

January
2026

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 God's name to **worship** and praise God; 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
Church Office: (724) 625-1830
Office email: office@stjohnchurchmars.org
Pastor Katie's email: pastorkmcneal@gmail.com
Pastor's Cell #: 412-407-3166*

Please call to ensure availability before coming to the office.

I recently read a new book by Diana Butler Bass called "A Beautiful Year." The book is filled with over 50 brief reflections as Bass muses on the church's calendar, the patterns of the scripture read in worship throughout the year, and the themes that are enriched in our cyclical approach to telling the story of the good news of Jesus Christ and our response to it as church. The book begins with Advent, then follows the seasons of the church as Bass marvels at the way this calendar helps to deepen and enrich her faith. As I read the book, I realized in a new way just how much I love the church calendar and the way it invites us to slow down and really reflect on the story of God's good news come to us in Jesus and how God invites us to respond to and participate in God's work in this world.

We begin the year with Advent, when we look for the in-breaking of God's kingdom among us. We pray that God would prepare our hearts to celebrate Christ's birth and to receive him when he comes again. Then at Christmas we marvel at the presence of God with us, Emmanuel, born among us to dwell with us as one of us. After twelve days of dwelling in the marvel of the Christmas season, we celebrate Epiphany, when God's presence and good news is made known to the world far and wide through the wise men, and we spend the season after Epiphany exploring what difference Christmas makes for us today. We eventually move into Lent and Easter. We pause briefly at the festival of Pentecost, then there's the long season after Pentecost. And then we cycle right back around to Advent to experience it all again. Sometimes it can feel like these seasons blend indistinguishably one to the next, only marked by the festivals that begin each new season, but each of these seasons has their distinct value and purpose as we explore what it means to be a child of God, baptized in God's name in the 21st century. So what if we took a cue from the church calendar and spent time dwelling in the richness of each season? What if we allowed the seasons of the church calendar to invite us into a deeper connection not only with the story of God's good news born to us in Christ Jesus, but into a more intentional reflection on what it means to be a Christian now, participants in God's ongoing story of good news for all people?

As we dwell in the Christmas season for the first week of January and as we reflect on God's word made known and available to all people in Epiphany until Ash Wednesday in February, may we be open to the ways God is speaking to us in the ancient pattern of the church calendar.

Peace
Pastor Katie

Find Us on Social Media

Like us on **Facebook** ([@stjohnchurchmars](https://www.facebook.com/stjohnchurchmars)) or follow us on **Instagram** ([@stjohnchurchmars](https://www.instagram.com/stjohnchurchmars))

Online Sunday Worship

Join Zoom for service: <https://zoom.us/j/5663185411> Meeting ID: 566 318 5411 PW: Luther

Available on our YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@St.JohnLutheranChurch-2>

Worship Notes

Young Worship Leaders

We love having our young worshippers helping with worship leadership! If you are unable to be present for your scheduled service, please find someone to cover and tell the office of the change.

	Acolyte	Offering	Offering	Young Reader
4-Jan	Lydia M	Anna K	Nathan K	
11-Jan	Ella N	Jules K	Eva K	
18-Jan	Carissa M	Lydia M	Abby C	Carissa M
25-Jan	Nathan K	Josie W	Cate S	
1-Feb	Ava N	Ava N	Ella N	

Adult Worship Leaders

	Greeters	Usher	Assistant Minister	Bread Baker	Counters
4-Jan	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	David D	VOLUNTEER	Deb M Jamie W
11-Jan	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	David D	VOLUNTEER	Deb M Jamie W
18-Jan	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	David D	VOLUNTEER	Deb M Jamie W
25-Jan	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	David D	VOLUNTEER	Deb M Jamie W
1-Feb	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Katie N John F

Flowers in Worship

If you would like to **provide flowers for our altar during worship**, please sign up in the Greeting Area. Flowers offer a bright connection with God's creation in our worship space. Sponsors for flowers are responsible for ordering their own flowers. If you need assistance in contacting a florist that often works with the church, contact the office.



