

WARNING ORDER:

OPERATION BARNABAS

DECEMBER 2023

OPERATION BARNABAS

Operation Barnabas is the LCMS' network of care to our nation's military members, families and veterans. We reach out to all branches of the military with a special emphasis on our Reserve members and their families.

LUKE 1:46-55

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

THE MAGNIFICENT JOY OF CHRISTMAS

CH (LTC) Steven Hokana, USA (Ret)



Photo: Lightstock

Advent and Christmas are my favorite times of the year. The anticipation builds for that wonderful Christmas Eve. That Babe born in a manger. But wow! What a wild ride heading to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. Some of us reminisce about favorite Christmas gifts and look forward to the food served once a year. We also reflect with fondness upon those no longer with us, but who rest in the arms of the Almighty.

This year I thought I'd reflect on Christmas disasters. Nothing too serious — no major train wrecks, homes destroyed by fire or loved ones banged up in auto accidents. This is, after all, a short reflection about Christmas and not an after-action report on past accidents. I'll focus on the minor hiccups of life, the kerfuffles large enough to etch themselves into

my memory. Here's a small list, not necessarily in chronological order.

I decided to be a hero for my wife and family and fold socks before heading to church on Christmas Eve. Since I am a theologian, I thought I'd use the basic principle of Jacob and Laban in Genesis 31: "Distinct white sheep ... and goats." Divide the sheep from the goats, conquer, fold, then throw in the hamper. Not too hard. After a while the socks didn't match, my back started to ache, and the dog, a people-pleasing, 109-pound Great Dane, sat in my folded pile and got hair all over them. I also discovered that our dryer eats socks. Household Six (Army vernacular for one's wife) fired me and should probably have given me a counseling statement. We made it to church, but the conversation in the van was bereft of hilarity.

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REPORTS

J-1 Personnel

Roll Call: Gather names and record attendance of members. A time to get to know each other.

J-2 Intelligence

Gather and share information. Provide a report on local units and their deployment schedule; also provide contact information for local military contacts upon request. Identify and assess what is going on in the community concerning veterans and their families.

J-3 Operations and Training

Develop a plan. Draft a listing of possible chapter activities, including veterans celebrations, presentations (as desired and available); develop a strategy to expand outreach into the community. Identify and assign tasks to specific people that include standards and timeframes.

J-4 Logistics

Identify and provide materials for meetings, such as coffee, refreshments, etc., to support the plan.

J-6 Communication

Develop communication strategies to support the plan. Place internal announcements (newsletter/bulletins) as well as provide articles for the local paper.

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One year, while we were living in military housing, the heat went out in the house. The system was antiquated. The repairman has been over enough times that we were on a first-name basis ... we share a crisis and plates of Christmas cookies. Another time before Christmas, at a different house, a water leak developed in the lawn. The water bubbling up looked like the early beginnings of the Trevi Fountain in Rome, without the romance. The plumber showed up and fixed it. God bless plumbers who make fast house calls.

Don't stop reading! I'm not here to throw a wet blanket on the wonderful season of hope and peace. I have not forgotten the theme of one of the Advent candles: joy. You have heard the saying, "This is where the rubber meets the road." Advent is where the light shines ever so brightly with a glow of hope! A light given by God's one and only Son. The promised Savior of the Old Testament now dwells among us. John the Baptist, the herald of God, announces Jesus' ministry. We celebrate His birth with great and exultant joy!

I can think of no better backdrop for magnifying the importance of Jesus' birth than life's foibles and "nut rolls." We are so human! We make mistakes. We are sinners in need of redemption. Even the world echoes and groans in its fallen state. Clean socks become dirty, plumbing breaks and heating systems fail. After all this, joy is given to us by the deliverance of humanity by God's one and only Son, Jesus.

If you reflect back on both Advent and Christmas, you have to agree that "childlike" is written all over it. This season of the Church Year brings out the child in all of us. Jesus said in Matthew 19:14, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." He includes all of us, which is a cause of joy!

I've been thinking about and reading up on the Christmas story. When you read Luther's writings on this season of joy, he refers to it as "the Nativity."

Luther has a driving theme to press home when preaching on the Christmas story, the Nativity. The characters must be real. He expends a lot of energy telling you that Mary was an unmarried housemaid. Luther wants you to know that Gabriel toned things down when he spoke to Mary. He was the ranking authority of angels, and if he revealed himself in his full glory, it would overwhelm her. The shepherds were authentic men of the earth. They lived for the care of their flocks. But they help drive home the joy the Incarnation brings to all humanity.

