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# What Christmas Could Mean to You (Luke 1:46-55)

It seems that every year Christmas arrives earlier and earlier, at least that what stores and the internet would suggest. After the Halloween sweets and costumes have their scare, the turkeys barely have time to gobble before the store shelves are bedecked with gifts, wrapping paper and food items all designed to make the season bright. The internet seems to reach out through the screen to convince us that holiday cheer will not come unless we purchase their treasures.

It is easy to vilify the corporations and local store owners, decrying their preoccupation with increased sales and enlarged profits, all of which seems to empty Christmas of its True meaning. Honesty

demands. however. that as consumers we embrace at least a portion of the responsibility. The stores would not be open at 4AM (I will be sleeping) if shoppers did not come. Retailers may be at fault for laying at our feet the temptation to replace reverence with materialism; but we keep giving them reason to do so. So, we ought not to ponder what Christmas means to people, but rather what does it mean to each one of us individually.

We know what
Christmas meant to the
Mary. God sent His angel
Gabriel to explain the
coming Savior, Jesus
Christ. This would mean
that Mary would be with
child outside of marriage,
and bear the disapproving
looks of those in her
community. Despite these
circumstances, she also

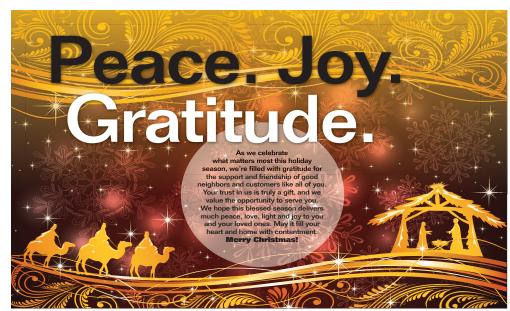
grasped the significance of the Child she carried. Gabriel said, "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." Mary herself understood the power of the event as she sings "He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever." Mary fathomed the immeasurable value of God's gift. Gabriel's visit and message were not the events of an average day. The whole world had changed.

We also know what Christmas meant to Jesus. The Son of God, being beforehand Spirit with His Father in heaven, was conceived by the Third Person of the Trinity and took on the flesh of Mary, one of His own creations. He entered the world not as He would have it, but rather as a broken shadow of God's intent, reeling in the consequences of its own Sin. He came not to be worshipped and served, but rather to humble Himself and to serve. He pierced the darkness to make true Mary's words "For the Mighty One has done great things for me." The crawling baby would eventually walk to the cross. The tender flesh of the infant would ultimately be pierced for

the transgressions of an ignorant, ungrateful world. For Jesus, Christmas meant the inauguration of a thirty-three year sojourn to death, and then a glorious three day march to resurrection! He did all of this because he loves us so very dearly. His act for us means peace with God, righteousness before our Creator, forgiveness of sins, and a future in heaven. This is what Christmas could mean to you.

~ Rev Dr. Philip J. Rigdon Pastor, St. John Lutheran Church and School







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## Redeeming Christmas Movies Continued

The first time I wrote for the Christmas Praver and Worship Guide, I told a story about how my brother likes to point out that the Christmas message is often absent from popular Christmas stories and movies. He points out that many of the shows we loved as children do not have the message of God sending God's Son into the world to offer redemption to all of creation. While I agree with him that the message is not as front and center as I may like, I still love some of the old classics. One of my favorites growing up was the Muppet Christmas Carol, and through that rendition I have grown to love just about every version of A Christmas Carol that I have seen.

