

## WinterHaven 120422 Adv 2

In the Name of Jesus Rom. 15:4-13 Dear Fellow Redeemed by the blood of God's own Son, Think back to the earlier Scripture reading from Luke's gospel. When God gave Elizabeth a baby boy in her old age, everyone "rejoiced with her." They all agreed that she had been unable to have children, was truly blessed. (Lk. 1:57). We can imagine that they also agreed with her that her little boy was a beautiful child. But when Elizabeth announced that the child would be named "John," not Zacharias after his father, the neighbors and relatives argued with her: "How can this be the child's name? None of your relatives have the name John!" You know how it is. Everything is so peaceful as relatives and friends look upon the little one. Everyone agrees that the child is beautiful. But then the baby cries, and the quiet unity disappears! Someone says the child is hungry, another is certain that he needs a diaper change. "No," says a third, feeling the baby's head, "the little one has a fever!" When the child grows older and begins to speak, even his words will cause some division. So it is with every baby; so it would be with Elizabeth's son, John the Baptizer. Why should it be any different with the coming of Christ? Why do people gaze into the manger and think about political peace and unity in the world? Surely, His message was intended to bring peace on earth and God's "good will" to mankind. However, the more He spoke, the more division He caused! The grown up Christ-Child told His disciples: "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. . . . I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother; . . . And a man's enemies will be those of his own household." (Mt 10) You see, Christmas is not about the sentimental "unity" the world desires at Christmas. So we offer this prayer on the basis of our text MAY THE CHRIST- CHILD BRING TRUE UNITY AT CHRISTMAS AND ALWAYS! I. We pray for a unity which gives glory to God – not "according to man," but "according to Christ." This was the kind of unity that Paul wanted for the Christian church in Rome, so that they would may "glorify God with one mind and one mouth." There are differences here at Immanuel, as in every Christian church. But the congregation in Rome included Jew and Gentiles, whose nations had been enemies for hundreds of years! Jewish Law regarded Gentiles or non-Jews as "unclean." Gentiles were not allowed in the Jerusalem temple. Gentiles ate pork and bloody meat, which was forbidden to the Jews. The Gentiles, on the other hand, were appalled by the Jewish practice of circumcision! In a sense, each group thought the other had grown up on the "grown up on the wrong side of the tracks!" But now things are to be different, Paul says. "Each of you is to think the same thing among yourselves. (vs. 5,6) The world pushes the idea that we should all be united especially at Christmas. We are all supposed to agree that every person has good within him, and only needsto be encouraged to develop his goodness! We are all supposed to think that right and wrong are not absolutes, but only relative to one's situation! We are supposed to agree that God is whatever a person wants Him to be! But this is all about a false unity which is "according to man," and does not "give glory to God"! Paul says we are to "like-minded toward one another" – think the same thing among ourselves – "according to Christ Jesus." (V. 5) Our unity is to be based on His Word alone. This is a most serious matter even at Christmas! Think of how the whole world was united against the teaching of that "righteous man" Noah (2Pet. 2:5). Who was more "divisive" in those evil days, than Noah, who by faith in God's word, "condemned the world," that perished in the Flood? That world-wide flood shows that all the unity in the world is useless when it does not give glory to God, according to Christ! Paul says it's only by thinking and speaking according to Christ's word that we may truly glorify God "with one mind and one mouth." When I was in the 9 grade, the school

Christmas programs were a really big deal in our city, like they are here. That th year a Christian boy was asked to sing "Away in a Manger" with a Jewish girl, who was a friend of his, but who rejected Christ. He told the teacher he could not sing the hymn or participate in the program because it would not be glorifying his Savior. Where there is not complete unity in thinking according to Christ's Word, somebody is wrong. If a Christian prays or participates in the singing of religious music with those who do not agree on the basis of God's Word, He is forsaking Christ's word and glorifying himself! He is telling this lie to his neighbor: "The differences between the teachings of your church and mine are not important. This 'church business' is only a matter of personal taste and prejudice. You like your eggs scrambled, I like mine sunny-side-up. It's all the same to God. I'm such a good fellow, I say that God has no problem with what you think about Him and His Word." Brothers and sisters in Christ, may God keep us from misleading our neighbors in this way! As we celebrate the birth of Christ, it is our privilege to join the Bethlehem shepherds and "Give glory to God in the highest," when much of the world is listening. May our unity give glory to our God with the same mind and mouth, "according to Christ Jesus." II. But let this be true also, that ours be a unity which reaches out to others to the glory of God. Before the members of the Roman church could reach out to others and do mission work in the area they had to accept one another. "Receive one another," Paul says, "just as Christ also received us to the glory of God." Jesus did not accept the Jews or the Gentiles of that Roman congregation because they were "loveable." Does He accept any of us because we are "loveable," or because He saw that we have a lot of potential? No! – We were all "dead in sin," and the "objects of God's wrath"! (Eph. 2:1-3). Because of God's grace, Jesus accepted us anyway. He made us alive, even when we were still dead in sin! He is not ashamed to call us His brethren (Heb. 2:11) Jesus brought glory to God when He came to the Jews, who are called "the circumcision." He fulfilled the whole Law of Moses, and preached the Gospel to them as the O.T. chosen people of God. He did this "for the sake of "the truth of God" – to confirm the promises made to the fathers" – to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But it wasn't only for the Jews that Jesus became their "servant for the truth of God." It was also so that "gentiles might glorify God for His mercy" toward them! Even the O.T. prophets of Israel wrote of how the Gentile nations would praise the LORD for the salvation they shared with Jewish believers. Paul quotes several O.T. passages to encourage the Jewish Christians in Rome to accept their Gentile Christian brethren. Today also we need to take to heart Paul's encouragement to "receive (or accept) one another just as Christ has also received us." We may be tempted to label and treat people on the basis of their outward appearances, social or cultural background, what "side of town" they are from, how long their hair is, or by the mistakes they have made. But how self-righteous is that! Do we wish to give glory to ourselves, rather than to God? True unity at Christmas and always reaches out to others, not with pride, but for the glory of God, Who accepts us all on the same basis – His grace and mercy in Christ. How many different shepherds went to Bethlehem? Yet they said to one another: "Let US go to Bethlehem and see this thing ... which the Lord has made known to US." Three different Gentile wise men came with different gifts to join the young Jewish couple in the worship of their son. All of them – lowly shepherds, a poor carpenter, a humble housewife, and wealthy foreigners – all found God's grace and salvation in the Christ-Child! It's a difficult thing for poor humans like us to think the same way and to receive one another in true unity. We need help. Our help is our Hope! And now we all – every Christ-believer among us – shares the same hope, given and nourished by the Holy Spirit through the "patience and comfort of the Scriptures" (v. 4) . So we pray with Paul in v. 13: "May the God of this hope fill us with all

joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” By this Hope may the Christ-Child bring true unity at Christmas and always! Amen.