variety of ministries under one roof. During council and elder meetings one was likely to hear such marketing lingo as, "who is the consumer," "learning the market," and "cost-results." Success was measured by attendance numbers.

Although huge churches (Lakewood Church, Saddleback Church, for example) are models for success, only a small percentage of the estimated 375,000 U.S. churches fit into that category. Most are small. Half have 75 or less in worship on Sunday mornings. The proponents of adopting a business marketing approach to church growth argue that the church is a

business and needs to be treated as such. But the fear is that the American church has gone outside the Bible to adopt a model that produces some pretty bad fruit. How do we measure spiritual service? How do we evaluate time spent in prayer? How do we determine the cost effectiveness of serving lunch to Habitat for Humanity volunteers, or knitting prayer shawls for hospital patients? What do we get for our money's worth from a weekly quilting group or a care team packing Christmas cookies for shut-ins?

The question we most often ask when it comes to "church growth" is, "What's working that will increase our numbers?" What we need to ask is, "What does the Bible say about ministry?"

Anytime we consider the subject of church growth, it's important to start with what Jesus said on the subject. In the first chapter of the book of Acts, he told his disciples to begin in Jerusalem, expand outward to all of Judea, then to Samaria, and the "to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8). Evangelism is to be comprehensive, and all-fronts push outward, block by block, city by city, nation by nation, to the entire world.

Prior to his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus modeled the passion and commitment to which he called his followers. He talked with "sinners," tended to the sick and disadvantaged and taught great crowds. He reached out to people and by his actions he changed hearts.

While some Christian congregations languish in mediocrity, this was not the case with the first century church. Following Jesus' ascension, the eleven remaining disciples gathered with the wider network of Jesus' followers. At the time of Pentecost, about 120 of Jesus' followers were "meeting together in one place" when the Holy Spirit empowered them (Acts 2:1-4). Pentecost saw 3,000 men and women added to the Jerusalem church.

The early church continued to grow, spreading well beyond Jerusalem to Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, Africa and other parts of the known world.

In the period following the Apostolic Age, there was an exuberant caring and sharing on the part of Christians that was so unique that the Roman Emperor Julian "the apostate" (331/332-363 AD), a staunch enemy of Christianity, admitted that "the godless Galileans fed not only their (poor) but ours also." Tertullian (c. 160 - c. 220 AD) wrote that the Christians' deeds of love were so noble that the pagan world confessed in astonishment, "See how they love one another." Exactly what is it that these Christians did which elicited such a response from their enemies?

There was, first of all, an exceptional freedom to care for the needs of one another in the believing community. By 250 AD Christians in Rome were caring for some fifteen hundred needy people. Their generosity was so great that Ignatius said they were "leading in love," and Bishop Dionysus of Corinth noted that they were sending "supplies to many churches in every city..."

But this joyful sharing was not confined to Christians. Bishop John Chrysostom witnessed: "Every day the Church here feeds 3,000 people. Besides this, the church daily helps provide food and clothes for prisoners, the hospitalized, pilgrims, cripples, churchmen and others. When epidemics broke out in Carthage and Alexandria, Christians rushed to aid all in need." These Christians genuinely believed that God was the owner and giver of

all good gifts. Their generosity was an imitation of God's generosity. They were free from anxiety because they knew that tomorrow was in God's hands. They lived in simplicity.

The bottom line for church growth is that we are commanded to go out among the people and show that we are Christians by our love, not to adopt a "come to us" mentality. The only numbers that matter are the total of people served, not those in attendance.

## **Bible Boot Camp 5**

### **Isaiah: Building Straight Roads and Leveling Ground**

Isaiah is one of the most beautiful and significant books in the Old Testament. Its messages of judgment are balanced by words of comfort and hope, and its vision of the the coming Messiah is the most moving and clearest of all Old Testament prophecies. Isaiah calls on us to look beyond the present, to remain aware of God and to be confident in the future that God is shaping.

Yet Isaiah's work was not solely a foretelling the future. A prophet was not just a future teller, but one who spoke God's word to the people of his own day. Isaiah was God's spokesman to the Southern Kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem. He spoke against their sins, urging them to repent. He then foretold destruction upon them if they did not return to God.

In the midst of his dire warnings, Isaiah also foretold of a bright future with the coming Messiah. God had not forgotten the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David, and would spare a remnant of the nation out of which would come the Messiah and his new kingdom.

Isaiah did not work alone at this time. God sent other prophets to Israel and Judah. Hosea (750-725 BC) prophesied mainly to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Micah (735-700 BC), together with Isaiah, spoke primarily to Judah in the south.