Yet, my brother's accusation often haunts me (pun intended) whenever I watch it now. At face value, it has very little to do with the grace we see Christ come to usher into this world and focuses instead on our own actions. Hopefully, this quick synopsis will not prove to spoil the movie/story for anyone. Ebenezer Scrooge is a surly miser who cares for nothing but money. When three ghosts (four if you count his old partner Marley) visit him, he amends his ways and his doings. He has a change of heart and is suddenly very generous, reaching out to those in his community, and his sole employee, to bring some cheer to them at Christmas and beyond.

tale, by the end, is that Scrooge has prevented the fate that the third ghost showed him both for himself and for Tiny

Tim. Tiny Tim is his employee's son, who Scrooge grows quite fond of through his time with the ghosts. While it is a wonderful tale of changed hearts and the joy that comes when we are more willing to give than receive, it seems focused on what Luther would call "works righteousness." Works righteousness is the belief that we can save ourselves if we think the right thoughts and do the right things, that we can earn our righteousness before God. The Gospel, on the other hand, tells us that we cannot save ourselves. Indeed, if we could, there would be no need for Christmas at all. If humanity had the capacity to deal with the problem of sin and death, it would not be necessary for God to take on flesh, suffer, and die to offer us and all of creation redemption and restoration. But that is not the case. Christmas comes because we need the gift of God's grace.

Of course, this can lead to a problem that Dickens is likely seeking to address in his work: that we think we need not do anything thanks to the gift of God's grace. Dickens' story invites us to consider our actions and recognize that there are things we can do in service to those around us. These actions certainly have an impact on the quality of life others have, and can bring joy to us as well. Yet, the Christian faith The assumption of the says such actions are done as a response to grace already received. not to earn a certain reward.

It may be helpful to

illustrate this using A Christmas Carol. We can tell that something significant happened to Scrooge because of his change of heart. The question, then, is what motivated this change? Was it grace he had received? Or was he hoping to change a future outcome by modifying his behavior? His discussion with the third ghost makes it seem like the latter. The best way to discover this, I think, is to contemplate whether or not the change would remain if there was no external reward. Would Scrooge have continued his ways of being generous and jolly after encountering the ghosts if everyone still treated him like an old miser. avoiding him on the street and hoping that he stayed away from them? Would Scrooge be able to maintain that joy and generosity if he

could not change the outcome for Tiny Tim?

We, of course, cannot know the answer to these questions. Yet, they do highlight our own understandings of grace and the motivations behind our actions. Christ calls us to persist in bearing the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) regardless of the response we receive. When we have been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit, ready to walk in the newness of life that Christ has promised, we are to continue in this path, upheld by that same Spirit, even if no one else recognizes this change or treats us poorly along the way.

But, of course, for Scrooge people do treat him differently once he has his change of heart. His nephew

welcomes him warmly, Bob Cratchit is thankful for his help, kids on the street will laugh with him, etc. I think it is the response of this community around Scrooge that bears the Gospel in our story, then. We see in these responses a willingness to offer forgiveness, to give a person who has struggled to care as they should for a long time the chance to be different. We see in the invitation made by the nephew a relentless hope that things can be different for one who has spurned and rejected all invitations to love and kindness before. Such hope and forgiveness are what Christ offers to each of us. No matter how long we have rejected the invitation, Christ still invites us to experience a love that holds us fast for all eternity.

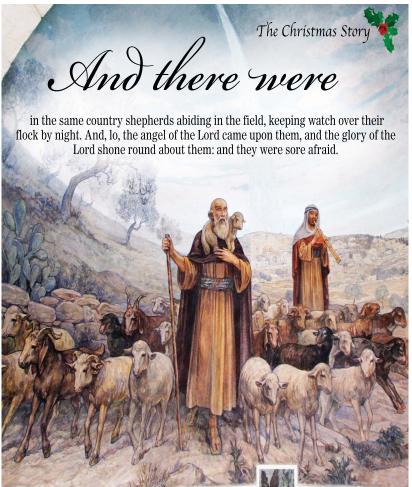
SEE MOVIES, PAGE 5



# And it came to pass

in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And Joseph also went up to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.



