

GREETINGS FROM THE PASTOR:

January has revealed its wintry character with lots of snow and lots of cold, which means we can expect some pretty hefty utility bills this month and next. Oddly enough, from what I've heard, our snowbirds in Florida are not having the warmest of weather either. Still, news of our record-breaking January should help them feel good about their choices, leaving us to wonder a whole lot about ours! I know that when philosophers and theologians challenge us with questions like *WHY ARE WE HERE?*, they're not asking us to think about the weather; but whether we stay north or head south sounds more and more like one of those ultimate questions in life compelling our attention with the cold and snow that greet us with the dawning sun of each new day. Did I say *dawning sun*? I must be dreaming that I'm back in Palm Spings, where the sun shines three-hundred-and-fifty days a year!

So, why are we here? What is our mission? Do we have a sense of purpose that drives us to engage each day? It's true that the weather here in northeast Ohio creates the impression that life is almost always about shades of gray; and it may seem at times that each day is pretty much more of the same-old, same-old. But the Good News of the Gospel says otherwise. Our celebration of the birth of Christ with Christmas affirms the sense of promise that is rooted in the truth of God's faithfulness. As Jesus grows to become a man, whose Baptism calls him to a life of ministry, it becomes clear from the get-go that God has the kingdom on His mind. With the Resurrection, it becomes even clearer that as followers of Jesus who are called to be the body of Christ, we are the hands and feet through which the reign of God's kingdom is proclaimed and extended. The call that God issues to the church, and to each of us individually, as members or membranes in Christ's body, is the mission that drives us, rain, snow, or shine.

I know that I often use the pages of this newsletter as a monthly pep talk to encourage support for keeping the ministry of our church vibrant and above water. I take great pride in the goals we set, the ministry we do, and the community we are. I know who we are, individually and together. I know how we struggle to meet the challenges God has placed before us. I continue to marvel as the goals we set with each new year become missions accomplished by year's end. The truth is that I am still astounded by the great news that in 2008 we gave *fifty-five thousand, two-hundred and eighty-two dollars and fifty-three cents* to folks in need and ministries other than our own because of the needs we've seen and the generosity that is in us; and I take even greater pride in the good news that we met the demands of our Operating Budget, and added almost six thousand dollars more to the series of surpluses we've enjoyed over several years.

I have spent many pages in the newsletter exhorting us to take on the challenges posed by the needs of our building, including the HV/AC system, our renovation goals, and the drudgery of thinking about snow-plowing expenses and utility bills. It is because we know who we are and why we're here that we find the will and the power to address the challenges that arrive with each new year. God willing, our goals will again be met and our mission will be accomplished when December 2009 comes and goes. In the meantime, we've got lots to do. Let's begin by humbly acknowledging our dependence on God's grace in all things; and more, let's invite the light of Epiphany to burn within us, for that little light is what illumines our way with God's guidance, adding the warmth of God's love to everything we do. God's richest blessings to all.

CHURCH COUNCIL NEWS

We spent a good part of January's meeting celebrating Zion's faithfulness in 2008. We enjoyed a solid budget surplus, some record benevolence, great support for the HV/AC system, wonderful work on the Sanctuary, and we ended the year on the high note of hiring a new choir director. In terms of membership at Zion, 2008 was a year when many of our friends and loved ones were called home to heaven: Catherine Elsass, Ila Mae Givler, Fredrick Elsass, Mary Jane Hawkins, Marjorie Woodside, Cora Lanzalotta, Robert Leed, Aleene Heist. 2008 was also a year when seven baptized members became confirmed members: Marissa and Ronda Keating, Ben and Matt Mathie, Ashley Porter, Brooke Roman, Kelly Walters. We received three members through Holy Baptism: Joshua Paul Hilson, Ephraim James Cavender, Bailey Charles Greenwell. We received six members through transfer: Eileen & Orrin Bose, Carl & Susan Geib, Dick & Doris Spall. We received one member through affirmation of faith: Michelle Cohen. Two members transferred to sister ELCA congregations: Melanie (Slease) Thoma to Gloria Dei in Kansas City, Missouri, and Katie Leed to Trinity in Lakewood, Ohio. In terms of membership totals, we added four confirmed members, with no change for baptized members, ending 2008 with 464 baptized members, 387 confirmed members. Attendance at our January meeting was almost perfect: Carol Rossbach (President), Jim Fidler (Vice-President), Dave Palumbo (Treasurer), Jayne Schrader (Secretary), Mary Humbert (Caring), Dale Jacobs (Worship), Betty Tracy (Social Outreach), Steve Ross (Witness), Linda Lancashire (Parish Life), Mark Votaw (Resource), Tina Beaber (Learning), and Pastor Sherwindt.