### **Placing Isaiah in Time**

King Solomon was known for his wisdom. Considering how he started, it's almost inconceivable that he drifted so far. Not only did he build altars to horrible gods (human sacrifice, sexual perversions) for his foreign wives, he also joined in the worship. He fell victim to the pleasures of the world, pleas from his wives, political pressure and began to think that he could do anything because of his power.

After the death of Solomon (about 931 BC) his kingdom was divided in two. The northern tribes (commonly numbered 10, but actually eight) became the kingdom of Israel with Samaria as its capital city. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed the smaller king of Judah in the south, with Jerusalem as its capital.

About 190 years passed. Both Judah and Israel became buffer states between the greater powers of Assyria to the north and Egypt to the south. If the aggressive Assyrians pursued their ambition of conquering Egypt, Judah and Israel would be crushed. Isaiah advised the kings of Judah to avoid all foreign alliances and remain neutral, siding with neither Assyria or Egypt and place their reliance in God. Signing treaties with outside powers meant compromise with pagan gods -- an unthinkable act of unfaithfulness with God.

## Who was Isaiah?

Isaiah means "the Lord is salvation," and he is described as "the son of Amoz" of whom the Bible reveals nothing. Tradition says that Amoz was a brother of Amaziah, the son of Joash, king of Judah (2 Kings 14:1). This would make Isaiah a close relative of the kings who ruled Judah during his lifetime, and would explain his close association with kings and priests and involvement with world affairs. Isaiah was married and had two sons, Shear-Jashub (meaning, "a remnant shall escape or return") and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz ("he speeds to plunder and to the prey") whose names symbolized his message.

Isaiah's prophetic ministry began in the last year of the rule of King Uzziah of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and spanned the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (about 740-681 BC). This roughly 40-year-long period was a time of great political turmoil for tiny Judah. The world superpower of day, Assyria (in modern Iraq), was aggressively expanding its empire. In 721/722 BC, the Assyrians crushed Israel, Judah's neighbor to the north and deported its population, an event that must have profoundly affected Judah, especially when it is realized that the northern tribes comprised the larger portion of God's people. Judah seems to have concluded that God would not protect them from the same fate. This may have been the cause of the desperate struggle that afterwards took place to throw off Assyria, including allying itself with Egypt and other weaker pagan nations. Only God could help Judah, but its people had drifted too far.

## Isaiah, the Book

Two major themes run throughout the book:

There is the exhortation to Trust in the Holy One of Israel. Faith in God would assure forgiveness for their transgressions and deliverance from their enemies. Eight times the people are urged to "wait upon the Lord" (cf. Isa 40:28-31).

Another dominate message is the Messiah to come and the glory of his age Isaiah spoke frequently of events to come, predicting the fall of heathen nations and the establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah who would rule in justice and righteousness.

## The book of Isaiah can be divided into three periods:

**Isaiah's ministry in Jerusalem (chapters 1-39)** - The prophet proclaims the Lord's indictment against Judah and Jerusalem, and the coming judgment against them. Isaiah challenges the credibility gap between the worship people offer and the lives they actually lead. God is sick of burnt offerings, which a nothing but a front behind which the people commit crimes and oppress the poor. He portrays the sovereign rule of the "Lord of Hosts" -- Isaiah's favorite designation for Jehovah (used 62 times) -- who judges not only Israel, but heathen nations as well. He prophesies that the Lord will use Assyria and Babylon to execute his purposes, and afterward judge each of these along with other nations, bringing them to desolation because of their sins.

**Prophecies for the exiles in Babylon (chapters 40-55)** - Isaiah exhorts an afflicted people to have faith and patience. He describes the salvation

and future blessings to come upon the true Israel of God. Though Isaiah did not live during the period of Babylonian captivity, he was inspired to speak words of comfort to those who would experience that difficult time in history.

### **Prophecies for the return from exile (chapters 56-66)**

There are many reasons why Christians should read and study the book of Isaiah. Among them:

- It increases faith in Jesus as the Messiah, as one reads the messianic prophecies that were fulfilled in him.
- It strengthens hope in God who is ultimately in control of all things.