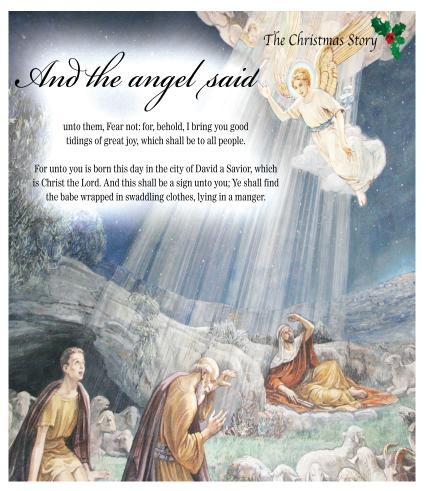


# The Christmas Story

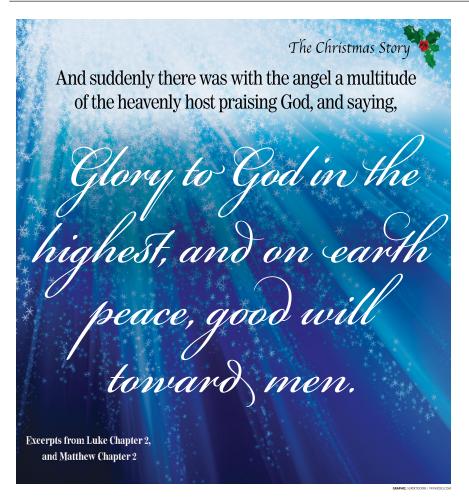
# Now when Jesus was born

in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.





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#### MOVIES

FROM PAGE 3

No matter how wrong we have been, how miserly, stingy, grouchy, or surly, the community of Christ stands ready to offer forgiveness and rejoice with us when we repent.

This is good news indeed! In Christ, we are invited to both give and receive forgiveness. Through the community that Christ makes possible with God and with one another, we can have resilient hope for one another, and stand ready to offer forgiveness and mercy to one another just as Christ has offered these gifts to us. While it can be tempting in a polarized world, especially as we gather with friends and family members of diverse viewpoints during this holiday season, to write people off as a lost cause, may we remember how God did not treat us this way.

Instead, when we were far off, God drew near in the flesh to show us grace and forgiveness beyond our comprehension. So, this Christmas season, when we may be tempted to get a little short or surly with others, may we be visited by the Three Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to help us remember God's amazing love for us and for all those around us. Amen.

Written and submitted by Pastor Daryl Emowrey Calvary Lutheran Church, Angola.





# Merry Christmas From: Angola United Methodist Church And The Gathering May you experience God's blessing and favor in the New Year!

#### **Christmas Eve Services**

7:00 pm Family Candlelight Service
11:00 pm Traditional & Candlelight Service

#### **Weekly Services**

9:00 am Traditional Service 11:00 am The Gathering

Pastor: Chuck Fenwick Angola United Methodist is located at 220 West Maumee, Angola, IN www.angolaumc.org

## Seek and Find

Christmas is a wonderful time to come back to church or come to church for the very first time. You might have gotten out of the habit during the pandemic. You can watch it at home but in reality, you do not get people who care about you and your soul. A great couple of questions I learned from a former local pastor, Rev. Tim Terrell is this "Who knows your name & cares about your soul?" With that in mind, I hope you peruse this Christmas Prayer and Worship section and find a place for you if you do not have one! Every one of the churches in town offers you an opportunity to worship God and experience community, find your place if you do not have one.

At my sweet church on Jimmerson Lake, Nevada Mills Community Church, we are focused on the people in the story of Christmas or The Cast of

do a deep dive into the story before. This is prior to the that way? One of the best of Christmas. The first week we studied prophets. Several prophets in the Old Testament gave a know two from the Book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 7: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"

Some of my favorite Christmas hymns are based on these great passages. Amazing to me is that hundreds of years prior to the birth of Jesus, these men heard from the Lord and gave great testimony to what would happen. This is prior to

printing press, libraries, and more where we might go to gather information and try to predict things. foreshadowing (an indica- I also think about weather tion of a future event) of forecasters (no offense) Jesus' birth. You might who have great technology at their fingertips and still predict forecasts that never happen. This is even more amazing.