MORE COUNCIL NEWS

As we look at the budget summary given below, it shows that we maintained the surplus balance that emerged in November. Over the past four years, we have managed to build a series of small but consistent surpluses, adding up to a positive balance of \$9,640.20 with which we begin 2009.

Also, as many recall, we began to invite your pledges for the HV/AC system in July. In just six months, we received \$41,361.50 in actual contributions! We very much appreciate what you have done to help us address and retire the challenge of replacing our fifty-year old heating system. Since recent gyrations in the stock market have made selling equities from the Merrill Lynch account ill-advised at the present time, the more quickly you are able to meet your pledge and make your contribution, the less the cost of short-term borrowing will be for us as we give our stocks time to recover.

ZION'S FINANCIAL FACTS: DECEMBER

December Income	23,813.99
December Expenses	<u>21,416.28</u>
December Surplus	+ 2,397.71
2008 Income for the year	241,142.38
2008 Expenses for the year	<u>235,267.35</u>
2008 Surplus for the Year	5,875.03
<i>Previous Years' Surpluses</i>	<i>3,765.17</i>
Giving for the HV/AC Fund	41,361.50
2008 Benevolence Support	55,282.53
Average Worship Attendance	160
Baptized Membership Changes	—
Confirmed Membership Changes	+ 4
Baptized Membership 12/31/08	464
Confirmed Membership 12/31/08	387

We thank you for your generous support!

NEWS IN THE FAMILY

The *Canton Repository* carried a story about a worksite injury at the Timken Company on Sunday, January 18, that involved Rick Riffle, husband of Connie, and father of Melissa and Chad. Rick was operating a remote-controlled crane when the loading platform collapsed on one end, which caused the tubing to roll off and hit him in his mid-section. Rick was rushed to Aultman Hospital, and then transported via helicopter to Akron General Medical Center. Everyone breathed a collective sigh of relief when emergency measures worked to place Rick in stable but serious condition in the Surgical Intensive Care Unit at Akron General, where he remained until the following Wednesday, January 28, when he was transferred to Cleveland Metro Health Center. While at Akron General, Rick's condition remained stable, but the reconstructive surgeries that he needed required more expertise and support than was available in Akron.

The lines of communication within the Zion family were humming at breakneck speed when area radio stations on Monday, January 19, carried the story at the top and bottom of every hour. In the meantime, the Riffles have developed a website that offers daily updates on Rick's condition and progress. It is a service of www.CaringBridge.org, and can be accessed on line by typing in the above address. Once there, in the box that directs you to "enter website name", type in the name *rickriffle*, all small case, no spaces. That will take you to a website page that offers daily updates. There are photographs of Rick, daily updates by Melissa, and opportunities for you to leave a message of encouragement and love. We thank God for Rick's life and survival, and we pray for a swift, full, and speedy recovery.