#### **Read:**

[Isaiah 1](#)

[Isaiah 2](#)

[Isaiah 5:1-7](#) (A parable)

[Isaiah 9](#) (The text for parts 11 and 12 of Handel's Messiah)

[Isaiah 53](#) (The passage most often read during Lent as description of the suffering and death of Jesus)

#### **Once you've read these passages, answer these questions:**

- As you anticipate the future, are you more of a dreamer or a realist?
- Isaiah 5 notes several social problems: oppression of the poor, disrespect for God, legalized injustice and self-centered leadership. How are these reflected in your newspaper this week?
- When you begin a project with high hopes but it fails to meet expectations, do you give up? Try again? Wait until another time? Why?
- What situation are you now facing that scares you?
- On a scale of 1 - 10, how much trust do you have in God during scary times?
- When have you thought something would work out in your favor, but it didn't?
- What is one example of an injustice or neglect of the poor in your community or nation that you could work on correcting? Tax reform? Housing? Health care? Race relations? Abuse? Homelessness? Neglect of the disabled? Something else? What is stopping you?
- Have you ever been asked to side with someone else in a dispute or mutual protection? If you said yes, how did it turn out?
- Do you learn more through listening to lectures, or by object lessons? Why? Cite an example.
- "Do not fear for I am with you. Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Surely I will help you. Surely I will uphold you with my righteous hand." ([Isaiah 41:10-14](#)). How does this passage make you feel?
- Sometimes it seems people will turn anywhere except to God and the Bible. They try eastern religion, horoscopes, they incorporate practices from pagan religions, or they replace God with idols of materialism, prosperity, work, education, possessions, family, sports - the list is endless. What do you spend most of your time thinking about and talking about? That is an indication of where your heart lies and what is most important to you.

#### **Some well-known passages from Isaiah...**

- Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. -

Isaiah 1:18

- They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. - Isaiah 2:4
- Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. - Isaiah 7:14
- The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. - Isaiah 9:2
- For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. - Isaiah 9:6
- A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD-and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. - Isaiah 11: 1-3
- The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. - Isaiah 11:6
- "Let us eat and drink," you say, "for tomorrow we die!" - Isaiah 22:13
- A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." - Isaiah 40:3-5

## March Highlights

**Tuesday, March 1**

**7:00 PM Care Team Meeting**

**Wednesday, March 2**

**5:30 PM WELCA Board Meeting**

**7:00 PM Confirmation Class**

**Sunday, March 6**

**11:30 AM Baby Shower for Katie Johnson Phillips**

**11:30 AM Hosanna Church Council meeting**

**Wednesday, March 9**

**6:15 PM Ash Wednesday Worship for Families and Children**

**7:30 PM Ash Wednesday Worship**

**Saturday, March 12**

**Seniors Outing to Radio Music Theater**

**Sunday, March 13**

**Equal Exchange Coffee Sunday**

**The Backyard Distribution**

**Wednesday, March 16**

**6:15 PM Soup Supper**

**7:00 PM Lenten Worship**

**Saturday, March 19**

**9:00 AM-2:00 PM Forming our Future Retreat**

**Sunday, March 20**

**Mission of the Month Noisy Offering for Lutherhill**

**9:00 AM Blood Drive**

**11:30 AM Congregation Meeting**

**Wednesday, March 23**

**6:15 PM Soup Supper**

**7:00 PM Lenten Worship**

**Thursday, March 24**

**10:00 AM Bishop's Worship Excellence Team Meeting**

**Saturday, March 26**

**WELCA Spring Fling and General Elections**

**Wednesday, March 30**

**6:15 PM Soup Supper**

**7:00 PM Lenten Worship**

**April Hotline Emailed to All Subscribers**

### **Looking Ahead...**

**Saturday, April 2 - Book Discussion**

**Sunday, April 3 - Walk, Rock to Feed the Hungry**

**Sunday, April 17 - Sunday of the Passion/Palm Sunday**

**Thursday, April 21 - Maundy Thursday**

**Friday, April 22 - Good Friday**

**Saturday, April 23 - Easter Vigil**

**Sunday, April 24 - Easter Sunday**

**Saturday, May 14 - 2nd Annual Men of Hosanna Fishing Trip in Galveston**

**Saturday, May 14 - John and Nancy Mulkey Scholarship Endowment Dinner and Cobbler Bake-Off.**

## **Photo Gallery**

**Some recent images**





Blessing of the quilts during worship, February 13



A beautiful February sunrise: "For the beauty of the earth...".



One of numerous safari images captured by Ron and Heda Christ during their two-year mission in Botswana, Africa.



Flower of a Saucer Magnolia at Mercer Arboretum, a sign of spring,

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[Shelly Gunhouse, Children's Music](#)  
[Anna Marie Flusche, O.P., Organist](#)

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