

March  
2025

# St. John Lutheran Church



St. John Lutheran Church  
PO Box 411  
420 Beaver Street  
Mars, PA 16046  
Office Hours MWF, 8a-1p

Web site: [www.stjohnchurchmars.org](http://www.stjohnchurchmars.org)  
Church Office: (724) 625-1830  
Office email: [office@stjohnchurchmars.org](mailto:office@stjohnchurchmars.org)  
Pastor Katie's email: [pastorkmcneal@gmail.com](mailto:pastorkmcneal@gmail.com)  
Pastor's Cell #: 412-407-3166

Please call to ensure availability before coming to the office.

Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...

- Joel 2:13

## 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.*

We begin the journey of Lent on March 5. We begin by remembering that we are dust and to dust we shall return. And we remember that even as we are dust, we are marked and sealed with the sign of the cross and promised life everlasting in the waters of baptism. We remember that as Jesus journeys to the cross, he also journeys to the ultimate act of abundant and expansive grace as he conquers sin and death for all in his resurrection. This year, Luke offers us reminder after reminder of the persistence of God's mercy despite stubborn obstacles as we travel along our Lenten journey into Jesus' death and resurrection.

This Lent, we will hear God's invitation to counter scarcity and injustice, to pour our God's grace wherever it is needed, to be filled to the brim with God's lavish love. We will hear the nurturing, protective voice of God as Jesus is likened to a mother hen. We will hear about an abundant feast offered in celebration of a son coming home. We will hear about a fig tree offered grace and nurtured with care and hope. We will hear about oil being lovingly and freely poured out. And then we will hear even the rocks crying out songs of praise, trusting in the promises of mercy and life even in the shadow of the cross.

We are dust, and to dust we will return. We do not deserve this grace. And yet, like a cup that runs over with life-giving water, we receive the gift of this grace as God pours it freely, relentlessly, abundantly over us. God has promised us this lavish gift in our baptisms as we were named and claimed as children of God. And so, this Lent, we journey with Jesus to the cross, reminded over and over again of God's everlasting mercy, lavish love, and abundant grace. God has intended good for us. God has promised abundant, expansive life for us. God has envisioned us to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another, and to live in harmony with creation.

In our baptism, we begin our journey as disciples of Christ. In our Lenten journey we explore what that means for each of us. And for all of us, may this Lenten journey be an opportunity for us to be filled to the brim with God's goodness. May this Lenten journey be an invitation to live fully into our identity as children of God. May this Lenten journey be an encouragement to increase our own capacities to receive and give grace.

Peace,  
Pastor Katie

### Find Us on Social Media

Like us on **Facebook** ([@stjohnchurchmars](#)) or Follow us on **Instagram** ([@stjohnchurchmars](#))

### Online Sunday Worship

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

Available on our **YouTubeChannel**: <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 try to find someone to cover and tell the office of the change.

	<b>Acolyte</b>	<b>Offering</b>	<b>Offering</b>	<b>Young Reader</b>
<b>2-Mar</b>	Lydia M	Carissa M	Cate S	
<b>9-Mar</b>	Jules K	Anna K	Nathan K	
<b>16-Mar</b>	Nathan K	Abby C	Eva K	Abby C
<b>23-Mar</b>	Ava N	Carissa M	Jules K	
<b>30-Mar</b>	Carissa M	Lydia M	Cate S	
<b>6-April</b>	Abby C	Ava N	Ella N	

### Adult Worship Leaders

	<b>Greeters</b>	<b>Usher</b>	<b>Assistant Minister</b>	<b>Bread Baker</b>	<b>Counters</b>
<b>2-Mar</b>	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Jen M	Kim R	Jen M Keith C
<b>9-Mar</b>	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Valerie C	Kim R	Jen M Keith C
<b>16-Mar</b>	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Valerie C	Kim R	Jen M Keith C
<b>23-Mar</b>	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Kim R	Jen M Keith C
<b>30-Mar</b>	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Kim R	Jen M Keith C
<b>6-April</b>	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Denise H	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T

Sign up to volunteer for an open slot using the sign-up sheets in the greeting area or at <https://signup.com/go/JPakfVA>

### Ash Wednesday – March 5

We begin the season of Lent with Ash Wednesday. Marking our foreheads with ash (dust), we remember that we come from dust, and to dust we shall return. At the same time, the ash traces the life-giving cross marked on our foreheads at baptism. We mark Ash Wednesday in the church with a **service of Holy Communion and the Imposition of Ashes at 7:00 pm in the sanctuary.** For those who are unable to come to evening worship, Pastor Katie will be **available in the church to offer ashes and communion 10:00 am to 1:00 pm.**



## **Lenten Worship and Study Schedule**

Lent is a time for us, as Christians, to take extra time in prayer, devotion, and/or worship. We begin the season with ashes, remembering our humanity and mortality. Then, as we journey to the death and resurrection of Jesus, we **reflect on our faith and strive to deepen our connection with God and grow in our faith lives as disciples**. This year, we have multiple ways for people to connect with their faith lives each week. On Sundays we will have a traditional Bible study exploring the book of 1 Corinthians as we ask what it means to be a follower of Jesus as people new to the faith and people wanting to grow in faith. On Wednesdays we will have an integrated time of worship, dinner, and faith exploration as we Meet Jesus at the Table at Dinner Church. There will be a community luncheon and reflection series on Fridays in Lent as well.

