

The St. John Lutheran Church
Volume 70 – Number 12
December 2024 Jottings

“We lift up Jesus Christ in our lives, our church, and our community.”



Pastor Michael's Musings

December 2024

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in clothes and placed him in manger, because there was no room for them at the inn.”

--- Luke 2: 6 & 7

Every year we read these lines of the virgin birth that took place in Bethlehem, the “City of Bread.” (That’s what Bethlehem means in Hebrew.) We read of the hurried and harried Mary and Joseph, forced to leave their actual home in Nazareth, in order to fulfill some sort of governmental decree (the taking of the census) quite apart from their will. “While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,” we read. Hardly a desirable condition for a woman to be in while on the road. Pregnancy and birth are hard enough without the grievous inconvenience of travel. And then the crowning insult – the sour icing on the stressful cake, “...there was no room for them at the inn.” One can only imagine the stress and frustration of this young couple and their new baby “on-the-way.”

We’ve all been there before. We all have stories and accounts from our past where we found things going from bad to worse. It just keeps getting more hurried and harried and chaotic. Yet, there is a silver lining and a valuable lesson in what we read in the nativity account. That message dawns on us when we begin to understand that God works in our lives through all conditions and predicaments, not just when things are good and predictable. A lot of the hymns that we sing were written in times of strife

for the author and for the nation they lived in. King David wrote the beauty of the Psalms when he was in the wilderness hiding from his son Absalom who was trying to kill him for the throne. It is unfortunate, but necessary to experience the downs of life, for sometimes they bring out the best in us when we struggle against them; when we come to ponder our place in the great and wide world, complete with God's Kingdom.

The Nativity story is astounding in that it brings together an extremely unlikely cast of characters who witness the incredible and wonderful. The shepherds, the equivalent of today's minimum wage workers, doing the work that most other people would not have wanted to do, the wise men, foreigners who studied and practiced divination and astrology, perhaps even worshipping other gods, on their way to the true God in Jesus Christ. The unhelpful innkeeper, the animals who were not even aware of the one who they were sharing a manger and stall with, even the angels, alien and pristine in the sky as they trumpeted down the glory of the Lord in their magnificent celestial music; all of these characters who came to the Nativity scene (yes, I know the wisemen came later on) with wonder and mystery in their hearts, minds full of questions, all are part of this story in that they lived out life on that special day. The world spun around them in all its glory for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords had arrived in the form of a vulnerable baby.

As you experience this Christmas Season, do not forget the blessing that is the people all about you. Yes, they come frustrated, worried, anxious and wondering, but they also bear the gift of being created in the image of God in their hearts and spirits and have a place in the plan of the Almighty. Jump in, get involved, experience the Christmas Season all over again. The blessings of the Christ child await.

Baby Jesus Available Upon Purchase

Christmas is coming...everyone is decorating! Most Christians have some sort of Nativity set in their displays. We recently went to Tanner's Orchard for a quick escape from reality. Their large display of gift items included a magnificent collection of gorgeous and unique nativity sets. Needless to say, they were priced accordingly to match their beauty and quality. However, I noticed that NONE of the sets included the star of the show: Baby Jesus. A closer look revealed a sign with each set saying "Baby Jesus Available Upon Purchase". Apparently, it has become popular to steal little Jesus figurines from Nativity sets in stores. Can you imagine that? WHY would people start doing that? What's the reason? What's the thrill? Where is Baby Jesus?

I don't know the answer to that, but I know that over 2000 years ago, shepherds were also looking for the answer to that question. On Christmas Eve, we'll hear the Gospel of St. Luke repeating those familiar words spoken to the shepherds by an angel who said, "*This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.*" (Luke 2:12). In a manger, a barn! Well, the gift shop at Tanners isn't really a barn, but they DO have farm animals in their petting area, so perhaps people should look there for their baby Jesus figures, right? NOPE, he isn't there either. So where is Jesus today? Well, the ceramic ones are safely stored away at Tanners, but for Christians, we say that Jesus lives in our hearts. Through Baptism and Confirmation and Sermons and Sunday School lessons, we've all learned how and where to find Jesus, but he's **no longer a Baby** (the choir once sang an anthem by that title)...he lived and preached and taught and died and rose again. Christmas is just the beginning. In fact, he's COMING AGAIN, at a time yet-to be-revealed. So, we should remember that Christmas shows us that God loved us SO MUCH that he gave us the perfect gift: his son. Maybe we can remember that as we mull over what to buy as Christmas gifts for others. Some people just want to be loved, which means more than all the "stuff" in the world. I hope we all find time to reflect on what Christmas really means as the sacred night approaches.

Happy New Year!