MORE FAMILY NEWS

I recently received a telephone call from Anne Djupedal Gura letting us know that her mother, longtime member Kjellaug Djupedal (JOO-peh-dall), was called home to heaven on January 24, while residing in her hometown of Selje, Norway, at the age eighty-five. Lars and Kjellaug Djupedal moved to Perry in 1953, when Lars was offered the position of mechanical engineer at the Timken Company. The Djupedals had four children, sons Knut and Tore, daughters Birgit and Anne. They became members of Zion in 1965, and remained active until they retired in Miramar, Florida in 1997. Lars passed away in 2004, after battling cancer. Kjellaug suffered a serious stroke in 2003, and then spent her winters with Birgit in Florida, and her summers with Anne in Connecticut. Since it was her longtime wish to return to her hometown of Selje, her daughters helped her move back to Norway under Knut's care, enjoying the surroundings of her native Norway, with childhood friends and close cousins nearby. A Service of Christian Burial will be held for Kjellaug at the Church of Norway in Selje on Thursday, February 5. The family has asked that in lieu of flowers, memorials be made to the Food Pantry & Clothing Closet at Zion Lutheran Church.

*You Are Invited to Celebrate the
50th Wedding Anniversary of
ART & HELEN EDWARDS*

Saturday, February 7, 2009
2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Right here in Luther Hall
at Zion Lutheran Church

Carol, Bonnie & John, Ralph & Brigid

A BIG PANTRY THANK YOU

June will mark the eighth anniversary of the time that Margaret and I have served as co-directors of Zion's Food Pantry. For us it has been a true labor of love. We do realize that without the congregations' continued support of this mission of outreach, the pantry could not have accomplished all that it has.

There are so many people who have played such an intricate part in the continuation of the pantry. First and foremost, there's the awesome Pantry Crew, which always shows up like clockwork on the first and third Tuesdays of every month. Let's not forget the Youth of Zion and their leaders, for all their various activities, which benefit our Food Pantry clients. Then, there are our wonderful gardeners, Verle and Ruth Elsass, who give us a bountiful harvest every August. The cast continues with Tim, our custodian, all the volunteer secretaries that serve in the Church Office, Pastor, and many, many parishioners.

We also need to remember all the outside support the Food Pantry has received throughout these eight years. How about the various North Canton churches that have not only donated canned goods, but have also given generous monetary donations! We have benefited from a variety of volunteer groups that hail from all around Stark County.

As we brace for the poor economic future that is taking hold of northeast Ohio (and the country), our clients will continue to grow in numbers, placing more and more stress on the resources of our Food Pantry. But with due diligence, we hope to continue serving the wider community with the quality of food that they have come to rely upon. Let me leave you with just one thought. Whenever you can, do something for others.

Shirley Cavender

ODDS 'N ENDS AT ZION

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, back at the Synod Assembly in May, asked congregations in the Northeastern Ohio Synod to help her meet synod budget shortfalls by contributing an additional \$1,000 above and beyond our monthly commitment to the wider church. Zion contributed \$19,200 as our fair share of the Synod's budget in 2008. Council voted at our January meeting to support Bishop Eaton in her *Close the Budget Gap Challenge*. We joined thirty other congregations, along with a dozen individuals, in helping to close the budget gap by over \$50,000 in 2008. Thank you, Church Council, and thank you, Zion.

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to *Jessica Lynn Stayer* and *Aaron Allen Heath*, who have announced their intention to be married here at Zion on the afternoon of Saturday, April 25! May the Lord our God richly bless them in their life together.

True love grows through sunshine, rain,
through smiles and tears,
Through sickness, health, and passing years.
True love still grows more firm and sure,
More deep and strong, more sweet and pure.

Prayers and Poems by Peggy Ferrell

GREAT NEWS FROM ZION'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

UPCOMING EVENTS – MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Sunday, February 15: The Children's Choir sings at the 10:30 a.m. Family-friendly Service

Sunday, March 1: Practice for this year's Children's Easter Program after Choir Rehearsal

Sunday, March 29: The Youth of Zion host our Lenten Dinner, which begins at 5:30 p.m.

Saturday, April 4: Children's Easter Program Dress Rehearsal in the morning at 10:30 a.m.

Palm Sunday, April 5: Children's Easter Program during the 10:30 a.m. Worship Service

Easter Sunday, April 12: Our Children's Easter Egg Hunt for all ages during Sunday School

ZION'S CHILDREN'S CHOIR SINGS AGAIN!