### **Wednesday Schedule**

6:30 pm – Dinner Church

### **Sunday Schedule**

9:00 am – Worship with Communion  
10:15 am – Sunday School for all ages  
6:30 pm Bible Study

### **Friday Schedule**

12:00 pm – community lunch with Lenten speaker series  
March 7 at Mars United Presbyterian  
March 14 at Penn Mar Apartments  
March 21 at St. John Lutheran  
March 28 at Penn Mar Apartments  
April 4 at St John Lutheran  
April 11 at Penn Mar Apartments  
April 18 at Mars United Presbyterian with Good Friday worship to follow

## **Holy Week Worship Schedule**

- + Palm Sunday – Sunday, April 13, 9:00 am
- + Maundy Thursday – Thursday, April 17, 7:00 pm
- + Good Friday – Friday, April 18  
Community Service with lunch at Mars United Presbyterian, after lunch  
Kids Cross Walk, 3:00-5:00 pm  
Stations of the Cross Tableaux, 5:30 pm  
Tenebrae service at St. John, 7:00 pm
- + Easter Vigil – Saturday, April 19, 7:00 pm
- + Easter Day – Sunday, April 20  
Community Sunrise Service (location tbd), 7:00 am  
Easter Sunday Celebration at St John, 9:00 am

## **Serving Others**

### **St. John Food Pantry**

Our little food pantry sees more usage than we sometimes recognize. Within the week prior to writing the newsletter, we had two individuals visit the pantry who we do not see on a regular basis. One person had bought extra groceries and stopped at the pantry on her way home to donate goods. Another person stopped by the pantry to collect items and was grateful for the opportunity to “shop” at the indoor pantry as well. When people are asked what goods they are most often looking for, they typically respond with items that are not covered by SNAP benefits (i.e. cleaning products, paper products, personal hygiene products) or easy to prepare meals.

# Around the Church

## Community Garden

Gardening season is just around the corner! We are looking to make a plan for the garden this year so that it grows healthy, organic, and delicious food for people in the community. This year we are particularly looking to explore ways to make the garden more accessible to individuals looking to pick their own produce and provide assistance to those who need help harvesting. If you would like to be a part of the brainstorming process to achieve these goals, see Pastor Katie.

## Website Updates!

**We are excited to begin using a Member Portal on our website!** When you visit the website at [stjohnchurchmars.org](http://stjohnchurchmars.org), there is an option to “log in” in the upper right corner. When you log in, you will have access to a member portal. Here you can offer ways to connect with other members, access the latest directory, access the online sign-up board at <https://signup.com/go/JPakfVA>, or view the current vestry. To help keep members safe, the office will approve membership requests.

## Gathered Under One Roof Campaign Update

We have collected \$35,000 for our Gathered Under One Roof Campaign! Please prayerfully consider how you can continue to support this capital campaign so that we can match our goal of \$50,000. Funds raised from this campaign are used to pay back the loan that was used to pay for the roof as well as replenish the Maintenance Fund used for other large maintenance projects.

## Spaghetti Dinner – March 8 (4:30-6:30pm)



The Spaghetti Dinner is back and coming soon; mark your calendars for **March 8th!** The Deacons are handling the organizational aspects, but *many hands make the work light*. We are hoping that **all** members of St John will share their **time and talents** to make the dinner a success. **Help is needed with the set-up, cooking, serving, bussing tables, preparing baked goods, clean-up and more.** Sign-up posters will be stationed in the greeting area. Of course, we are also hoping that you will **invite 10-12 of your friends.** 😊 Thank you.

## Spring Ahead – March 9

March 9, 2am Don't forget to move your clocks AHEAD one hour at 2am on Sunday, March 9<sup>th</sup> (or before you go to bed on Saturday March 8<sup>th</sup>), losing an hour.

## Shamrock Elephant Bingo – March 15 (3:00-8:00pm)

Shamrock Bingo will follow the rules of White Elephant Bingo. 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.



When: Saturday, March 15th

Time: 3:00- 8ish

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

Family Friendly - All are welcome to come for an enjoyable afternoon.

### **Help Needed**

Each Christmas, the church building is surrounded by a choir of wooden angels. However after years of faithfully taking their place in the winter weather, many of the angels are ready to retire from their post. We are looking for volunteers to make replacement angels for Christmas 2025. There is a pattern available. If you would like to help, please contact John Tully.



