

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMONETTE FOR DECEMBER 20 & 21, 2020**

¹⁹ Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

(Luke 2:19,20)

To know what's trending is to be hip, cool, in the know, to be in touch and conversant with the culture. The latest in fashion, the latest in how to tips, the newest and most popular products. Online you can find what's trending in the news and what the most popular internet searches are.

So, Christmas is trending. Again. No surprise. Every year, same time, same day. But what are the topics that are trending around this most precious of holidays? Politics – let's not go there. Pandemic pressures - isolation, quarantine, uncertainty, economic challenges. Shopping – time's running out, have you been shopping in store or online more, big box or local retailers?

Personally, you may have some trending issues rising to the top of your attention and diverting your energy. Those can make getting ready for Christmas and even imagining joy at Christmas a tough go.

So there's all of this stuff. Things to do, things to think about, things to worry about, shiny objects over here, dark shadows over there. And just days away now, Christmas Covid-19 edition.

Remember Tim Tebow? About a decade ago, Tim Tebow was the flavor of the month, a continuously trending topic. During his college career he won the Heisman trophy as a sophomore, and was a two-time national champion with the Florida Gators. He then entered the NFL and had a very short career but did win one playoff game with the Denver Broncos. What made Tim Tebow noteworthy was his outspoken Christian faith; his practice kneeling in prayer on the football field became known as "Tebowing."

Just how popular was Tim Tebow at the time? Consider this hypothetical... Tim Tebow asks for an audience with the Pope. He flies to Rome and the Pope gives him a tour of the Vatican, the Sistine Chapel, everything worth seeing. But it's Sunday morning and now the Pope needs to deliver Mass to the 50,000 people waiting in St. Peter's Square below his window (pre-Covid, obviously). "Come along with me, Tim," the Pope encourages. The two of them go to the window. Down below, an Italian guy says to his buddy, "Hey, who's the guy in the pointy hat next to Tebow?"

Many will have the same experience this week. Christmas will arrive, whether people are ready or not. All the fussing and fixing and planning and preparing, the frantic race to the finish – and suddenly, it will hit them: a question begging to be answered... "Who's the baby in the manger next to Santa?" Why is there a baby in that little scene under the Christmas tree?"

Well, that baby is what the fuss is all about – the Christ of Christmas. The question that confronts you and me is this: Who is Jesus to you? The reason for the season or the excuse for season? Do you believe in him or brush him off to the side?

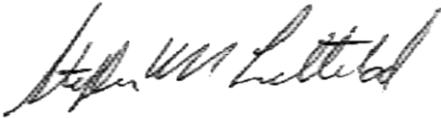
There is only one acceptable response. It's not enough to know him, to acknowledge him. Herod did that. Satan does that. Even your inner Anakin, aka Darth Vader, prideful ruler of your own little empire acknowledges God. But for the sinful nature, it's all about me, myself, and I, and our countless sins of thought, word, and deed – a debt that we can't possibly even begin to pay, a debt that deserves separation from God forever

But this perfect Child lived a perfect life and traded the wood of the manger for the wood of the cross. He died an innocent death, crushing Satan, paying the price for all sin with his holy precious blood, then rose

again from the dead on Easter morning. He is our living Savior, our Wonderful Counselor, our mighty God, our everlasting Father, our Prince of Peace.

Precious truths. Powerful truths. Truths that take us into eternity. All the more reason to imitate the actions of both Mary and the shepherds shared with us at the end of Luke's Christmas Gospel. ¹⁹ ***Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*** ²⁰ ***The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.***

Is Christmas bigger than the Christ? Nope. Don't let it happen. Check your heart, set your perspective, fix your eyes on Jesus. Treasure. Ponder. Praise. Rejoice. Blessed Christmas to you and yours!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen W. Luchterhand". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand
Minocqua, WI