

## **KNOW OUR FAITH XXIV**

Pastor Don Marxhausen

### **Christmas**

The word Christmas comes from two words: Christ and Mass. The word Mass comes from *mitto* meaning *to send* which is the dismissal at the end of the worship service (“Go in peace...”). The color of Christmas is white which is always used for a festival celebrating Christ: Sundays after Christmas, the Epiphany, and the Baptism of Jesus will all be white. For Roman Catholics Christmas Day is a day of obligation. It is important to be in church. For most Protestants Christmas Eve is the most attended time in recent years, while decades ago it was important for some ethnic Lutherans to be in church Christmas morning and greet the new day.

Christmas has many symbols. Some are: angels, bells, greens (Trees, wreaths, etc.) light (in the darkness), candles, gifts, music, Mary and Joseph, nativity sets, shepherds, sheep, stars, wise men, etc. The two major texts for the celebration are Luke 2 (the story of the birth) and John 1 (the meaning of the Incarnation).

The date of Christmas was set to compete with the ancient Roman holiday of Saturnalia which celebrated the return of the sun to the northern hemisphere. (The Feast of the Unconquered Sun moved to The Feast of the Unconquered *SON*). Initially, the celebration was called the Feast of the Nativity in 432 C.E. in Egypt and the celebration had made its way to Scandinavia by the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. In the Eastern Church, the celebration is celebrated 13 days later giving us the 12 days of Christmas.