Maybe I should say “Happy liturgical year!” Calendars are human inventions to help us keep track of times and dates, Without calendars, how would we remember birthdays and appointments and festivals? But all calendars are NOT created equal. Case in point: When is NEW YEARS? If you said January 1st, I’d reply “Yes, that is ONE new year...but it’s not the ONLY new year”. We in North America and Europe use the Gregorian Calendar, invented in 1582 (100 years AFTER Luther was born). In many Asian countries, they use a LUNAR-based calendar, in which “New Years” appears on a variety of dates on our calendar. In 2025, the “Chinese New Year” will happen on January 29th, 2025. Our Jewish friends find that their holidays are determined by the Julian (Hebrew) Calendar, which is also primarily based on the LUNAR cycles as opposed to our SOLAR based calendar. For Jewish people, New Years already happened on October 2, 2024. So what’s this “liturgical” calendar? It’s simply a way the church marches through the seasons. We START with ADVENT (4 Sundays before Christmas), followed by CHRISTMAS, then EPIPHANY (the season of light), then LENT (40 days before Easter...not including Sundays), then EASTER, then PENTECOST, and then the long season of the Sundays after Pentecost. We use that calendar to schedule festival days and important seasons like Lent. So, as of December 1st, I say to you, “HAPPY NEW YEAR”. Come to church...celebrate.

Christmas Eve Worship

We will once again have TWO opportunities to worship the newborn savior on Christmas Eve. The services will be at 4 pm and 6:30 pm. NOTE that the start time of the 2nd service is 1/2 hour LATER than in past years, which will prove more convenient for everyone involved. The services are in a “Lessons and Carols” format, which means you’ll hear lot of short Bible readings followed by the opportunity to sing MANY of the familiar and beloved Christmas Carols between readings. Of course, both services will end with the beautiful candle-lighting, and we will have special music at both services. Invite your friends. Bring your out-of-town visiting relatives and worship together on this most holy night!

Until Next Month...

Don’t let the real meaning of Christmas pass you by. It’s more than gift exchanges, parties, and revelry. Remember the words of the Angel who announced to the shepherds:

“I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. Luke 2:10-11 (NRSV)

Soli Deo Gloria (To God alone be the Glory)
Donald L. Bauer Director of Music

Look what is happening in Sunday School.

3 years old-K
1st-3rd grade
4th grade
Middle School

Kathy Ellis/Becca Smith
Becky & Shannon Sanders
Patti Riley
Fred Rosenbohm

Starting Sunday, December 1st and throughout the winter months, our lessons will follow the Year C Lectionary to connect with Pastor's sermons.

December 1 st	A Good Ruler
December 8 th	Zechariah
December 15 th	John the Baptist
December 22 nd	Mary Visits Elizabeth/Jesus is Born
December 29 th	The Boy at the Temple
January 5 th	Jesus the Word
January 12 th	Jesus' Baptism
January 19 th	Wedding at Cana
January 26 th	Jesus Goes to Nazareth
February 2 nd	Jeremiah
February 9 th	The Disciples
February 16 th	The Beatitudes
February 23 rd	Joseph Feeds His Family
March 2 nd	The Transfiguration

In addition to following the stories covered in Lectionary "C", our 4th-8th grade students are studying the stories in the Old Testament and how they are still relevant in today's world. As always, all Sunday School age children are welcome and we would love to have new faces join us on Sunday morning. If interested, please contact me to register your child.

John Wetterauer
christian.reichert@att.net
691-0434-home
678-1736-cell

Homebound List (as of November 25, 2024)

Jim & Nadine Bartell	2705 S. Hilton Ln. Bartonville, Il. 61607	Pat Janssen	12615 Lancaster Rd. Hanna City, Il. 61536
Jay Baumgardner	Swan Special Care Center 109 Kenwood Champaign, Il. 61824	Joyce Jones	Villas of Holly Brook 5301 W. Dirksen Pkwy. Apt. 24 Peoria, Il. 61607
Art Campen % Carrie Campen	4169 King St. Denver, Co. 80211	Debra Look	Timber Ridge 2125 Veterans Rd. Morton, Il. 61550
Jeffrey Campen	Lennox Guest Home 2875 W. 33 rd Ave. Denver, Co. 80211	Jane Look	Heartis Village Peoria 8201 N. Il. Route 91 Peoria, Il. 61615
Millie Carlson	Villas of Holly Brook 5301 W. Dirksen Pkwy. Apt. 48 Peoria, Il. 61607	Jerry Pitzer	Independence Village 1201 N. Northmoor Rd. Rm. 242 Peoria, Il. 61614
Sally Catterall	Villas of Holly Brook 5301 W. Dirksen Pkwy. Apt. 28 Peoria, Il. 61607	Sharon Resler	The Loft 1500 W. Northmoor Rm. 415 Peoria, Il. 61614
Evelyn Cool	Lutheran Hillside Village 6901 N. Galena Rd. Acorn Way Apt. A1 Peoria, Il. 61614		
Barb Dickerson	2422 S. Daycor Divide Bartonville, Il. 61607		

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Christmas Eve Service: Come and join us in worshipping our Lord on Christmas Eve at 4:00pm and at 6:30pm, both services will be by candle light. Come and join the blessed festivities and the music that we share on this wonderful day!

