

Most of us have expectations for Christmas. The media bombards us with visual images and fictional accounts of the perfect Christmas, musical lyrics stir emotions, and books offer ideas for creating the perfect celebration. Many Christians plan and prepare at Advent, focusing on Jesus' birth, His coming into our hearts today, and His promise to come again. For the faithful, this is *major!* With best intentions, we attempt to make preparations "fit for a King."

Perhaps your expectations include family gathering around the Christmas tree decorated with ornaments evoking memories of special people and places, giving a loved one the ideal gift, or planning the perfect homecoming for a special guest. But instead, Christmas bonuses get cut and guests don't show. Snow changes to sleet and mud, a string of lights goes out just as you've finished the tree, cookies burn, and nothing ruins a mood faster than children fighting – which they are more than likely to do!

I vividly recall a less-than-expected Christmas back in 2001. I'd written and directed a children's program pointing to Baby Jesus as our Good Shepherd with a message of comfort and hope for troubled "post-911" hearts. All Christmas plans were set and then fell apart as pneumonia kept me from attending the service. My disappointment was overwhelming. I'd expected to prepare favorite foods, decorate the table, and go to church Christmas Eve, but I couldn't.

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Cookies went unbaked, parties were missed, family stayed away, and I spent New Year's Eve in the hospital. For a "detail person" like me, having my children struggle with housework and my pastor-husband putting in extra hours trying to keep up with their schedules at his busiest time was extremely difficult. This was definitely NOT the Christmas that I had prepared for or expected.

But then, Mary didn't expect to be the mother of the Son of God, Joseph didn't expect his young bride to be pregnant, and the shepherds didn't expect to see a sky of angels or their Savior in a manger! God surprised them all. Furthermore, no one expected a boy to teach in the Temple, and the crowd of 5,000 certainly didn't expect lunch! God's Word tells us that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life," (Romans 6:23). Death is deserved, but God offers the gift of grace instead?! Why? (Surprise!) He loves you and offered yet the biggest surprise of all – the resurrection! Jesus was crucified, died, and was sealed in a tomb.

Never in their wildest dreams did those soldiers expect that stone to move!

Christmas is realizing that Jesus, and His peace, dwells in your heart. *That's* what you can expect. The fact that my expectations weren't met that Christmas of 2001 didn't matter, because Jesus filled them all! His love was given to me through the gift of my family's *love*, as they took over and cared for me in ways that I had cared for them and *encouragement* through friends who stepped in to provide for our needs. I received the gifts of *patience* and *peace* as I realized things didn't have to be the way I'd expected, and of *hope* and *healing* in my body, mind, and spirit. As I recovered, I recognized that my Christmas had truly been blessed.

During this busy Advent season, take time to look for God's surprises. Open your eyes to see

*continued on page 27*



# Expecting the Unexpected

By Patricia Maier

## 2010 Lutheran Adult Gathering

Plans are underway for the Lutheran Adult Gathering being held October 8-10, 2010. This event gives adults (single and married) the opportunity to hear from inspirational speakers and enjoy fellowship, recreation, and relaxation in a Christian atmosphere – surrounded by the grace, charm, and majestic beauty of The Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island. The gathering theme, *Serving in His Presence With Hands, Heart, and Feet*, is based on Colossians 3:23-24.



Keynote speakers will be Rev. John H. Kieschnick, author of *The Best is Yet to Come*, and Dr. James Boldt, frequent lecturer and instructor. President of the Michigan District, LCMS, Rev. David P. E. Maier, will preach at the Sunday service and Mr. Thomas Czinder of St. Matthew, Walled Lake will serve as musician.

A highlight of the gathering will be the hilarious comedy of ventriloquist, Taylor Mason. Registration information will be available beginning in January.

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Retreat sponsored by the Michigan District, LCMS 

## Lutheran Special Education Ministries Announces New President and CEO

Mr. James R. Krone (below right) accepted the Call to Lutheran Special Education Ministries as its next President and Chief Executive Officer, effective October 1.

“This Call is the continuation of God’s plan in my life. It is with humility and reliance upon the Holy Spirit that I joyfully accept the Call and the opportunity to serve for such a time as this”, said Krone.

Mr. Krone has twenty-seven years of professional experience in education. He has served at Lutheran Special Education Ministries during the last twenty-three years, most recently as Vice President of Programs and Services.

Dr. Roger DeMeyere (below left), former President and CEO, will officially retire in March 2010.

Founded in 1873, Lutheran Special Education Ministries has helped thousands of children to know Jesus and lead fulfilling lives. For more information, or if you are interested in services, you may contact the national office at 888.488.LSEM (5736).



*continued from page 13*

beyond the unbaked cake, a canceled party, or the forgotten gift and look for the unwrapped gifts of God all around you. See not just your own failures and burdens, but the forgiveness and sustaining love of Jesus. Let’s expect what God has in mind for us this Christmas – from cradle, to cross, to crown. He won’t disappoint us!

*Pat Maier is married to the newly elected District President, David Maier. She has served as a Lutheran grade school teacher and children’s choir director, written and directed several Christmas programs and musicals, and enjoys the challenge of writing to inspire. She and her husband are blessed with four children, and God surprises them all the time!*