

December  
2019

# St. John Lutheran Church



## Mission Statement

*St. John is a living witness to the love of God as shown in Jesus Christ.*

*We gather faithfully in His name to **worship** and praise Him; and we go forth in peace to **share** the Good News and to **serve** the world around us.*

St. John Lutheran Church  
PO Box 411  
420 Beaver Street  
Mars, PA 16046

Web site: [www.stjohnchurchmars.org](http://www.stjohnchurchmars.org)  
Church Office: (724) 625-1830  
Office email: [office@stjohnchurchmars.org](mailto:office@stjohnchurchmars.org)  
Pastor Bob's email: [pastor@stjohnchurchmars.org](mailto:pastor@stjohnchurchmars.org)  
Pastor's Cell #: 412-585-1628

*"...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16*

Dear friends in Christ,

I recently received information on the annual "Abundant Lights" celebration on December 7<sup>th</sup> on the Passavant campus of Lutheran Senior Life. One of many light displays in the area, this celebration has been going on for at least eighteen years. My thoughts turned to a former resident of Passavant, (who was a member of a previous congregation I served) who used to volunteer to help check all the bulbs for the thousands of lights that make up the beautiful holiday display that lights up the campus. Homer began working on those lights and the wires that powered them over the summer. It was painstaking work, carefully, intentionally checking string after string of lights and wires, replacing bulbs, checking again and carefully storing them away to ensure they were ready to share their light the following Christmas season.

The above verse is proclaimed at the baptism of an infant. But, in order for that small person to share the light of Christ there is the need to be nurtured and cared for in and among the people of God. There is learning, faith development and as they grow, opportunities to let that light shine brightly. In the same way, ongoing prayerful, intentional discernment, planning and preparation is required as we seek to share the light of Christ in our congregation, community and world as we live out our baptismal calls.

Homer, and all others who behind the scenes do the work that makes things happen, are examples of the importance of intentional, careful preparation. As we begin this season of Advent, it is good to remember, in the midst of all our holiday busyness, that this season of the church is a time of preparation and anticipation. Even as we get ready to look back and celebrate the birth of Jesus, we also prepare to look forward, to what it means to live as those that proclaim, "Emmanuel", which means, "God is with us." (Matthew 1:23)

Advent Blessings and Christmas Joy,  
Pastor Bob Zimmerman

**Vestry Election  
Sunday, December 8, 2019**

Vestry elections will take place following both worship services on Sunday, December 8. The congregation will be asked to vote on the slate for the **2020 Vestry**.

**Annual Meeting - Sunday, January 26**

We will review 2019, vote on a budget, and approve the congregational council for 2020. **There will be one worship service at 10:00 am.**

*A Blue Christmas*  
*Community Worship*  
**Saturday, December 21, 3:00 p.m.**  
St. John Lutheran Church

While Christmas is a season of joy, not everyone feels hopeful or like celebrating. Grief, illness, aging, depression, loneliness, unemployment and loss are magnified. Even those not struggling with losses may feel the stress of preparations and expectations around Christmas time. A Blue Christmas service provides a time and place of solace during the often frenetic days surrounding the celebration of Christmas.

Come out, and join with us in sharing and hearing prayers, scripture, and music that acknowledge that God's presence is for those who mourn, for those who struggle - and that God's Word comes to shine light into our darkness. Everyone, regardless of church background (or lack of it) is welcome.

*Church Decorating*  
**Sunday, December 22 at 11:30 am**

If you are able to help decorate the church for Christmas, please stay after the 10:30 am worship service. Your help will be greatly appreciated.



**Christmas Worship Services**

**Dec. 24 – Christmas Eve - 3:00 pm & 7:30 pm –  
Festival Candlelight Service of Holy Communion**

**Dec. 25 – Christmas Day - One Service at 10:00 am  
Service of Holy Communion**

**Dec. 29 – Lessons & Carols – One Service at 10:00 am**



*Wishing all of the St. John  
congregation and your  
families a Blessed and  
Peaceful Christmas season.*

### **Brown Bag Bible Study Advent/Christmas/Epiphany Study of the Book of Isaiah**

Morning Prayer (11:30 am, Brown Bag Lunch (Noon) & Bible Study (12:30 pm)  
will continue on Wednesdays in December.

