

The St. John Lutheran Church

Volume 26 — Number 1

January 2026 Jottings

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



Pastor Michael's Musings

January 2026

Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Arise, take the young child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young child’s life are dead.” Then he arose, took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judah instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, “He shall be called a Nazarene.” ----
Matthew 3: 19 – 23

As we are all being carried into the year of 2026, I thought it might be good to continue the Christmas story to its logical, and prophesied, end as it is recorded in the book of Matthew. We might all be familiar with the story. Joseph suddenly leaps to center stage and becomes a very central figure. The Magnificat of Mary, the centralizing nature of her story, takes a momentary backseat as Joseph is faced with a sudden slew of quandaries and challenges. Herod wants to kill his newborn son for fear of Jesus being the King of the Jews. A complicated story involving the wise-men, prophecy, the killing of male infants in and around Bethlehem of two years of age and younger, and angels who keep coming to Joseph and directing his steps so that he leaves to foreign lands all make for a varied and involved story. Gone is the “Silent Night, Holy Night”, and terror and uncertainty follow in its path for this Holy Family. Not only is Jesus born in humility into a world that is chaotic and disjointed, but he continues to live in one as he is shipped and carried here and there with no

solid and familiar home to call his own. Even when he returns to Israel, he returns and must take residence in a district that is foreign to where the family originally grew up. “He shall be called a Nazarene...” in verse 23 is not a sentence to be taken lightly. We might not see the implications of this in our modern-day western mind set, but in the countries of the Middle East then, and still today, where a person is from says a lot about their identity and what is expected of them. Nazareth is a backwater. It is a place of poverty and social removal. One does not go to Nazareth to strike it rich or make a name for oneself. Jesus and his family are being dealt a rough hand of cards. This is not a gracious positive. But yet, it is God’s will.

As we head into a new year, we might find that we are feeling a bit like Jesus and his family. Upheaval, chaos, the landscape of what we know changing before our eyes, the advent of AI, or wondering about the state of wars and threats in the world, maybe our teetering health or the uncertainty of our economic situation; all these things contribute to a life that might feel uncertain or dangerous. “He will be called a Nazarene.” Matthew makes it clear that this is part of God’s plan for the unfolding of God’s will. What are you to be called in the year ahead? Will others brand you with something, some monicker that you have no control over, or perhaps, will you work quietly and deliberately to fashion a name for yourself that only you know in the stillness of your heart? Regardless, God will walk with you. As God walked with the family of Jesus and gave Joseph instructions that he carried out to the letter, we can also listen and hear God speaking to us in this New Year. Do we have the spiritual ears to hear? If we quiet down and listen with our spirits instead of our appetites and worries we might be able to receive direction.

Go into 2026 with boldness. Not pride, but boldness. You have permission to be bold, for it is God’s good pleasure to make you so.

Christmas continues...and LIGHTs the darkness

MERRY CHRISTMAS! Yes—I know it’s JANUARY, but the church calendar celebrates the Christmas Season STARTING December 24th, unlike the secular world that STOPS after December 25th. (Is your Christmas Tree still up? Why not?) Our celebration continues until Epiphany, January 6th (also Pastor’s Birthday), so we can still sing those beloved Christmas Carols in church on Sunday January 4th. “Tradition” holds that January 6th is the day the “Wise Men” reached their destination to worship the Baby Jesus, but we know better...the Bible says those guys reached a HOUSE, not a stable, and based on the speed of even the most turbo-charged camels, theologians now realize their journey most likely took MONTHS, perhaps over a YEAR, which explains Herod issuing the order to “kill all the boy babies” up to two years old. And of course, historians now also realize that Jesus was most likely born in the FALL, not December 25th. The December date was chosen to counter secular solstice celebrations. POP! Is that your holiday traditions bubble bursting? Does it matter? Not really. The Bible clearly states it’s A-OK to “invent” a holy day if it honors the Lord:

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. Romans 14:5-6 (NRSV)

So, we start the new year celebrating Christmas. Then what? Well, on January 11th, the Sunday after Epiphany, we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. It’s a day to remember that we too were baptized. Of course, if you were baptized as an infant, you have no memory of that day. I clearly remember mine, because I was a young boy, but old enough to remember...and I still have fond memories of the event. I can’t remember the calendar DATE, but as with Christmas, the date is less important than what happened on that date.

SO , Jesus is born, Jesus is Baptised, then what? This brings us to the “Sundays after Epiphany”, during which we basically celebrate LIGHT and the importance of letting OUR lights SHINE...in other words, DO SOMETHING with your faith. SHARE IT, invite others to “Come, Follow ME” as we will once again hear Jesus say several times in the weekly lessons.

The Epiphany season lasts until the start of LENT, which in 2026 will be February 18th. More on that next month.

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THANK YOU!

Thanks to all who helped to make my Christmas season “brighter” with gifts, donations to the staff bonus fund, cards, or simply well wishes. All were much appreciated!