The Children's Choir is off to a great start with Megan Meyer. Practice starts at 9:10 a.m. every Sunday in the Choir Room. The choir includes all of our kids in Pre-K through 6th grade. Our children practice every Sunday before Sunday School and will sing once a month during the 10:30 a.m. service. We are looking forward to hearing their beautiful voices on February 15th.

PRE-KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 6:

Sunday School will begin at 9:30 a.m. following the Children's Choir practice, which finishes around 10:20 a.m. As a reminder, we now have a third class for our Pre-K students, which is led by Connie Riffle. Janet Slease will continue to teach 1st & 2nd grade, and Mary Humbert, the 4th through 6th grades. Our kids will continue to learn great stories from the Bible each week, along with enjoying games, crafts and snacks. We will begin practicing for the Easter program on the Sunday of March 1st during the Sunday School hour.

ACME RECEIPTS DEADLINE APPROACHING:

Thank you for all of your Acme receipts. The last day for these receipts will be **February 21, 2009**. We will get credit for all receipts dated between September 28, 2008 and February 21, 2009 that show **COMMUNITY CASH BACK** at the bottom of the receipt. Please bring in all of your receipts no later than Sunday, March 1, 2009. And **thank you** for your interest and support.

A SUNDAY SCHOOL GREETING FOR RICK RIFFLE:

The Sunday School children, staff and their families would like to send out our best wishes and heartfelt prayers to Connie Riffle and her family during this very difficult time of waiting for good news and daily progress as Rick recovers. We keep Rick and the rest of you in our thoughts and prayers everyday. Miss Connie's class especially wants her to know how much they miss her, but they understand and they are saying lots of prayers for the family. May God bless you with the support of His presence and the healing power of His love.

MORE GOOD NEWS FOR THE YOUTH OF ZION

A FREE CONCERT ON FEBRUARY 5, 7:00 P.M.

A Free Christian Concert will be hosted by Northminster Presbyterian Church on Thursday, February 5, beginning at 7:00 p.m. Nate Houge is a Minnesota singer-songwriter who grew up in Nigeria. He has a provocative rock style that hits on themes of redemption, justice, relationships, and unconditional love, all delivered with understated insight and a casual sense of humor. His songwriting and playing has appeared on albums by Jonathan Rundman, Rachel Kurtz, Micah Taylor, and Fuller Still. He has toured as instrumentalist with Rundman, Kurtz, and Taylor. When not on the road, Nate writes faith development curriculum for Augsburg Fortress Publishing, acts as the unofficial music director and creative sounding board for *Humble Walk Lutheran Church*, teaches folk songs to neighborhood kids, spends many a day with his two young, above average, daughters, and enjoys the love of his wife Jodi, a Lutheran Pastor. Make every effort to attend this free Christian concert on Thursday, February 5th, at Northminster Presbyterian Church.

SOME GREAT VALENTINE'S DAY GIFT IDEAS:

Have you been wondering what to give your kids for Valentine's Day? How about giving the gift of *acceptance*? Teach your children that you love them for who and what they are, and give them this gift with a kiss. How about *self-confidence*? Help your children understand that they can trust themselves, and give this gift with a hug. How about *a life without needless fear*? Don't let your children see you as a worrier, and give them this gift with laughter. How about *appreciation*? Help your children acquire a spark of gratitude with which to enjoy all of life, and give them this gift as they go out the door each and every day. How about *faith*? Introduce your children to God, the best friend they will ever have; and give them this gift by bringing them with you to church every Sunday. So, there you have it: five great gift ideas – acceptance, self-confidence, a life free of needless worry, filled with gratitude, and grounded in faith. These are the kind of gifts Saint Valentine would have encouraged. Happy Valentine's Day to all!

LUTHERAN STUDY BIBLE

With all the hoopla surrounding our ELCA commitment to becoming a people who read the Bible, otherwise known as the Book of Faith Initiative, passed at our 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, Augsburg Fortress Publishing is on the verge of releasing a new Lutheran Study Bible, featuring the NRSV translation, as well as introductions, notes and articles written by over sixty Lutheran pastors and teaching theologians.

