

*The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
Greensburg, Pennsylvania
Thursday, December 24, 2015
'Christmas Eve'
4:30pm, 7:30pm, 10:00pm*

*Isaiah 9:2-7
Psalm 96
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-20*

It was on Christmas Eve 1977 when the very first Star Wars came out. My sister Gloria took me to see it at the Manos Theater in Jeannette. When we left the house the skirt around the tree was glistening from the lights on the tree shining onto the plasticville house and church and village below, but when we came back from seeing Star Wars, there were presents under the tree. Such a great memory. I remember how hard it was to wait for Christmas morning to come.... I also remember that year hoping to get a runner sled and a crazy car. I kept dropping hints, I wrote my letter to Santa, I cut out pictures of these gifts and put them on my parent's pillows. When Christmas morning came, I jumped out of bed, ran to the Christmas tree and I looked for a box with my name on it. I looked all around for a sled with a bow on it, or a large box... As the moments went on I opened my socks, underwear, Don't break the ice and the mousetrap game. Paper everywhere, my mom said, Oh, this has been a very nice morning.... It got very quiet, then my dad shifted the recliner and said, "Look, Santa must have needed more room. He put two gifts back here." I ran, I peeked... It came... A Flexible Flyer runner sled and a crazy car!!! Oh my! All of my waiting and hoping gave way to the promise being fulfilled. I saw myself zipping down a snowy hill and spinning myself into oblivion... The mystery and wonder of waiting gave way to the promise...

I knew even as a child it wasn't all about receiving gifts, I knew that, but, it was still fun to open presents and give them too and watch surprised faces. And, while we enjoy all these things, Christmas as it turns out isn't all about us, our family, our friends, church and gifts and yet is all about us and our families and our friends and our church and all people in the world... Because God gave this gift to the entire world... Jesus, born to save and bring peace to the world... Simply the best gift! Christmas programs on tv have changed. Timeless, Santa Claus is coming to Town, Rudolph the Red-nosed reindeer.... But my favorite is Charlie Brown Christmas. He asks if anyone knows what Christmas is all about. Linus recites the Gospel of Luke that we heard this evening... Linus simply says, "That's what Christmas is all about Charlie Brown." It's about Angels, not leaving notes and pictures on pillows but instead leaving amazing signs in the star lit sky and in dreams of a gift that was so long-awaited and so deeply desired... Mary and Joseph and Shepherds and Kings were so happy,, even more than I was with my runner sled and crazy car... All my years of waiting for Christmas and coming to the tree, and now watching our children come to the tree, I get it... It's not the runner sled or crazy car and not all those other impressive gifts. Christmastime is the time we celebrate the most wonderful gift ever given to us, and to the world... JOY... JESUS, OTHERS, YOURSELF. Joy at Christmas and any time of the year is to discover the joy of Jesus then sharing it with others. Joy at Christmas? Find someone in need and in the name of Jesus, give our time and gift of help to them by caring...

Tonight/tomorrow morning as you exchange gifts remember that Christmas is the time when the membrane between Heaven and earth is so thin you can almost see through it. It is when every hopeless thing, event or relationship is restored and God's gift given fresh to us again... In all of the beautiful decorations, music, candlelight, we are surprised once again, IT CAME! JESUS OUR SAVIOR. All our waiting and hoping has given way to the promise fulfilled. You now can see yourself zipping down, sliding down, gliding down into God's arms of love and spinning in God's amazing grace... As we gather with people this season, some won't. Some will be alone, but it is still that baby Jesus who is the light of the world, even when the world seems dark and scary and lonely Jesus is our living, breathing sign of God's love. Christmas is the promise that we are never alone no matter where we are in life or what condition we find ourselves. So it's not about bobble head dolls under your tree, electronic devices or runner sleds or crazy cars. But, it is in these gifts, gatherings and simple greetings that we receive God's love who lives in us, feeds us with himself, gives us his light on this

Holy night, leads us and brings us peace to never ever give up hope...Tonight, boys and girls and dear friends, I know you are excited. Me too!!!!!! But don't forget that in this time together this evening, we have held the baby Jesus in our arms. This evening we have seen the face of God. Share this great gift with everyone everyday of your life. JOY. Jesus, others, then yourself. Merry Christmas! (Pass out treats to children...)