Joy! What a wonderful topic. One way we express our joy over Christmas is by way of plays. "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come" (LSB 358) is, in fact, a Christmas play written by Luther. Using this familiar hymn, the Nativity is acted out by family and friends in theatrical form. The characters in the story and the joy of the prophetic promise are fulfilled.

A lot of Christmas plays echo throughout my life and memories. I have seen plays with all kinds of themes. Some get rather lost in their attempt to simply show miracles and joy. Some works are theologically dubious at best. One major category is the "talking animal participation play." This is where a cow, a duck or a mouse sees the iridescent glow coming from the manger and the star in the sky. As a result, they demonstrate the joy of Christmas for all of us. In addition, the "miracle" of Christmas in this genre is that the animals talk. They call out in plain English, "God bless us, everyone," in Tiny Tim fashion. Such is the attempt to show the joy of Christmas through animals.

There is also what I call the "innocent bystander" Christmas play. A great example is "Amal and the Night Visitors." This was the first Christmas play shown live on television back in 1951. Amal, a disabled boy who can walk only with a crutch, gives his crutch to baby Jesus as a gift and as a result, is healed. This story has no basis in fact, but it is an attempt to show joy.

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Photo: LCMS Communications/Erik M. Lunsford

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Yet another way we attempt to show “Christmas joy” is in pageants and plays put on by congregations. When I was seven years old, I was in the annual Christmas play at Faith Lutheran Church, in Lincoln, Neb. We wrote in a part. We wanted to show Joseph and Mary’s wedding. So, we had a wedding scene as part of the Christmas play. Borrowing a tie from my dad’s closet as a stole and a white shirt as a chasuble, I pronounced Joseph and Mary “husband and wife” in the name of the Triune God. Although this was a stretch as far as the life of Mary and Joseph goes, it did put me on the road to considering the pastoral ministry.

One year I met a pastor in Florida. He had a great story about the joy of Christmas. When he was a little boy, the Sunday school superintendent promised the children that every child would have a part in the Christmas play. Much to the shock of the superintendent and Christmas committee, kids came out of the woodwork to be in the play. They were running out of parts. Mary, Joseph, angels, choirs of angels, shepherds, lots of shepherds, a large flock of sheep, Zachariah and Elizabeth, farm animals — all were taken.

So here comes the Magi. In all fairness, nowhere in Scripture does it mention that there were three wise men. Of course, the number three refers to the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. But this superintendent must have known his Bible and knew that perhaps, more gifts and more wise men were present. For the play at that large church in rural America, there were four wise men who brought four gifts to baby Jesus: gold, frankincense, myrrh and chocolate donuts. The superintendent was the one who brought the “holey gift.” Thank you, Pastor Freddy Nauman.

The stories and plays are trying to tell us something. It’s about joy. It’s about moving from the usual — socks, a handmaiden, watching sheep, staring at a busted furnace — to the miraculous. The eternal God has come into the flesh, the angels are singing with joy, a star shines overhead. Now the world, and your life and mine, are forever changed.



Photo: Lightstock

All of these plays are way off-kilter unless they express the purpose of God becoming man: to rescue man from sin, death and the power of the devil.

The Nativity is about the Incarnation, the eternal God taking on human form. An interesting component of this event is how God appointed an angel — a head honcho angel — to tell Mary about the miracle of Jesus’ birth, rather than a prophet or priest. I’ll bet Gabriel was so excited to tell Mary. What joy!

Mary responds to the news that she would be the mother of Jesus with a wonderful and joyful song: the Magnificat. The title of this song is from the Vulgate, St. Jerome’s Latin translation of the Bible. “Magnificat” is the first word out of Mary’s mouth. “Magnificent!” is a good English word to use for the occasion. Here is my paraphrase of Luke 1:47–55.

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

“Magnificent!” is the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.

“Magnificent!” The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

“Magnificent!” His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

“Magnificent!” He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; He has brought down

the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.

“Magnificent!” He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away.

“Magnificent!” He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

When you listen to Mary, you notice a powerful theme: joy. Joy in the Christian faith is not based on our activity. It is the activity of the Holy Spirit! It is the joy of Christmas, of God delivering and rescuing His people. This movement of the Almighty brings about change, a sudden and dramatic transformation that turns fallen humanity around and flips it in another direction — from spiraling down to death and eternal destruction, to rising upward to salvation and redemption.