For those who may need some reminding, our 2007 Churchwide Assembly in Chicago embraced a five-year initiative for getting fluent in faith's first language, the Bible. "The careful reading of Scripture opens up the possibility of hearing a voice other than our own," said Diane Jacobson, professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary and director of the ELCA *Book of Faith Initiative*. "We live in a secular world, where everything reminds us of a movie or television show. Jesus doesn't enter naturally into our conversations. Taking the time to develop a biblical imagination allows this to happen."

Our new Lutheran Study Bible is reader-friendly, with easy-to-read, plain-language study notes, inviting discovery, while offering helpful background information for readers that want to engage the biblical text. These study notes explore historical, cultural, and geographic background, explain key words and biblical concepts, highlight Lutheran theological insights and catechetical connections, and provide regular *Faith Reflections and Commentary* along the way.

The cost is \$24.50 for the hardcover and \$18.75 for paperback, when purchasing in orders of 10 or more. Contact Carol Rossbach (or Pastor Sherwindt) with your interest in being included in Zion's group order. You'll be glad you did.

MORE LUTHERAN NEWS

Seven New U.S. Congressional Members sworn into office on January 6, 2009 are Lutheran, bringing the overall total of Lutherans serving on Capitol Hill to 24. There are 15 Democrats and 9 Republicans. 4 are in the Senate, and 20 are in the House of Representatives. The only new Lutheran in the U.S. Senate – Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon – belongs to the ELCA, as do the 3 returning Lutheran Senators: Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio; Byron Dorgan, D-North Dakota; Tim Johnson, D-South Dakota. 3 new Lutherans in the House of Representatives are ELCA members: Martin Heinrich, D-New Mexico; Chellie Pingree, D-Maine; Marc Schauer, D-Michigan. 3 others belong to the LC-MS: Debbie Halvorson, D-Illinois; Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyoming; Erik Paulsen, R-Minnesota. Of the remaining Lutherans in the House, 11 are members of the ELCA, 2 belong to the LC-MS, and 2 belong to the Wisconsin Synod. ELCA members are: Lois Capps, D-California; John Carter, R-Texas; Norman Dicks, D-Washington; Stephanie Herseth, D-South Dakota; Tom Latham, R-Iowa; Zoe Lofgren, D-California; Collin Peterson, D-Minnesota; Tom Petri, R-Wisconsin; Bill Shuster, R-Pennsylvania; Tim Walz, D-Minnesota. (ELCA News Service)

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday: We begin our Lenten journey on **February 25**, Ash Wednesday. Although the mood of that service is somber, it is not really a time of mourning. It starts us on a journey of self-examination. In ancient times, ashes were used for cleansing and enriching the soil. So, while ashes are a symbol of our mortality, they also serve as a reminder to come clean before God. Confession, the Imposition of Ashes, and Holy Communion will cleanse and nourish us as we worship on the 25th.

THE WOMEN OF ZION

All women are invited to join us for our **monthly Bible study**, which meets in Luther Hall on the third Tuesday, which this month is *February 17, 9:30 a.m.* February's lesson continues our study of the hidden hand of God in the Book of Daniel. Session 6 moves from Daniel's trial by fire to the test that comes with being *Thrown to the Lions*. King Nebuchadnezzar has died. His son Belshazzar inherits the throne, and quickly proves himself unworthy, eliciting God's judgment, which foreshadows Belshazzar's brief reign and imminent death. Daniel interpreted the vision that proved to be a prophecy of doom and death for Belshazzar. Belshazzar has embodied the arrogance of idolatry, which is his destruction. Daniel embodies the loving faithfulness of the one, true God, which is his blessing and salvation. Daniel's influence grows, as does the jealousy of envious colleagues competing for power. In the end, Daniel's unassuming faithfulness overcomes the conspiracies of selfishness, and the idolatries of paganism are exposed by the radical monotheism of Daniel's Jewish faith. Join us for February's study of God's hidden hand protecting Daniel in the lion's den.