Worship Notes (continued)

Worship Volunteers Wanted

Training is available for any position. Sign-up in the Greeting Area or at <https://signup.com/go/JPakfVA>.

Assistant Minister

Help lead worship by reading scripture and prayers and assisting in the distribution of communion.

Greeter

Greet people as they enter for worship and hand out bulletins.

Usher

Ring the bell before and during worship, attend to lights and doors, and coordinate offering collection.

Bread Baker

Bake or purchase bread to be used for communion during worship.

Counter (contact Financial Secretary, no sign-up sheet)

Serve in a team of two to count the offering after worship.

Eucharistic Minister (contact Pastor Katie, no sign-up sheet)

Visit and take communion from our Sunday celebration to those unable to be physically in worship.

Altar Guild (contact Pastor Katie, no sign-up sheet)

Set up for and clean up after worship; change the paraments to match the color of the day.

Adult Choir

For major festivals (like Easter!), there is a **choir of dedicated singers** who prepare and offer a song for worship. If you'd like to be a part of this group, contact our Music Director, Maizy.

Chime Choir

Have you ever wanted to make music with friends in praise and worship of God? **We are collecting names of individuals who might be interested in starting a chime choir at St. John.** Chimes are like handbells but require much less specialized care and technique in playing. Chime choir is excellent for people of all musical abilities – even if you don't read music! Reach out to Pastor Katie or Vern M if you are interested in learning more. No commitments are needed at this time.

Service of Lessons and Carols – December 28

A service of Lessons and Carols is an opportunity to **dwell in the richness of God's Word** and the promise of God's Word incarnate, Jesus Christ. **Worship will be at 9:00 am.**

Christmas Pageant – January 4

We're having a throwback! Inviting participation in the story of Jesus' birth through pageants is a beloved tradition of the church. **You are invited into this creative way of connecting with the Christmas story** during worship on January 4, as we complete our celebration of the Christmas season in the church with the welcoming of the wise men and the beginning of the season of Epiphany. Contact Denise H or Pastor Katie if you are interested in participating. All ages are welcome and encouraged!

Celebration of Baptism of Our Lord – January 11

Come celebrate the baptism of our Lord and the gift we receive in our baptisms in worship on Jan 11!

Worship Notes (continued)

What is Epiphany?

Epiphany is **one of the oldest traditions** in the Christian church, dating back to the second century. From our liturgical resource, Sundays and Seasons: “The feast of Epiphany (“manifestation”) **concludes the Christmas season with a celebration of God’s glory revealed** in the person of Jesus Christ for all people. Like the light of the star that guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are: children of God who are claimed and washed in the waters of baptism. **We are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God’s love to all people.**” Epiphany is celebrated on **January 6th**, 12 days after Christmas. In worship, we will celebrate Epiphany on the Sunday following January 6th. Following the day of Epiphany, we observe the “**season after Epiphany**” until we begin **our Lenten journey** on Ash Wednesday, which this year is February 18th.



Around the Church

White Elephant Bingo – January 17

The rules are simple. **Everybody brings a wrapped white elephant gift. Everyone can play with as many Bingo cards as they wish.** Whenever you get a Bingo – you choose a gift from the vast assortment on the table – or you can take a gift from someone else. We will begin at 3:00pm.

Please provide a \$5.00 donation towards Pizza and drinks.

Vestry Installation – January 18

We are so grateful to those who dedicate time and energy to **serve in various leadership roles** within the congregation. As we begin a new year, the vestry will be charged with leading the congregation through the coming year during **the installation of the vestry during worship on January 18th.**

2026 Church Directory

It’s time for us to update our church directory! There will be a copy of 2025’s directory in the Greeting Area for the first few weeks of January. Please go through the directory and add or edit any information you would like included in the 2026 directory. If you have contact information that you do not want in the directory but would like to make sure is updated for the office’s records, please contact Pastor Katie or the office directly with that information. The directory will be available in hard copy by February 1 at the church. An electronic copy is also available in the members-only section of the website.

Strategic Planning Team

There is tremendous growth happening in the communities that surround St. John. Many new homes, families, and businesses have been added to our area, and many more are planned in the near future.

