

Dear People of University Lutheran Church,

Well, I saw a sign of hope today. It wasn't a robin poking around my backyard. Unfortunately, there's still too much snow back there. Instead, it was the top of Joseph's head! For those of you who read our monthly newsletter, the ECHO, you may recall that in December, I wrote to you about the small nativity scene I bought at Menards. It was the simplest of scenes, only the Holy Family itself – Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus. I even invited you to drive by our home to see our Christmas lights, to appreciate the star I hang over the house, and of course, to enjoy my new plastic nativity scene.

Then the snow came. We had several weeks where one storm came after another. At one point, there was so much snow on our roof, I measured just below three feet in certain areas, that I had to climb onto the roof and shovel where it seemed like the snow might be too heavy. The result of all these storms – the poor Holy Family became entombed in a deep pile of snow. At first, this made me a little sad, but then someone kindly pointed out to me that Christmas was over, and this was no different than if I had entombed them in their cardboard box and stored them in our basement.

As the weather has warmed up, we have been trying to guess when we would see the Holy Family again. I even suggested we could start a pool and let people guess. Since that would be gambling, maybe local governmental authorities and my bishop would frown on this! At any rate, today is the day. I pulled into the driveway about 4:15 this afternoon, walked along the front of the house and over to where I placed the Holy Family, and I saw it. There was a 6-inch circle on top of Joseph's head now visible. The rest of Joseph, all of Mary, and all of the baby Jesus, were still completely covered.

So, let me get back to hope. To me, seeing this 6-inch spot on Joseph's head is hope for spring, hope for warmer weather, hope for green grass, hope for blooming flowers and trees, and hope for the end of this coronavirus pandemic. After just a couple of weeks of this national emergency, social distancing, reports of sickness and death across the world, suspension of all activities at ULC, and so on, I am already on the lookout for any small signs of hope for the future. Some look to the government for hope, some look to doctors and medicines, but tonight I am looking to the Lord and the Holy Family for my hope.

Do you know that we are now members of the Holy Family? It was the Apostle Paul who liked to remind Christians that God had adopted them as his children into his Holy Family. Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:5-6, that God "destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will." I understand this to mean that God, by sending Jesus Christ into the world, willed to adopt us and make us members and children of his eternal Holy Family. Indeed, God's Holy Family is no longer just three, but of a multitude of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, we face these strange and difficult times of the coronavirus, and we face whatever other hardships and challenges we have in life, as adopted children of God. We are the adopted daughters and sons of the Holy Family, children for whom he has poured out forgiveness, grace and love. Therefore, God is our heavenly Father, a Father who will never abandon his children. Instead, he comes to help and save us. So, if a 6-inch circle on top of Joseph's head gives me a little hope for the future, how much more will God, our Father, who has adopted us into his Holy Family, give us hope in such a time as this.

You are in my prayers,
Pastor Tom