Don't forget that **Zion's Comfort Givers** continue to meet on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month, *February 12 & 26*, beginning at 9:30 a.m. in Luther Hall. We enjoy coffee, conversation, and being filled with the feeling of knowing that we are helping others through the good that we do.

The **Chancel Guild** will meet on Tuesday evening, February 10th, at 6:30 p.m. for the great fun that accompanies the annual cleaning of our communion ware, along with repairing any of the green hymnals the might benefit from our attention and love.

THE MEN OF ZION

The **Men of Zion** have a very busy month with the arrival of February. We will host the very first **Sunday Evening Lenten Dinner**, which is scheduled for the first Sunday in March, which is **March 1st**. That means that we should use our regular monthly meeting on **Wednesday, February 4th**, to begin thinking about how we can help the Singing Chef plan a wonderfully delicious menu.

In addition to these activities, the Men of Zion have been invited by *Lutheran Men in Mission* of the Canton Massillon Conference to Abiding Savior Lutheran Church, which is located in Alliance at 1845 Sawburg Road, on the morning of **Saturday, February 7th**, to attend our *Annual Men's Winter Breakfast*. A delicious breakfast will be served, beginning at 8:00 a.m., with our program taking us to 11:00 a.m. We will enjoy great fellowship, good conversation, a guest speaker, and some inspirational music. Pr. Walt Jordan will lead the Bible study, and the *Town Sound Quartet* will provide the music. We have a whole lot to talk about, between future Habitat homes, the election of officers, new outreach opportunities, as well as the Browns, Buckeyes, Cavaliers and the Indians. Please contact Jamie Savarin with your interest in attending at jsavarin@aol.com or call Jamie at 330-323-4212. We haven't yet heard the details about the *Fourth Annual Great Chili Cook Off*, but we are sure to find out a good deal more at the Men's Winter Breakfast. Feel free to invite a neighbor, bring your son, your father, a brother, or a friend. (*FYI: The vision of Lutheran Men in Mission is to have an effective men's ministry in every congregation. Their mission is to build men's faith, relationships, and ministry through the events we sponsor, the resources we produce, and the leadership we develop.*)

A LOOK AHEAD TO OUR LENTEN SCHEDULE AT ZION

February 25, Wednesday	7:00 p.m.	Ash Wednesday Worship Service "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."
Our worship includes an extended Rite of Confession, the Imposition of Ashes, special music from the Senior Choir, and the Celebration of Holy Communion.		
March 1, Sunday	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.	Lent 1 , Mark 1:9-15 (Wilderness)
March 1, Sunday	5:30 p.m.	Dinner hosted by the Men of Zion
March 1, Sunday	6:15 p.m.	Lenten Renewal at Worship: <i>Taize</i>
March 8, Sunday	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.	Lent 2 , Mark 8:31-38 (The Cross)
March 8, Sunday	5:30 p.m.	Dinner hosted by the Chancel Guild
March 8, Sunday	6:15 p.m.	Lenten Renewal at Worship: <i>ELW</i>
March 15, Sunday	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.	Lent 3 , John 2:13-22 (The Temple)
March 15, Sunday	5:30 p.m.	Dinner hosted by the Senior Choir
March 15, Sunday	6:15 p.m.	Lenten Renewal at Worship: <i>Taize</i>
March 22, Sunday	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.	Lent 4 , John 3:14-21 (God's Love)
March 22, Sunday	5:30 p.m.	Dinner hosted by the Church Council
March 22, Sunday	6:15 p.m.	Lenten Renewal at Worship: <i>ELW</i>
March 29, Sunday	8:00 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.	Lent 5 , John 12:20-33 (Resurrection)
March 29, Sunday	5:30 p.m.	Dinner hosted by the Youth of Zion
March 29, Sunday	6:15 p.m.	The Passion Narrative of Saint Mark

LENT INVITES US TO ASK, "WHAT'S IN A NAME?"