To be ready to invite and welcome these people to experience the good news of Jesus Christ through the mission and ministry of St. John, we will be exploring the core identity of St. John. To help guide the conversations that will take place as part of this journey of self-discovery, the council has appointed a team of six individuals to serve on a strategic planning team: Keith C, David D, Denise H, Jeff M, Casey S, and Tim W. **In the very beginning of January, the strategic planning team will be inviting you to offer your responses to several questions through a written form and roundtable discussions.** We need your input in answering those questions and invite you to share your thoughts and ideas about St. John Lutheran Church.

Around the Church (continued)
Community Bulletin Board

Are you or your child in an activity? Do you have a play or concert coming up? Or a game schedule that can be shared? **Let's support one another by inviting one another to celebrate our joys and passions with the world!** There is a new section on the bulletin board near the library for you to post fliers and notices for upcoming events to which you would like to invite people to attend.

Office Hours

Diane is currently in the office one day a week, on Thursday mornings, working other hours remotely or in the office on a flexible schedule. Holidays may impact this schedule, though. If you need access to the building or assistance with anything, please call ahead to assure availability. Pastor Katie can provide assistance.

Congregation Meeting Notices

Annual Meeting – Sunday, January 18, 2026

We will review 2025, vote on a budget for 2026, approve the congregational council for 2026, and look forward to what ministry might look like at St. John in 2026, including a vote regarding the acquisition of a wheelchair van to help continued growth and accessibility of ministry. The congregational meeting will be held after the worship service.

Vestry Retreat– Saturday, January 31, 2026

The newly installed vestry will gather for a day of planning and visioning on Saturday, January 31st from 9:00am – 2:00pm. The vestry retreat is a great way to set the tone for the new calendar year as we pray for and strategically plan for the coming year.

Around the Community

Around the Synod
Lutheran Disaster Response Trip – May 3-9, 2026

Save the Date

Our Synod's Lutheran Disaster Response Team will be traveling for a second time for a week of mission work to help restore and rebuild communities across Western North Carolina affected by Hurricane Helene. More information will soon be available.

Did You Know?

The church website has an ongoing calendar! There is only so much room in the newsletter for upcoming events, but the website has all of them, including several months out! See the calendar at stjohnchurchmars.org/calendar.

Serving Others

Thank You!

Thank you to all those who helped to bake dozens upon dozens of cookies and goodies for the participants in the local Meals on Wheels program. The goodies were so appreciated!

Thank You!

Once again, St. John took on the **challenge of 75 tags on the Angel Tree**... and once again, every single tag was taken and replaced with a gift under the tree for a person under the care of Glade Run Services! **Thank you to all who helped make Christmas special for these people!**

Thank You!

TWICE the congregation of St. Johns has provided over \$500 to supply five local families in need a holiday meal. Thanksgiving meals were delivered in the week before Thanksgiving, and Christmas dinners the week before Christmas. Each family was deeply grateful for the support and care offered in these meal kits. The Sunday School class had a blast shopping for everything too!

1st Quarter Mission Emphasis: Inspired Hearts and Hands

Inspired Hearts and Hands (IH2) is a community-wide coalition of inspired hearts and hands collectively focused on addressing economic hardship and food insecurity through food box distributions, community events, holiday angel trees, educational enrichment programs, and student appreciation activities. Together, we are serving those who are less fortunate, not just because it is a good thing to do, but rather because it is our hearts' desire to share our blessings with others.

To learn more about this organization, visit <https://inspiredheartsandhands.com/>.

You are invited to support this organization through designated financial contributions. To designate funds to be given to Inspired Hearts and Hands, mark your offering "Mission Emphasis." 100% of funds collected for mission emphasis go directly to the named organization. Stay tuned for other ways that you can support Inspired Hearts and Hands.

St. John Food Pantry



As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, and we do this by keeping the food pantry in good supply, even of thinking of items that might in some circles be considered "treats." On behalf of everyone who visits the pantry, thank you.

