

Historical moments. We soon mark 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Oct. 31. It's still all about Jesus, who He is, what He has done, how we receive His goods. Our desire to simply believe, teach, confess, practice as the Church always has. Remarkable this very night 491 years ago, the first time since the early church, first time ever for the German people; to hold a Divine Service entirely in their own language.

Some of you know, most Germans aren't very smart. 240 years ago this very night Hessian (German) soldiers working for the British were celebrating Christmas, unprepared, who attacks on Christmas. Gen. Washington makes his famous Delaware crossing (you've seen the painting). Surprise attack, key turning point in the Revolutionary War.

This very night 165 years, a Lutheran pastor Schwan, the same family with the home delivery trucks you see, Pastor Schwan in Cleveland Ohio, would place a Christmas tree in the church and also put one up on a public display. First time ever. Its not until the early 1900s American homes began putting up trees like Europe. It's thought Martin Luther was the first to begin the Christmas tree tradition, I think the idea of Christmas trees caught on.

This very night 5 years ago, the first Service in this place; 5 years of history, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight.

Genealogy used to be of limited interest; now Ancestry.com and others came along, even dna testing; they discovered how to make a profit from human vanity and curiosity. Paul warned those who squabbled over genealogy as foolish if it gave them special chosenness with God. For the record, Paul was proud of his genealogy, descendant of Benjamin.

The Bible has much history, many genealogies, alot of those names we can't pronounce; yet it all serves a purpose. That's your family. Shows how there's never a time God was not turning over the calendar pages from day to day, month to month, year to year. Genealogies are milemarkers along history, to show, Jesus in the flesh, is God who's been with you all thru the years. People- Old and New testament are all saved the same way, by grace alone in this Child who comes to be, a sacrifice.

History is more that a succession of isolated disconnected events but is what the Germans call Heilesgeschichta. History of how God is carrying out His saving purpose. As God was making His way through history to Bethlehem, God is making your history. All creation, all history, the present, looks to Bethlehem and on a hill outside Jerusalem. There alone is salvation. Humanity restored in His flesh and blood. In the fullness of time God sent His Son. Heaven is opened, by sending the Spirit into our hearts in baptism, our life joined to Him; and no longer live for ourselves. Just as Mary bore God in the stable; we are born as His children in the fount. He doesn't stop there.

Yet, sometimes it seems like the only book of the Bible is Job. A hidden, unapproachable God. We may search, but He is the one who seeks you out, draws you unto Himself. The hidden God comes where He promises. He has come, is come, will come again. Emmanuel, God with us, always. Those who look for God outside of Jesus, outside of Scripture, you will come up empty handed. Luther once said, "I know no other God than the One who hangs dead on a cross and nurses at the breast of His mother." profound miracle of the Incarnation. The Creator, your God in diapers. Jesus is not only the image and picture of God and dare we say, the selfie of God, but God breaks through in time, in history in the flesh; to joined to your flesh; to bring your flesh to heaven.

We must do away with any pious notions of “God up there.” We cannot ascend to God, either in thoughts, prayers, dreams, or faith, but God comes down to us. We cannot crawl our way out of your sin’s darkness, but God crawls His way to you. He comes here in this place for the sick, the lost; He comes for sinners.

We can no longer pretend we live in a Christian society. There was no room at the inn and there is none now. We refuse the culture to pretend that Jesus came to make people feel good about themselves and their life choices, when in fact Jesus comes to His own and they do not receive Him. It was not a happy time. Placing a baby in a manger was not a clever life hack. An act of desperation, humiliation for Mary, Joseph, and God. His birth turned Bethlehem into a village of Herod’s massacre. His preaching would lead to the martyrdom of John his cousin and countless afterward. Being sad at Christmas is ancient tradition.

I pray this is your most memorable Christmas. A time you look back with fond memories for the rest of your life. God be praised. For some, Christmas lights won’t twinkle as bright. Family situations change. Years have taken their toll, history has changed this night for us in many ways. Those you love who won’t be there for one reason or another. As you get more history in your life, your Christmas table, family gatherings are always mixed with tears of joy and sadness, regret, and we dream of Christmas just like the ones we use to know. But nothing can change, nothing can ruin, historical facts, your historical, present reality, Jesus was born for you.

No matter what may come. You have Luke chapter 2. You have forgiveness of sins. Tomorrow you have ChristMass, the Supper and every Sunday. You’ve the promises, the certainty of what lies ahead in your days. Maybe you’re not the people you want to be; but you are not alone. Christ with us. Emmanuel, in His Word and Sacraments, here as in no other way on this earth for you.

The point of all history – the prophecies, the promises, the dreams, the angels, the Virgin, her Child, the manger, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection, the glory – is to save you. Because you can’t. To spend eternity with you. That you would never be separated from your loved ones.

The more you hear the Christmas story. Its just not history, but you are a living part of it. God born as one of you. God knows your sorrows, even the ones you hide. In His cross, Jesus’ bears our sins and burdens. Already from silent night of Bethlehem you can hear your Savior cry: **It is finished**. Your sin atoned. Death is not the end of your history or family genealogy. You will never, ever die.

Jesus was never meant to stay in the manger, anymore than you are meant to stay in this world. You have more history to make here, knowing your future history is already written. True Christmas joy is the life that is yours in this Child now; nothing of this world can take away from you.

Nothing can truly harm you. You are His. Bask in His forgiveness and love and what this night brings. Your hopes and fears of all your years are met in thee tonight, He turns the calendar page each of your days, not a single detail in your life goes unnoticed. His continual care, evermore and evermore. 5 years in this place; indeed we’re living historical days. Your history is enfolding here. Welcome home for the holy days. Christmas has arrived.