

Bethlehem Parma

Past – Present – Future

Text: NAS 2020

Introduction: Dear friends: Last Thursday, **11/13/25**, was the **121st Anniversary of this Congregation (1904 – 2025)**. Today, let's consider some of our past, present, and future.

1. **Past:** A brief history of Bethlehem Parma:
 - a. 8/20/1899: **Pastor Ungemach**, of St. Mark, Cleveland, began services in **Parma** at the old town hall.
 - b. 12/25/1901: Pr. Ungemach began services at the old schoolhouse on Pleasant Valley, near State Road.
 - c. 6/15/1904: **Eleven** families purchased property at State and Pleasant Valley for **\$65**. The total cost for *finishing* and *furnishing* the first building was **\$720**: light by kerosene lamps, heat by a pot-bellied stove.
 - d. 11/13/1904: **First Service, new building**: language – German, men & boys – right, women & girls – left.
 - e. 3/22/1908: **Name**: Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church U.A.C. (Unaltered Augsburg Confession).
 - f. Over the Decades: Served by **14** pastors and **4** vicars. Dual parish w/ St. John Independence: **1910 to 1948**.
 - g. Mid 1960's: The congregation purchased the current property (14.5 acres) and built the current building.

2. **Present:** We are thankful for our ♦finances and ♦facility, but our focus is on things of eternal significance:
- a. The Triune God – ***The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit***: The Three Persons worked together to ♦create all things and ♦save us from our sins!
 - b. The Holy Bible – ***God’s word of truth***: It was given to ♦teach us vital things and ♦call us into God’s kingdom – for example:
 - i. The Origin: ***God created all things*** – The Father worked through the Son (Heb. 1:1-2; Jn. 1:3), along with the Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:2)!
 - ii. The Fall Into Sin: ***Adam and Eve listened to Satan rather than God*** – the results:
 - 1. Immediate spiritual death (Gen. 2:16-17).
 - 2. Eventual physical death (Gen. 5:5).
 - 3. Nature frustrated (Rom. 8:20) – *having been pulled down from its perfect state.*
 - 4. Sin and death passed to all future people (Rom. 5:12).
 - iii. The Savior was Promised: ***He would be a future descendant of the woman*** – He would ♦defeat Satan (Gen. 3:15), ♦reverse his work (1Jo. 3:8), and ♦restore all things (Rev. 21:5)!
 - iv. The OT Era: ***It kept revealing the great need for the Messiah*** (Gen. 6:5) – It kept pointing to the Coming Messiah through ♦the Sabbath day (Ex. 20:8), ♦the sacrificial system (Lev. 1-7), and ♦the seven annual festivals (Lev. 23).

v. The Savior's Arrival: ***The Son of God put on the flesh of Mary*** – He came:

1. According to God's plan (Gal. 4:4)!
2. He lived as our sinless substitute, perfectly fulfilling the Law (2Co. 5:21; Matt. 5:17)!
3. He received our sins and the eternal punishment we deserve (Is. 53:6; 1Jo. 2:2)!
4. He opened the one way from us to God (1Pe. 3:18; John 14:6; Acts 4:12)!

vi. The Gift of Salvation: ***It has always been received by grace through faith***:

1. **By grace** – Though we have rebelled against God (Rom. 3:23), He ♦loves us (Jn 3:16), ♦makes us aware of our lost condition (Rom. 3:20), and ♦calls us to turn from our goodness to Jesus' finished work (Phil. 3:9)!
2. **Through faith** – By the Spirit through the word, God gives us the gift of faith by which we trust in Jesus as our Savior (Jam. 1:18; 1Pe. 1:23)!

vii. Being a Disciple: ***That means to learn from Jesus*** – Then ♦apply what we learn and ♦share that learning with someone else (2Ti. 2:2).

3. **Future**: Challenges and Awareness:

a. **Challenges**: Per the 2024 Church and Mission Stats¹:

- i. **“Three out of four churches are currently dying.”**

¹ <https://dmdworks.com/stats#>

- ii. “42% of pastors considered quitting... in 2022.”
- iii. The decline of Christian affiliation by generation:
“Builders (before 46) 65%... Boomers (46-64) 35%... Gen X (65-79) 24%... Millennials (1980-2000) 15%.”
- b. **Awareness**: Congregations *normally* follow a three-part life-cycle, *with 20-30 years per cycle*:
 - i. Part 1 – Outreach: The congregation is active in reaching new people by ♦inviting them, ♦sharing God’s truth, ♦growing their finances, and ♦constructing their own building.
 - ii. Part 2 – Ease: The congregation begins to ♦relax, ♦give thanks for a balanced budget, ♦stop reaching out, and ♦focus on those who attend.
 - iii. Part 3 – Decline: Since most of the reaching and inviting stopped decades earlier, the congregation is now inching toward death.
 - iv. What Is Critical for Bethlehem? To **never stop** ♦inviting and **never stop** ♦sharing God’s saving truth. We should also see ourselves as disciples – ♦learning from Jesus AND ♦sharing what we are learning with someone else – by using our sermons, studies, and/or brochures.

Let Us Pray: Dear LORD! *TY for sustaining this congregation for the past **121 years!*** Going forward, help each of us to be a disciple by ♦continuing to learn **and** ♦passing what we learn to another person. Keep us, Guide us, Use us **to Your glory!**

Website: www.BLC7500.com; **YouTube and Podcast:** “Benefit from the Bible”
Facebook: “Bethlehem Parma” / **Pastor:** RevRLGreen@aol.com; 440-292-5915
 7500 State Road, Parma, Ohio 44134 / 440-845-2230