Please continue inviting people to make use of the pantry as needed! If you notice that the outdoor pantry is looking empty, **please move stuff from the inside shelves**. As the weather

drops below freezing more regularly, **please be aware of how any items might**



store in freezing temperatures (typically items with liquid should not be outside during freezing temperatures). Currently, Thursday morning is the most reliable time for access to the indoor food pantry (or times when there is a meeting or service at the church). If you know someone who needs access at another time, Pastor Katie is happy to coordinate a time to open the building for them.

People who use our pantries have asked that we focus our offerings on **toiletries, cleaning supplies, and paper products as well as easy-to-make meals** (e.g., soups or other microwaveable meals). **We also have had several special requests for favored food items. These include Kellogg Raisin Bran, Lucky Charms, Carnation Instant Breakfast packets (vanilla), and pasta sauce.**

Stewardship

Stewardship Corner from Stewardship of Life Institute

Many Christians think of “stewardship” only in financial terms, but money is only one of the gifts God entrusts us with – and it’s usually the one we value less than our gifts of time, relationships, faith and health. Make 2026 your year for holistic stewardship - and abundant living – by taking steps to care better for ALL the gifts God entrusts to us, including our finances. Here are tips.

Health: Get a physical and ask your doctor to help you to form a strategy for better living. For most of us, the plan would include eating better, exercising more and practicing wellness.

Relationships: We not only share love and joy with family and friends, but also turn to and rely on them in times of trouble. Care for your relationships with honest and frequent communication, get-togethers and sharing. Renew and repair relationships that need it.

Time: Are you just mindlessly counting the hours and days? Take charge of your time by planning events and activities that enrich your life. Plan for health and relationships.

Faith: No matter where you are on your discipleship journey, all of us can draw closer to God and open ourselves more fully to the Holy Spirit. For 2026, commit to regular worship, prayer, Scripture reading, devotions, service and other faith practices.

Money: Get your finances in order. Consider the 10-10-80 plan, budgeting your income to save 10 percent, give away 10 percent, and living on 80 percent.

God has given us so much. Stewarding the most important aspects of our lives can bring us into the life of abundance that Jesus promises us in John 10:10.

--Rob Blezard

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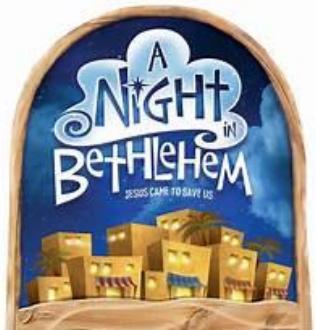
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Faith Formation

One Night in Bethlehem – January 3

The celebration of Christmas only begins on Christmas Eve! **Come and hear the story of Jesus birth from the people who experienced it first, Elizabeth, the shepherds and wisemen, and angels, without ever leaving the basement of St. John Lutheran Church!** Participants will learn from different people in the story of Jesus birth through activities, crafts, songs and more. We begin our journey at 10am and will conclude at 12pm. **This event is FREE and open to all, so invite your family, neighbors, friends, and the person you met while waiting in line at the grocery store!** Get a flier in the Gathering Area and hang it wherever you see fliers in the area! Register your child today at <https://forms.gle/bweDSrkHz1jC8HCK9>.

If you would like to help bring this story alive to participants, contact Denise H or Pastor Katie.



Confirmation Class – December 27 and January 24

What does it mean to be a member of a church? Confirmation class is a time for our students in 6th-8th grade to develop deeper scriptural understanding and more robust connection to their faith and identity as a member of the church. **In November, the students explored the books of Wisdom: their unique contribution to scripture and what it means to be wise in today's world.** Class meets on the fourth Saturday of each month, 9:30-11:30am.

Faith Formation (continued)

Kids Club/Youth Group – January 18 and 25

The Mars Area Youth Group (grades 6-12) and Kids' Club (grades 2-5) are joint ministries supported by Mars United Presbyterian and St. John Lutheran Church. Each group meets approximately twice per month, sometimes meeting in the church buildings (Youth Group at Mars United Presbyterian, Kids Club at St John), sometimes meeting together for joint social and service events.