The Gospel of Mark begins abruptly with the announcement that Jesus Christ is *the Son of God*, our Savior. (Mark 1:1) God confirms this Good News at Jesus' Baptism. (Mark 1:11) From that point on in Mark's Gospel, we never hear these words uttered rightly again until they are spoken by the Roman centurion, who upon witnessing the death of Jesus on the Cross, responds by saying, "Truly, this is *the Son of God*." (Mark 15:39)

Demons sometimes try to reveal who Jesus is, like when they declare Jesus to be "the Holy One of God" in Mark 1:24, or when the Gerasene demoniac calls Jesus "the Son of the Most High God" in Mark 5:7. But these are demons, not disciples who know the meaning and truth of what they say. Of course, even the disciples, who call Jesus their Teacher, Rabbi, Lord, and even the Christ, make it clear time and again that they do not understand what they are saying when they are trying to identify who Jesus is.

The Gospel of Mark is telling us is that unless we are the all-knowing God, who twice identifies Jesus as His Son (Mark 1:11; 9:7), we cannot understand what it means to say that Jesus is the Son of God until we see the role that the Cross plays in defining the purpose of his mission and the character of his identity as *the Son of God*. The Cross is the key to knowing *what's in the name*, when the name we're considering is Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Savior.

WHAT'S IN THE NAME BEHIND SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY

Valentine lived in Rome during the third century. At that time, Rome was ruled by an emperor named Claudius, whose nickname was Claudius the Cruel. Here's why. Claudius wanted to have a big army. He expected men to volunteer to join. Many men tired of leaving their wives and families to fight in wars. As you might have guessed, not many men signed up. This made Claudius furious. So what happened? He had a crazy idea. He thought that if men were not married, they wouldn't mind joining the army. So Claudius decided not to allow any more marriages. Young people thought his new law was cruel. Valentine thought it was preposterous, and he chose not to support that law!

Valentine was a pastor in the church. One of his favorite activities was presiding at marriage services. Even after Emperor Claudius passed his law, he kept on performing marriage ceremonies — secretly, of course. Imagine a small candlelit room with only the bride and groom and the priest. All were committed to whispering the words of the ceremony, listening all the while for the steps of soldiers. One night, the footsteps of soldiers approached. The couple escaped; but Valentine was caught, and thrown in jail with a punishment of death. As it turned out, wonderful things happened. Young people came to the jail to visit Valentine. They threw flowers and notes up to his window. They wanted him to know that they, too, believed in love.

One of those young people was the daughter of the prison guard. Her father allowed her to visit Valentine in the cell. Sometimes the two of them would sit and talk for hours. They lifted each other's spirits, and both agreed that Valentine did the right thing by ignoring the Emperor and going ahead with the secret marriages. His friend was blind, and over the course of many visits, God cured her of her blindness. When news of that miracle got out, Claudius the Cruel worried that news of Valentine's power might spread. So, he moved up the execution. On the day Valentine was to die, he left his friend a little note thanking her for her friendship and loyalty. It was signed, *from your Valentine*.

It was this note that started the custom of exchanging love messages on Valentine's Day. This first *Valentine* was written on the day that Valentine died, February 14, one thousand, seven hundred and forty years ago. Now, every year on that day, people remember. But most importantly, they think about love and friendship. And when they think of Emperor Claudius, they remember how he tried to stand in the way of love, and they laugh — because they know that love cannot be beaten, not God's love for us, and not our love for one another!

Moving forward from 269CE, the first modern valentines date from the fifteenth century. The young French duke of Orleans, captured at the battle of Agincourt, was kept a prisoner in the Tower of London for many years. To his wife he wrote poem after poem, real valentines. About sixty of them remain, and can be seen among the royal papers in the British Museum. Flowers as valentines appear nearly two hundred years later. A daughter of Henry IV of France gave a party in honor of St. Valentine. Each lady received a beautiful bouquet of flowers from the man chosen as her valentine. Thus from Italy and France and England has come the pretty custom of sending our friends loving messages on this day. Flowers, heart-shaped candies, lacy valentines: all honor the good priest who disobeyed Claudius the Cruel.