Poinsettia's: The Altar Guild will once again be selling memorial poinsettia's to decorate the church for the Christmas season. You may purchase a poinsettia in the church library on Dec.1 or Dec.8 before the 8:00 service , after the 8:00 service, and before the 10:30 service. The cost will be \$15.00.

Offering Envelopes: If anyone, including new members, are in need of offering envelopes, please get a hold of Patti Thornton at (309) 264-2303 or you can stop by the office. Thank you

Christmas Tradition: During the Christmas Season it has been a tradition at this church to give bonuses to the Pastor and Staff. A gift wrapped box has been placed at the back of the church for any donations you may wish to give thru Christmas Eve. Any donation is greatly appreciated.

Stewardship Pledge Cards: Pledge cards were distributed at the Annual Meeting in Sunday. To those parishioners who did not attend the annual meeting, please pick-up your pledge card at the Usher's table at the front of the church. Pledge cards may be returned with the collection plate on Sundays in November or dropped off at the Usher's table prior or after any Sunday service. Thank you in advance for your anticipated stewardship. Any questions can be directed to Deacon Teri Sammis.

Match for Jesus Campaign: In response to Pastor Michael's sermon recognizing the reduction of Stewardship during the Christmas Season, a family of our worship community has pledged to match dollar for dollar up to \$5,000.00 any special contributions made during the four Sundays prior to Christmas in honor of Lord Jesus' Birthday (December 1, 8, 15, 22). This stewardship should be identified as "Match for Jesus" and placed in envelopes available at the Usher's table in front of the church. Please consider participating in this stewardship event.

Thank you, The Deacons

Altar Guild Meeting: Next Altar Guild Meeting is Sunday, December 8th at 9:15am in the Reception Room. If anyone is interested in becoming a member please attend our December Altar Guild Meeting. All is Welcome!

Adult Bible Study: The Wednesday night Bible Study is waiting until January to meet again. Look for the announcement about it right here. Thank you,
Jane Rosenbohm (309) 645-9009 Happy Thanksgiving and Blessed Christmas

Sign-Up Sheet: There is now a Greeter sign-up sheet located at the back of the church. Please consider signing up to be a greeter at a service.

Help: Sewing ladies need help. Can you tie a knot, iron, and any other help you can give us, like putting squares together for a top. We meet about 8:30am on Thursday mornings. We would enjoy your company.

Church Altar Flowers: Altar Guild flowers are \$36. & make checks payable to Becks Florist & give to Jo Ann Brooks or the Altar Guild mailbox which is located in the Reception Room by the elevator. Sign up calendar for the flowers on the bulletin board in the West Entrance. Thank You, Altar Guild

St. John Lutheran Sunday School will

present

"The Christmas Story- Jesus Christ is the

Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever".

Sunday, December 8th at the

10:30 a.m. service.

Readers:

Dec. 01	Carol Alwood
Dec. 08	Christina Jones
Dec. 15	Pepper Bauer
Dec. 22	Sandy Behrends
Dec. 29	Carol Alwood

Ushers:

Dec. 01	8:00	Roger & Elaine Shafer
	10:30	Pat & Sally McGrew
Dec. 08	8:00	Ken & Sheryl Bruninga
	10:30	Eric Jones
Dec. 15	8:00	Tim & LaVonne Sammis
	10:30	Dave & Teri Sammis
Dec. 22	8:00	Pepper Bauer
	10:30	Josh Harken
Dec. 24	4:00p	Shirley Schmitt
	6:30p	John Grafelman

Dec. 29 8:00 Bill & Jodi Miller
10:30 Shirley Schmitt

Greeters:

Dec. 01 8:00 Alex & Brenda Heuermann
10:30 Nick & Mary Bruletta
Dec. 08 8:00 Ken & Sheryl Bruninga
10:30 Sue Jones
Dec. 15 8:00 Dan & Deb Sammis
10:30 open
Dec. 22 8:00 Betty Lyons & Brody /
Cheryl Russel
10:30 open
Dec. 24 4:00p open
6:30p Addison & Allison Grafelman
Dec. 29 8:00 Levi Miller
10:30 Leora Day & Ivy

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Year Round Worship Schedule :

8:00 a.m. Worship With Holy Communion
9:15 a.m. Sunday School for All Ages
10:30 a.m. Worship with Holy Communion

UPCOMING EVENTS THIS MONTH

Christmas Eve Services: Wednesday, December 24th at 4:00pm and 6:30pm

Leisure Group will meet again on January 15, 2025 at 12:00 noon. Happy and Blessed Holidays!

Sewing Group meets on Thursday morning at 8:30am. Come and sew or cut patterns with them.

Choir Rehearsal is on Thursday evenings at 7:00pm. Bring your voices!

Confirmation this month is Sunday December 1st and Sunday December 15th from 6-8pm, then a break until after the New Year.