The other characters we are focused on are Isaiah 9: 6-7; "For to the angels, the shepherds, the magi, and then US! As Isaiah states that I quoted above "unto us a child is born." He is the world's gift. How do I know that? John 3: 16-17; "God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him may not be lost, but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world guilty, but to save the world through Him." (New Century Version)

> I have felt lost, not sure where to turn or what to do. Have you ever felt

decisions of my life is my yes to Jesus. I realized that I am a sinner in need of a savior. I daily still make missteps and have things to repent for, but I am trying to live out my favorite passage from Jeremiah, Jeremiah 29:13 "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

So, join a flock this Christmas! Join a family of faith that knows your name and cares about your soul. Come find a home this Christmas where you can find out more about the

one who came to earth to save us! Join me in being in a "whoever believes in Him" and "seeks" Him and I know that our lives and world will be a better place for us loving Jesus and each other! Feel free to come to Nevada Mills Community Church and be a part of our family or seek out one of the other churches in town! Come find your home church for Christmas!

Striving to know Jesus and make Him known!

> Pastor Tracey Zimmerman Nevada Mills, Angola





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## Unique Christmas traditions around the world

#### BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Christmas celebrations span the globe. According to a 2025 report from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, there are roughly 2.6 billion Christians worldwide, a figure that undoubtedly contributes to the popularity of Christmas. Christianity continues to have the most adherents of any religion in the world, and the Christian population is expected to top three billion before 2050.

Christians bring unique cultural touches to their Christmas celebrations each year. Celebrations vary widely, and here's a look at some notable Christmas traditions across the globe.

#### **Yule Goat**

The Yule Goat is a Christmas tradition in Sweden. The goat is believed to be an invisible spirit that ensures that Yule preparations are done correctly. A popular theory connects the goat to the

Norse god Thor, who rode a chariot pulled by two goats.

#### Krampus

While many people celebrate the benevolence of Santa Claus, some celebrate a much grumpier alter-ego of sort. Krampus is a man-goat, half-demon monster who punishes misbehaving children at Christmastime, says Britannica. He is the evil companion of St. Nicholas, and is believed to have originated in Germany. His name comes from the German word "krampen," which means, "claw."

#### Christmas chicken

Christmas Eve is a popular romantic occasion for couples and families in Japan. In addition to gift-giving and a romance, many people choose to feast on a meal of KFC fried chicken and strawberry shortcake for dessert.

Roller-skating to Mass In the city of Caracas, Venezuela, it's customary for Christmas Eve celebrants to roller skate to early morning Mass. Known as "Misa de Aguinaldo," these special church services take place on the days leading up to Christmas, with the most festive held on December 24. On this day, the streets of Caracas are closed to automobiles, enabling revelers to cheerfully skate to church.

#### Mummering

In Newfoundland, Canada, celebrants known as mummers dress in elaborate disguises featuring mismatched clothing and whimsical accessories. The mummers obscure their identities and visit neighbors' homes during the 12 days of Christmas, performing songs, skits or dances while others attempt to guess their identities.

#### **Las Posadas**

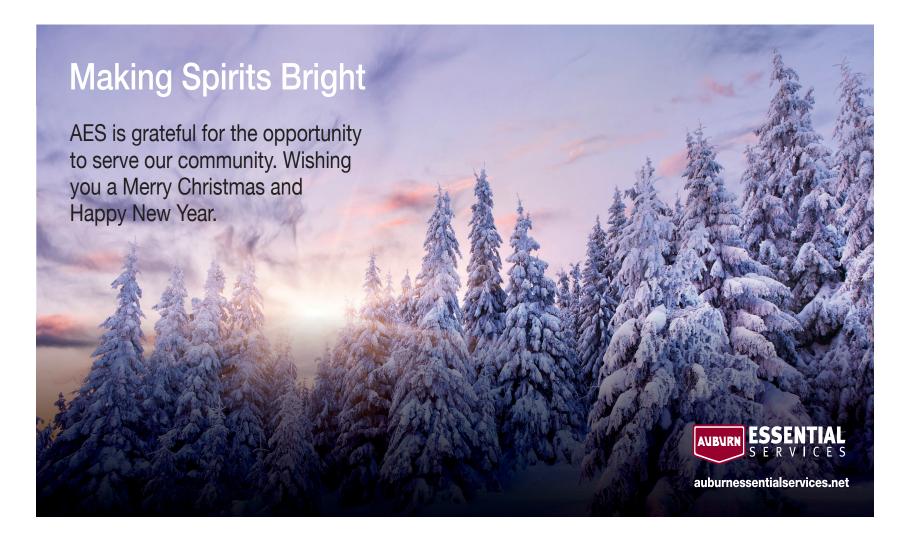
In some Hispanic regions, including Mexico, participants reenact Mary and Joseph's search for shelter in Bethlehem through