Isaiah is the longest and most important of the prophetic books and has often been used as Old Testament references to the coming of Christ, referred by Matthew and other New Testament authors. It covers a long period of Israel's history (before, during, and after the Babylonian exile) and offers the full range of God's prophetic message: terrifying words of judgment and comforting words of promise. Isaiah portrays God as the powerful Creator, like no other, and also the gentlest comforter, like an earthly lover or mother. Join us on Wednesdays as we explore this important book of the bible.

### **Online Bible Study Begins January 8, 2020**

Beginning on January 8 at 7:30 pm, Pastor Zimmerman will lead a four session online discussion and study of **Martin Luther's "On the Bondage of the Will."** He chided Erasmus for trusting in human abilities rather than in God's grace, and for attempting to solve the problem of evil by defending unfettered "free choice," when in fact human beings are (to use the words of ELW's confession of sin) "captive to sin and cannot free themselves." We will read Luther's work and discuss together how we as humans continue to be captive to sin, and its empty promises.

### **Angel Tree**



During this holiday season, we will once again sponsor an Angel Tree for Glade Run Lutheran Services in Zelienople. Tags are on the tree in the greeting area. **Please return your gift to the greeting area by Friday, December 6** If you have any questions, please contact Denise Hager.

## Meals on Wheels



Meals on Wheels is in need of dessert donations for the month of December. When you are doing your holiday baking, please keep them in mind and make an extra batch of cookies, brownies, cakes or candy. We will make weekly deliveries on each Monday in December of all donated items. There is a sign-up sheet in the greeting area for each week. Please see Kim Richards to help. Thank you for helping those in need.

## Quilting Group – December 9 – 6 pm

Whether you are a beginner or a novice you are welcome to join us as we make quilts for Lutheran World Relief. See Cindy Knauff if interested.

## Ladies Book Group

*No meeting in December*, we will meet again on January 15.

## Advent Family Breakfast

Join us on Sunday, December 22 for a family breakfast between services. All are welcome!

## Proposed Trial Period for One Sunday Worship service

For your continued consideration, conversation and prayer -

Last month in this space a recent discussion was shared that the congregation council wishes the congregation to vote on a trial period to see if a single Sunday worship service year round is desirable. The trial or test period of a few weeks would help determine if such a change would work both practically and attendance wise.

The proposal would be to have a trial period where there would be a single worship service and Sunday school on the six Sundays between Easter and Pentecost (April 19-May 24). This would be time enough to evaluate while not having to worry about weather or other issues. The time of such a service and will Sunday school be before or after, are decisions yet to be made. More information about this proposal will be given out at the December 8<sup>th</sup> congregational meeting and you will be invited to share your thoughts. A vote will be taken at the January 26<sup>th</sup> annual congregational meeting on whether to proceed with the trial period only. During and after the trial period the conversation will continue.

It is difficult to separate personal preference from what is the best option for the worship life of the congregation. That is the reason a trial period is recommended, for the congregation to “test drive” Sunday school and a single worship service on a Sunday. Please continue to lift this proposal in prayer and bring your thoughts and questions to the December 8<sup>th</sup> meetings that will occur immediately following each service.

## Church Office Closed

*The church office will be closed on December 23-27 for the Christmas holiday.*

***The second Sunday of each month is Food Bank Sunday***

## **Your Perfect Christmas Gift**

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. - Ephesians 2:8a*

True confessions: I've never worn that jaunty Christmas tie my son bought me five years ago. At the end of every December I shake my head and say, well, maybe next year. It's a waste, I know.

Most of us have a few Christmas presents, given in love and received with joy, that are forlornly collecting dust in a drawer or closet. That's not very good stewardship, is it?