In January the groups will meet at the respective churches on **January 18 with dinner served at Mars United Presbyterian** after the meeting. On **January 25th**, both groups will meet to go skating in Butler. And mark our calendars for the annual trip to **Peak N Peak on February 21st!** To sign up to receive updates and the group's schedule, please fill out the form at stjohnchurchmars.org/childrenyouth.



Messy Church – January 16

Messy Church is an intentionally intergenerational place for people to meet and experience fun and messy ways to engage in faith, including crafts and activities, celebration, and a shared meal no matter their connection to church. At Messy Church, we celebrate the creative, joyful God revealed in **Jesus Christ**. Bible stories are explored in ways that invite our whole messy selves into God's story of the good news of Jesus Christ - that we are freed and forgiven in God's abundant grace and that God's love is for us, all of us. Come and bring your neighbors and friends to share in this interactive, creative, and celebratory worship service!

We begin by eating dinner together at 6:00pm. Then after a brief, interactive story-telling, activities are opened for families to explore together at their own pace in a flexible environment. At the end of the evening, we bring our whole selves - our hearts, voices, and bodies to celebration of God's creative goodness in praise songs and prayer, **ending at 8:00pm.** In January, we will hear the story of **Jesus' baptism, exploring what baptism means for us today.**

Communion Classes

Each week, we give thanks to the ways God has moved in and through God's people across scripture before we remember Jesus' last supper with his disciples. **Communion class offers an opportunity for children and youth to hear the story of Jesus' last supper and its connection to the exodus in the Hebrew Bible.** We will explore the different supplies and practices surrounding communion as well as bake bread to be used at an upcoming worship service. If you are interested in your child receiving their first communion this year at the Palm Sunday worship service, please contact Pastor Katie and dates will be selected for these sessions. The Lutheran church does not have a specific age at which communion is first offered. It is a decision to be made for and with each child and their family.



Adult Bible Study – The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians is an invitation into a world of grace, sweeping us into an all-encompassing vision of God's eternal plan to redeem all creation. In this letter, we learn about the geography of grace where God labors to fulfill the mystery of the divine plan. Come and learn how the first listeners may have heard this letter and explore what the letter has to say to readers in the 21st century.

This new series will begin on January 14 (Wed.) and January 18 (Sun.). Bible Study meets on Wednesdays at 7:00pm and Sundays at 6:30pm. A Zoom option is available for both days. Material on Wednesday is repeated the following Sunday for those who need a flexible schedule.

Faith Formation (continued)

Sunday Faith Formation Hour

Each Sunday, we gather in the lower level of the building for Faith Formation for all ages. Hospitality is offered in the form of goodies and drinks. You are welcome to go downstairs immediately following worship and begin enjoying these goodies. At approximately 10:15am, we begin an all-ages together Bible game to help all of us develop greater familiarity with the Bible. At approximately 10:30am, people are invited to move into age-based groups to explore different topics as outlined below.

Pre-K through 5th Grade

The Pre-K through elementary classes will explore stories of Jesus' ministry through interactive storytelling and crafts. Students are asked to bring their Bibles to each class as they will be encouraged to find stories in their Bible, learning to mark their Bibles as they engage with the story. Students will be given a take-home sheet each week to help families continue the conversations at home. See below for a schedule of lessons to be covered each week this month:

January 4 – Epiphany Celebration
January 11 – Baptism of Our Lord
January 18 – The Boy at the Temple
January 25 – Jesus Goes to Nazareth
February 1 – The Disciples

Middle and High School

A note from the teacher, Ruth Ann: "We use Bibles each session, and I am hoping students will bring their own personal Bibles. They will be encouraged to mark, highlight, and put notes in their Bibles for future assistance. Thank you for sending me these inquisitive young people. I will do my best to broaden their Biblical knowledge, connecting their faith to daily life."