vibrant processions. They travel from house to house, singing traditional songs and requesting shelter only to be turned away until they reach a final home or church that will symbolically welcome them in.

#### **Spiderweb decorations**

Individuals in Ukraine decorate their Christmas trees with artificial spider webs. This tradition is inspired by a tale of a poor widow and her children who didn't have money for tree ornaments. Upon waking up on Christmas morning, they found their tree covered in sparkling, glimmering spider webs that resembled tinsel. A spider had spun the beautiful display as thanks for finding shelter and warmth in the family's humble abode. Today's spider webs symbolize unexpected blessings and gratitude.

Plenty of unique touches set Christmastime celebrations apart across the globe.



### Make Room

This Christmas, First UMC of Auburn is excited to explore a custom found in many Spanishspeaking communities: Las Posadas, translated in English as "The Inns." This rich tradition commemorates the Holy Family's quest for an inn in which to take shelter for the night, and it invites those who observe it to pause and make room in their hearts for the incarnation of Christ. How will Jesus show up in

your life this Christmas? Will you make room for him, or will you—like the innkeeper—unknowingly turn away the greatest gift any of us could receive?

While our two services look very different, they will both explore the question: How will you make room for the Christ Child? There are many distractions that press in and threaten to push out the amazing blessing that's right on our doorstep. This

tradition asks each of us what was asked of the innkeeper that night: "Do you have room for Christ in your life?" We, like the innkeeper, often find reasons to push Christ out, and more often than not, we don't even realize what we're doing.

Let's pause this season and invite in the Christ Child. Let's make space for the Prince of Peace. Join us for our Christmas Eve services and experience a space created to rest and receive the blessing of Christ.

Or tune into our Advent podcast series, Peace on Earth. You can find the link at auburnumc.church/ advent

The angels proclaim "Peace on earth, goodwill to all," but most days we don't feel like we're living in the kingdom of the Prince of Peace. We wake to wars, conflict, and anxiety—a world hungry for peace yet starved of it.

That's why Isaiah's promise can feel almost too good to be true. But he spoke those words when everything around him was falling apart. He trusted a God whose peace doesn't depend on our circumstances—a peace that is eternal, indwelling, and offered to you as well.

Rev. Robert Barton First UM, Auburn

## A brief history of Christmas trees

#### BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Towering evergreen trees adorned in lights and other trinkets are a focal point of the holiday season. Christmas trees are placed in prominent locations in homes, typically in front of a large picture window or in the corners of large entryways. These

awe-inspiring trees beckon people to inspect all of the ornaments and often are the first thing people envision when thinking of holiday decor. The tradition of the Christmas tree is believed to have begun in Germany in the sixteenth century. However, the National Christmas Tree Association says there may be earlier

references to Christmas trees in other parts of the world as well. The first written record of a decorated Christmas tree comes from Riga, Latvia, in 1510. Men of a local merchant's guild decorated the tree with roses and then set fire to it. The rose was considered a symbol of the Virgin Mary. In the sixteenth century in Alsace,

the marketplace and brought home and set up undecorated. Laws limited the size to "eight shoe lengths" or slightly more than four feet. Early German Christmas trees were adorned with apples, a holdover from earlier traditions when evergreen boughs hung with apples were used as props in miracle plays. These plays took place in churches on December 24, which was Adam & Eve's Day in the early Christian calendar. Evergreens have long been symbolic of life during the cold months of winter, calling to mind the promise of spring to

come. Various cultures,

featured trees during

including early Christians,

France, trees were sold in

winter solstice celebrations. Some historians believe Martin Luther, a Protestant reformer who might have been inspired by stars in the night, was responsible for adding lighted candles to the Christmas tree. The Christmas tree was introduced to the United States by German settlers in the 1800s. Soon after those settlers' arrival, trees began to be sold commercially. President Franklin Pierce is credited with having the first Christmas tree at the White House. Today, Christmas trees are wildly popular, with the American Christmas Tree Association reporting that 94 percent of U.S. consumers plan to display one.