Also, thanks to everyone who “adopted” one of more of the 46 pantry children through our annual Tiny Tim campaign and for helping stock our pantry shelves through the Pack-a-Sack Sundays program. The need continues, so for now, we’ll schedule a Pack-a-sack once a month. Any NON-PERISHABLE food items are welcome. Jesus fed 5000; we feed about 40, but then, we don’t quite have the ability to miraculously multiply it like he did, so we’re counting on you to help us.

Name that tune...

QUICK—name the hymn that comes to mind when you think about Epiphany. I’m betting you might say ***We Three Kings of Orient Are***, but I suggest a hymn that we sing that contrasts more on the GIFTS than the GUYS: ***Brightest and Best*** (# 303 in our hymnals). This hymn was written by Reginald Heber (1783–1826), an Anglican bishop and hymn writer (also known for “*Holy, Holy, Holy*”). The hymn uses the “Star of the East” imagery to welcome Jesus, contrasting the Magi’s rich gifts (gold, frankincense, and myrrh,) with the richer offering of a humble, adoring heart. Its set to a traditional American Folk melody. Next time we sing it, notice that it follows the same un-historical “tradition” of the Wise men coming to the manger...oh well! Enjoy singing it anyway.

Until Next Month...

If you wonder what Epiphany is all about...remember these words:

...the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,..In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. ”

Matthew 4:16 and 5:16 (NRSV)

Soli Deo Gloria (To God alone be the Glory)

Donald L. Bauer Director of Music

Readers:

Jan. 04	Christina Jones
Jan. 11	Pepper Bauer
Jan. 18	Sandy Behrends
Jan. 25	Alice Lopez

Ushers:

Jan. 04	8:00 am	John Grafelman
	10:30 am	Alex Heuermann
Jan. 11	8:00 am	Roger Schafer
	10:30 am	Shirley Schmitt
Jan. 18	8:00 am	Pepper Bauer
	10:30 am	John & Jane Rosenbohm
Jan. 25	8:00 am	Bill (Skeeter) & Jodi Miller
	10:30 am	Josh Harken

Greeters:

Jan. 04	8:00 am	Danette Grafelman
	10:30 am	Brenda Heuerman
Jan. 11	8:00 am	Elaine Shafer
	10:30 am	Marilyn Hartseil
Jan. 18	8:00 am	Bonnie Phelps
	10:30 am	Jessica Rosenbohm
Jan. 25	8:00 am	Levi Miller
	10:30 am	Open

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Christmas Poinsettias: The Altar Guild would like to thank everyone for purchasing poinsettias this year. Please take your poinsettias home now.

Match for Jesus Campaign: The council would like to thank everyone who participated in the Match for Jesus Campaign. It was a great success.

Thank you: We would like to thank everyone for our Christmas bonuses. It is greatly appreciated that you would take time out of your busy schedules and think about us. God Bless!

PACK-A-SACK SUNDAY! The need for food from our food pantry has increased greatly! You can help fill our shelves by bringing a sack of NON-PERISHABLE food on the 1st Sunday of the month! Cash donations are also helpful, especially in this busy season. Checks can be written to the "St John Lutheran Food Pantry". Thanks to everyone for helping support this vital outreach ministry.

2026 Offering Envelopes: Envelopes for the 2026 year are in the library, please make sure to pick yours up!

Offering: If you are interested there is an authorization form in the back of the church for electronic giving. Please fill it out and give to either Patti Thornton or Marla Kumpf.

Adult Sunday School: We are studying the Book of Psalms. Please feel free to join us every Sunday in the Conference room from 9:30 - 10:15. Jane Rosenbohm is our leader.

Adult Bible Study: The dates for the next Bible Study is January 14th and January 28th from 6-7:00 p.m. We are studying Ezekiel. They will be held at Jane Rosenbohm's home @ 14628 W. Farmington Rd. Hanna City. All are welcome. (309) 645-9009
- Jane Rosenbohm

Council Information: There is a flyer in the back of the church with council members name, addresses and phone numbers. Please feel free to take one home with you.

Food Pantry: The Peoria Area Association of Realtors (PAAR) donated 50 \$10.00 Kroger gift card to our food pantry in November...just in time for Thanksgiving. A very special thank you to them! A very special thank you to Peacocks Pub for the huge amount of toys donated for our Tiny Tim ministry.



Nadine Bartell	2705 S. Hilton Ln. Bartonville, Il 61607	Debra Look	Timber Ridge 2125 Veterans Rd. Morton, Il 61550
Art Campen	C/O Carrie Campen 4169 King St. Denver, Co. 80211	Jo Ann Lambie	C/O Pepper Bauer Lutheran Hillside Village 5220 S. Cameron Ln. Mapleton, Il 61547
Jeffrey Campen	Lennox Guest House 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. Apt. 334 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
Barb Dickerson	2422 S. Daycor Divide Bartonville, Il 61607	Shirley Cramer	7815 W. Plank Rd. Peoria, IL 61604
Pat Janssen	12615 Lancaster Rd. Hanna City, Il 61536	Ernie & Karen Williams	5907 S. Madison Bartonville, IL 61607
Joyce Jones	Villas of Holly Brook 5301 W. Dirksen Pkwy. Apt. 24 Peoria, Il 61607	Debra Look	Apostolic Christian Home 2125 Veterans Rd. Morton, IL 61550