A children’s tune popular in Sunday schools long ago, at least in the rural Midwest, comes to mind. I won’t recite all of it, but here’s a portion:

*“I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy
Down in my heart
Down in my heart
Down in my heart
I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy
Down in my heart
Down in my heart to stay.
And I’m so happy, so very happy
I’ve got the love of Jesus in my heart.
And I’m so happy, so very happy
I’ve got the love of Jesus in my heart.”*

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RESOURCES

LCMS Ministry to the Armed Forces

lcms.org/ministry-to-the-armed-forces

Military Chaplaincy (LCMS):

The link below provides an excellent introductory view of the exciting life and opportunities of the military chaplaincy.

- If Not Us, Then Who?: vimeo.com/208556248

Operation Barnabas logo wear by Lands' End

Clothing and other items with the Operation Barnabas logo can be purchased from Lands' End:

business.landsend.com/store/lcms-maf-ob

Combined Arms (CAX)

Combined Arms (CAX) is a nonprofit organization exclusively focused on transforming the veteran services marketplace (public & private) to improve the lives of veterans and military families: combinedarms.us

VA Medical Foster Home Program for Veterans

The VA now supports over 1,000 veterans in 700 foster homes in 42 states. This resource provides certified care for veterans needing supervision 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: blogs.va.gov/VAntage/69916/veterans-gain-freedom-fuller-lives-under-foster-home-program/

“Veteran-Friendly Community” program

The VA is seeking to enhance services to veterans through their “Veteran-Friendly Community” program. Please see this link for more information: va.gov/ve/engagement/index.asp

Also available is the Veteran Community Partnerships Toolkit. This resource aids in the development of community partnerships with the VA.

Veteran Help

If you are a veteran or you know a veteran who may be in crisis, free confidential support is available 24/7. Call the Veterans Crisis Line at 988 and press 1, send a text message to 838255 or chat online: veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat

National Chaplain Center

patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/index.asp

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs va.gov

National Guard Office of the Chaplain

nationalguard.mil/Leadership/Joint-Staff/Special-Staff/Chaplain/

National Military Family Association militaryfamily.org

U.S. Air Force Chaplain Corps af.mil

U.S. Army Chaplaincy army.mil/chaplaincorps/

Organize a donation drive for homeless veterans

Access the step-by-step guide at va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/FaithBasedDonationDrive-508.pdf.

OUTREACH TO THE MILITARY COMMUNITY



Photo: LCMS/Erik M. Lunsford

Operation Barnabas congregations can honor and support their military-connected members in various ways. Some of the projects that have been successful, and may help fill a need in your community, are listed below.

CREATING A WALL OF HONOR. Collect pictures and/or names of the veterans in your congregation and design a board to showcase their service. You may also dedicate this board using a template provided by Ministry to the Armed Forces (MAF).

MAILING CARE PACKAGES. Mail care packages to deployed LCMS chaplains and the service members at their location. For a list of recommended items or mailing addresses, contact Alicia Hinton at alicia.hinton@lcms.org.

HOLDING A VA FORUM. Call your local Veteran's Administration representative and ask them to come and speak about important topics such as benefits and special programs.

SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING. Hold a service of thanksgiving for the veterans in your community. Some examples include a hosting a July 4th BBQ or Veterans Day Dinner, or acknowledging their service on MAF Sunday.

DINNER FOR STUDENT VETERANS. Reach out to students who are veterans at your local college. Offer to cook a “home-cooked meal” for them.

MANNING A BOOTH. Secure a booth at your local fair/event and discuss how Operation Barnabas can support the military community. For flyers/giveaways, contact MAF.



Contributed photos

FALLEN HEROES



ARMY SPC. JEREMY D. EVANS
23, of Knoxville, Tenn., died Oct. 2 in a Light Medium Tactical Vehicle accident in the

Yukon Training Area of Alaska. Evans was assigned to 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry, 1st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 11th Airborne Division, Fort Wainwright, Alaska. He joined the Army in July 2020. His awards include the Army Achievement Medal, Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal and Korean Defense Service Medal. The incident is currently under investigation.



ARMY SPC. BRIAN J. SNOWDEN
22, of Lonedell, Mo., died Oct. 2 in a Light Medium Tactical Vehicle

accident in the Yukon Training Area in Alaska. Snowden was assigned to 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry, 1st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 11th Airborne Division, Fort Wainwright, Alaska. He joined the Army in July 2020. The incident is currently under investigation.



Image: Lightstock

OB SPECIAL OPS: NEWS FROM THE FIELD

This section highlights recent Operation Barnabas activities across the U.S. We hope these examples will be replicated in other congregations and chapters, that these activities might serve as a catalyst for other means of sharing God's mercy to military-connected people in our communities. Please share your activities, including pictures, so that others might gain from your experience.