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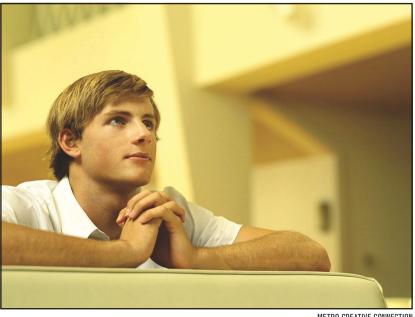
### Tips to engage your faith more during the holiday season

#### BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Shopping is a big part of the holiday season, and data regarding retail sales bears that out. According to the National Retail Federation, roughly 19 percent of total retail sales during a five-year period beginning in 2019 occurred between November and December.

NRF data is a testament to how much shopping now factors into the holiday season. But millions aspire to more fully engage their faith over the final month of the year. Indeed, religious holidays like Chanukah and Christmas mark a perfect time for the faithful to place a greater emphasis on their faith. That goal can be accomplished in a number of ways.

• Read scripture each day. Many adults' first interactions with their faith as youngsters were reading stories about the foundations of their religions with their parents, religious instructors or even on their own. Those stories might have been kid-friendly adaptations of notable stories found in the



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sacred writings of various faiths, including Christianity, Islam and Judaism. This holiday season adults can engage their faith more fully by committing time each day to reading scripture. If time is

short, commuters can even listen to audio versions of sacred writings on their way to and from work.

• Volunteer at your local house of worship. Houses of worship recognize the holiday season is a

special time of year. But they also recognize that the less fortunate might be particularly needy during this time of year, and many churches, synagogues, temples, and other houses of worship host holiday season food, clothing and toy drives, as well as additional events, in an effort to ensure everyone gets what they need. Volunteering to lend a hand during such events can be a great way to engage more fully with your faith.

• Attend services. The hectic pace of the holiday season is well-known, and it can be hard to make it to daily or weekly services. But such services can be just what people need to reconnect with their faith during the holiday season. If it's been awhile since you were a regular attendee at church services, commit to regular attendance throughout the month of December.

The holiday season is an undeniably commercial time of year. But it also marks a great time to reconnect with one's faith.



# The Legend of the Candy Cane

Many years ago, a candy maker wanted to make a candy at Christmas time that would serve as a witness to his Christian faith.

He wanted to incorporate several symbols for the birth, ministry and death of Jesus. He began with a stick of pure white hard candy; white to symbolize the Virgin Birth and the sinless nature of Jesus; hard to symbolize the solid rock, the foundation of the Church; firmness to represent the promise of God.

The candy maker made the candy in the form of a "J" to represent the name of Jesus, who came to earth as our Savior.

He thought it could also represent the staff of the Good Shepherd, with which he reached down into the ditches of the world to life out the fallen lambs who, like all sheep, have gone astray.

Thinking that the candy was somewhat plain, the candy maker stained it with red stripes. He used three small stripes to show the stripes of the scourging Jesus received, by which we are all healed. The large stripe was for the blood shed by Christ on the cross so that we could have the promise of eternal life. Unfortunately, the candy became know as a candy cane — a meaningless decoration seen at Christmas time.

But the true meaning is still there for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.