More important than that forgotten bottle of perfume or homely sweater, how are you stewarding that most precious of all Christmas gifts—the new life you have through faith in Jesus? Do you cherish it, honor it, make the most of all it has to offer? Because it is truly amazing.

New life. Too many Christians focus exclusively on the AFTERlife that begins when we die. But that's missing out on the joy, peace and fulfillment that Jesus promises us today, what he describes as life abundant. You've doubtless seen evidence of this life in the cheerful eyes and peaceful smiles of holy people you've encountered. Light and love and joy radiates from them.

I want that life. Don't you?

The abundant life is Jesus' free gift, but it doesn't come automatically. It grows with us as we mature in faith through prayer, scripture study, worship, service and generosity – the disciplines of faith. In so doing, we align our hearts and souls with God's purposes and fulfill ever more closely those two holy commandments to love God and neighbor.

This year, don't let your faith end up like a jaunty Christmas tie, hanging unused in the closet. Make the most of it and live into the new, abundant life Jesus promises to us all. It's the number one stewardship lesson.

*--Rob Blezard*

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### **Saturday, December 14 – 1:30 pm**

Join us for a reading of "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever," along with crafts, music and snacks.

The story is about "the worst kids in the history of the world" and how they invade the church one Sunday and decide to take over the annual Christmas pageant.

This light-hearted Christmas story is a treat for all ages.

## Advent Wreath



We often use symbols to help visualize our faith and remind us of our journey with Christ. They especially can have heightened meaning when used with a season, such as the Advent wreath.

The Advent wreath has its roots in the pre-Christian practices of northern Europe. People sought the return of the sun in the dark time of the year (winter solstice), by lighting candles and fires. In the Middle Ages, Christians used fire and light to represent Christ's coming into the world. Using this same symbolism, the Advent wreath developed a few centuries ago in Germany as a sign of the waiting and hopeful expectation of the return in glory of our Lord. The wreath, a circle, came to represent the eternal victory over death through Jesus Christ. A circle has no beginning or ending. The evergreens were a sign of the faithfulness of God to his people, even in death. The lighted candles were a reminder of the light of Christ brought into the world.

As with all symbols, they speak most loudly to remind us of God's promise of life when they are drawn directly out of our experiences and the environment. The circular shape is most important. Four natural candles are always appropriated and symbolize the Light for which we wait. Some traditions use other colors for or one of the candles, such as blue (color of Advent), purple, also used for Lent, or a pink candle for the third Sunday, which is no longer used. The pink candle tradition arose when Advent was considered a penitential season rather than one of hope and expectation of the coming Christ. This hope looks forward not only to celebrating the child in the manger, but even more to Christ's coming in glory at the end of time. Candles in rich royal blue are symbolic of this hope. Blue and purple have long been associated with this same idea: the symbolic colors of royal blue and of longing, the natural colors of the dawn before the sun rises, and the deep shades of midnight.

Principles for Worship

The Use of the Means of Grace



*"And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them. 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, 'which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men.'"*

~Luke 2: 9-14



12/01 Dominic Cardinal  
 12/10 Wanda Weidner  
 12/11 Serafina Julio  
 12/24 Christine Dishong  
 12/25 James Hager

**Upcoming Events**  
 December 6 – Synagogue Visit  
 December 7 – Youth Group Bowling @SJSCC  
 December 8 – Vestry Election  
 December 14 – Christmas Pageant  
 December 22 – Advent Breakfast  
 January 12 – White Elephant Bingo  
 January 26 – Annual Meeting

**Communion Bread Schedule**  
 December – Denise Hager

**Counters for December**  
 Sally Foster & Denise Hager

**Worship Helpers**  
**December**

**Assisting Ministers**  
 8:00 am Christine Dishong  
 10:30 am Denise Hager

**Ushers**  
 8:00 am Robert Dishong  
 10:30 am Leikauf's

# December Newsletter

Address service requested

ST JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH  
 420 BEAVER STREET  
 P.O. BOX 411  
 MARS, PA 16046