PETOSKEY, MICH.

Zion Lutheran Church in Petoskey, Mich., unveiled their new Wall of Honor, recognizing those members who have served and are currently serving in the military.

DAYS TO REMEMBER DECEMBER

— **DEC. 7** —
**Pearl Harbor
Remembrance Day**

— **DEC. 13** —
National Guard Birthday

— **DEC. 16** —
**National Wreaths
Across America Day**

— **DEC. 20** —
Space Force Birthday

OPERATION BARNABAS

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Your generous gift to partner with Operation Barnabas makes a tremendous difference and helps to care for our nation's military members, families and veterans. Click here to give.

GIVE NOW

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mailchi.mp/lcms/resources.

SHARE YOUR STORIES

We want to hear from you! If you've got ideas for future issues, comments, feedback on articles you've read in *Warning Order* or news from your part of the world, please let us know. Write to alicia.hinton@lcms.org with your stories, and be sure to include your name, city and state.

Warning Order may be reprinted with acknowledgment given to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.



Ministry to the Armed Forces

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We still have that “joy, joy, joy, joy” even when folding socks that don’t match. Down in my heart? We still have joy when the plumbing breaks and the heat goes out! Christ gives us joy even when we hear about the failing health of a loved one.

I like to think of James in the first chapter of his epistle: “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds” (JAMES 1:2). We can count all trials as joy because of the love of Jesus. The message of Christmas brings joy that no grief can remove, no unmatched sock can

defeat, no heating problem nor plumbing disaster can destroy. St. Paul put it another way: “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (ROM. 8:38–39).

What joy we have at Christmas and throughout the year. A joy given us through Jesus. A joy that that lives in our hearts forever. Amen.

PRAYER

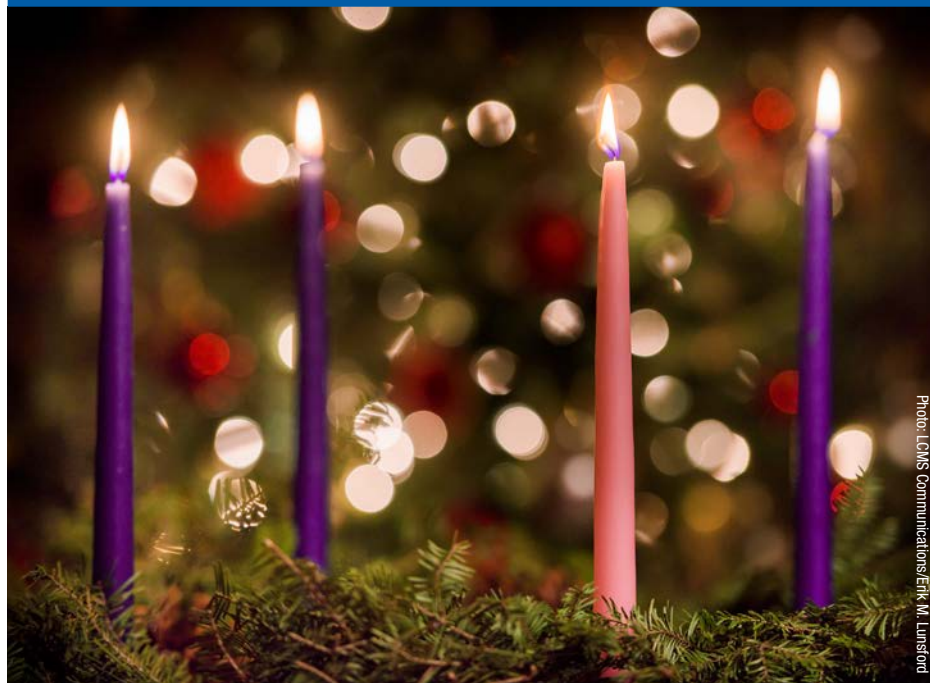


Photo: LCMS Communications/Erik M. Lunsford

ALMIGHTY AND EVER-LIVING GOD,

the harvest is gathered. The year is almost complete. During this month we are preparing again for Your coming. Though the sunlight diminishes, this time of Advent and Christmas is indeed the season of light. Candles on the Advent wreath remind us of the approach of Jesus’ birth.

What joy that God’s Son took on human form and lived among us. The birth of the

Christ child fulfilled the prophecies of old and extended a bright and glorious way to the cross for our reconciliation with God and peace on earth.

May the peace of Christ be ever ours and dwell in our hearts all the days of our life.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, the Word of God Incarnate.

AMEN.