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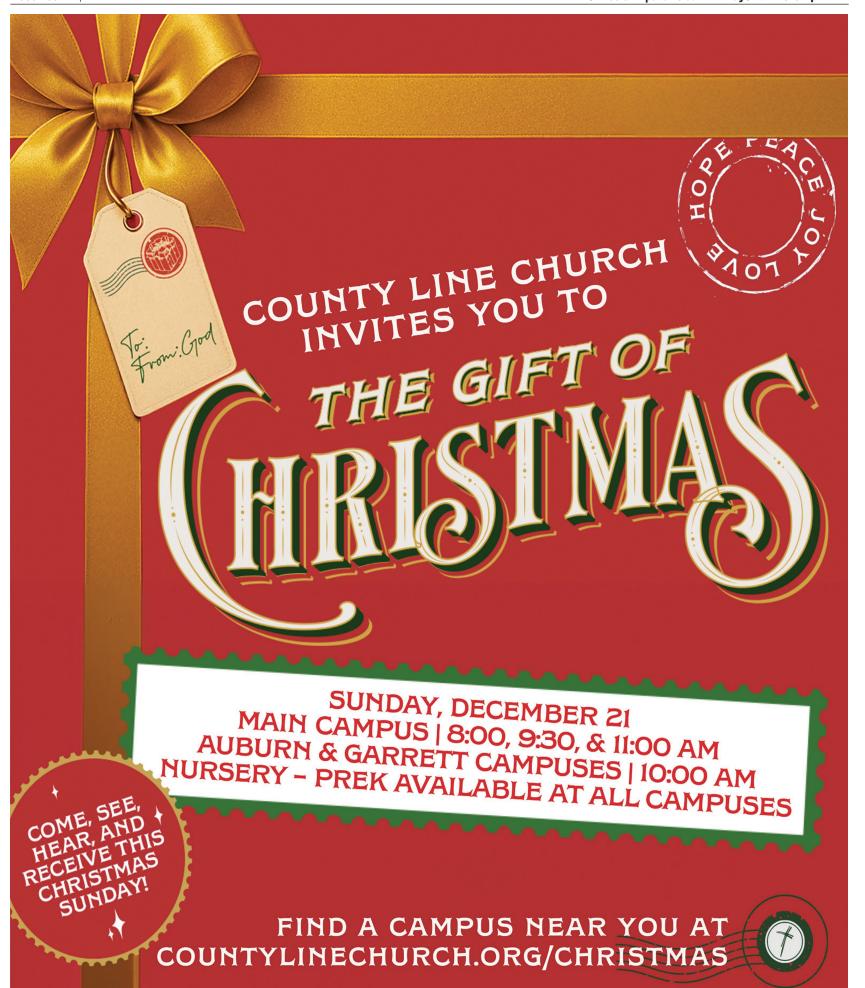
# Did you know?

#### BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Christmas is an important date on the calendar for faithful Christians across the globe. Given the fanfare around Christmas, it would seem that all Christians celebrate the holiday. However, some Christians do not celebrate Christmas. Denominations such as Jehovah's Witnesses and certain branches of the Churches of Christ do not observe Christmas. Their reasoning may be a lack of explicit biblical instruction to celebrate the holiday. The Bible does not command or even mention the early church celebrating the birth of Jesus. Others have concerns about the pagan origins of some Christmas traditions, such as mistletoe, holly, the yule log, and even Christmas trees. So they simply opt out entirely.



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#### St. Paul Catholic Chapel

Christmas Eve - December 24 Mass at 5:00 p.m.

Christmas Day - December 25 Mass at 10:00 a.m.

8780 E. 700 N. Fremont, Indiana 46737

# St. Anthony Catholic Church

Christmas Eve - December 24
Nativity Program at 4:30 p.m.
Children's Mass at 5:00 p.m.
Spanish Mass at 7:00 p.m.
Music Prelude at 9:30 p.m.
Midnight Mass at 10:00 p.m.

Christmas Day - December 25 Mass at 10:00 a.m.

700 W. Maumee Street Angola, Indiana 46703

#### St. Joseph Catholic Church

Christmas Eve - December 24 English Mass at 5:00 p.m.

Christmas Day - December 25 English Mass at 10:00 a.m. Spanish Mass at 12:30 p.m.

50 N. 100 E. LaGrange, Indiana 46761