Over the course of the year, students will explore the following topics:

- 1.) Do you believe in miracles?
- 2.) Stepping out of the boat, using the story of when Jesus and Peter walk on the water
- 3.) The seven "I am" statements of Jesus
- 4.) Mountaintop surprise – exploring the story of the Transfiguration

Adult Sunday Faith Formation

The Bible is full of stories. Stories that are full of success and failure, surprise and expectation, joy and sorrow. Each week we will tackle a different story in the Bible, hear how it fits into the grander narrative of the story of God's people in scripture and discuss how it impacts our own stories and daily lives.

January 4 – Epiphany Celebration
January 11 – No meeting
January 18 – How we read the Bible
January 25 – Beginnings: Genesis
February 1 – God's People on the Move: Exodus and Deuteronomy

2026 Vestry

Below is the 2026 Vestry as elected in our December Congregational Meeting. At the December Vestry Meeting, chairs, representatives to council, and secretaries were selected for each board. The Vestry also elected officers to council. Council is comprised of the officers (president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer) and the chair and representative to council from each board (Deacons, Elders, Trustees). The council is pending approval by the congregation at the January congregational meeting.

Council President – David Dreher

Council Vice-President – Keith Cardinal

Secretary – Missy Kramer

Financial Secretary – Kelly Greb

Treasurer – Tanya Nagel

Deacons

Dawn Barill

Beth Fitzgerald

Laura Greb – Representative to Council

Denise Hager - Secretary

Tanya Nagel

Cora Steigerwalt

Jamie Weaver - Chair

Elders

Keith Cardinal

Kelly Greb – Representative to Council

Deb Martin – Secretary

Vern Miller

Alaina Nagel

Katie Niklewicz

Ruth Ann Tully – Chair

Trustees

Bob Davidson

David Dreher

Jonathan Ciora

John Fritz – Secretary

John Tully – Chair

Barry Steigerwalt – Representative to Council

Missy Kramer

Board and Committee Meeting Schedule

Deacons: Monthly, 1st Tuesday at 7:00 pm

Elders: Monthly, 1st Tuesday at 7:00 pm

Trustees: Monthly, 1st Tuesday at 7:00 pm

Council: Monthly, 3rd Tuesday at 7:00 pm

Mission Endowment: Quarterly, as needed

Mutual Ministry: Quarterly, as needed

Other Standing Committees Approved by the Congregation

Mission Endowment

Beverly Crislip

Beth Fitzgerald

Denise Hager

Dave Knauff

Janet Senka

Laura Wach

Mutual Ministry

Keith Cardinal

Ruth Ann Tully

David Dreher

January 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	³ One Night in Bethlehem 10a – 12p
4 Worship, 9a <i>Christmas Pageant in worship</i> Faith Formation, 10:15 a	5 Vestry Meetings, 7p	6 Vestry Meetings, 7p	7	8	9	10
11 Worship, 9a Faith Formation, 10:15 a Strategic Planning Team Meeting, 11:30a	12 Mission Endowment Meeting, 6p	13 Mission Endowment Meeting, 6p	14 Bible Study, 7p	15 Bible Study, 7p	16 Messy Church, 6p	17 White Elephant Bingo, 3p
18 Worship, 9a Faith Formation, 10:15 a Congregational Meeting 10:15a Youth Group/Kids Club, 4:00p Bible Study, 6:30p	19 Council Meeting, 7p <i>Newsletter Articles Due</i>	20 Council Meeting, 7p <i>Newsletter Articles Due</i>	21 Bible Study, 7p	22 Bible Study, 7p	23 Bible Study, 7p	24 Confirmation Class, 9:30a
25 Worship, 9a Faith Formation, 10:15 a Youth Group/Kids Club Skating Outing, 4p Bible Study, 6:30p	26 Holy Communion at Penn Mar, 1:45p	27	28 Bible Study, 7p	29 Worship Planners 7p	30 Worship Planners 7p	31 Vestry Retreat, 9a



1/01 Laura Kramer
1/03 Sharon Wach
1/11 Fred Ludolff
1/16 Chuck Olescyski
1/21 Kathy Marshall
1/24 Madison Cardinal
1/27 Gianna Julio



January Newsletter

Address service requested

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