### **Spring Clean Up – April 12 (9:00 am – 12:00 pm)**

On Easter morning, the church is filled with the glory of Christ's resurrection! Prepare the building for this exciting day by coming for an indoor church clean-up day! **Caring for our building is one way that we can give of ourselves to participate in the ministry that happens at St. John.** Volunteers are needed to help wash all wood in the Church.

## **Around the Synod**

### **Weekly Synod Emails**

The synod sends out weekly emails of upcoming programs and important news. Everyone is welcome to receive these emails. Sign up to receive them at <https://www.swpasynod.org/wayfarer>

### **Families of Young Children... Let's Talk – March 13 (9:00-10:00pm)**

Put the kids to bed, grab a beverage, and join the synod's Care & Leadership of All Generations Committee for a frank talk about faith and kids over zoom. This gathering will deal specifically with talking to young children about death and dying, as well as kids' difficult questions about the crucifixion. Free printable resources will be provided as well. Led by Pastors Erin Evans and Jess Felici. Contact Pastor Katie to receive the zoom link when it is available.

### **Bishop Election Informational Meeting – March 16 (2:00-3:00 pm)**

In 2025, there will be a new bishop elected to serve the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA. Bishop Kusserow will be retiring at the end of his term. There will be a time of prayer, questions, and discussions focused on the bishop election open to all, but especially geared for Synod Assembly voting members. A zoom link will be provided closer to the event. Contact Pastor Katie if you'd like to be on the list to receive the link.

### **Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior Event – April 6**

We'll begin at 3pm with education time; worship will begin at 4:30pm with light refreshments to follow. The Rev. Dale B. Snyder of Bethel AME will be the guest preacher. The gathering will be at St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Shadyside. Stay tuned for more details.

### **2025 Synod Assembly – May 17 (online) and June 12-14 (in person)**

**Voting members from our congregation have an important responsibility** on behalf of all the members of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This assembly is the highest legislative authority of our synod; they will be making decisions that impact 143 congregations covering 10 counties in southwest PA. If you are interested in serving as a voting member at Synod Assembly, please submit your name to council by the March council meeting (March 18). Voting members are required to attend both sessions and must have a smartphone or tablet to use as a voting device.

# Faith Formation

## 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.

## Lent Activity Crosses

Remember to look at your Lenten Activity Cross! Try to complete 6-7 activities a week and color in the section as you do. On Palm Sunday, bring back your crosses so that we can decorate the church with their cheerful colors on Easter!

## Kids Club and Youth Group

The Mars Area Youth Group and Kids Club are joint ministries with Mars United Presbyterian Church. Youth Group (Grades 6-12) meets at Mars United Presbyterian Church and Kids Club (Grades 2-5) meets at St. John. **Each group will meet in their respective locations on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and March 30<sup>th</sup>. The groups will participate in a joint social event on March 16<sup>th</sup>. All meetings are 1:00-2:30pm. [Sign up online](#) to receive email updates regarding upcoming events.**

## Confirmation Classes

Confirmation is a faith formation opportunity that helps our young people (typically grades 6-8) engage with their faith and prepare to take ownership of the promises made on their behalf at baptism. **During our meeting in February the students explored the story of the Exodus, getting to know the different characters along the way. Our next class is March 15<sup>th</sup>.**

## Confirmation Camp – June 15-20

"ConfirCamp" at Lutherlyn is an invitation to join a group of ELCA Lutheran leaders in creating a safe place to **explore our faith, build trusting relationships, and experience the joy of Christian community.** Campers will spend approx. 3 hours each day in experiential confirmation class taught by Pastors and the rest of the day doing Classic Camp activities. Contact Pastor Katie for details.

## Messy Church – Third Fridays (5:30-7:30pm)



**Messy Church is an intentionally intergenerational place for people to meet and experience fun and messy ways to engage in faith and worship, 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.** Faith formation topics and 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. **If you would like to help with this ministry, contact Pastor Katie.** No registration is required for this free faith formation opportunity.

**Our next meeting will be March 21. At this session, we will feast with Jesus as we explore the story of Jesus feeding the multitudes.**

# Lutherlyn

## Lutherlyn Summer Camp Registration

Lutherlyn Summer Camp Registration is OPEN! Many of the camps fill quickly, so plan to register early! If your child would like to attend Lutherlyn, but finances are standing in your way, please contact Pastor Katie. Camperships are available through Lutherlyn! **Finances should never stop a kid from being able to experience the life-changing adventures in faith at Lutherlyn**, a place where each child is accepted, challenged, and sent out into the world to spread the love of Christ.

Learn more about the many different camps and what you can expect at a week of camp at <https://www.lutherlyn.com/programs/summercamp/>.

## Nature Nerds Retreat – March 28-30

Join us March 28 - 30 for "Nature Nerds," an adult-only (18+) weekend retreat designed for those who crave the great outdoors and seek a deeper connection with nature. Enjoy guided hikes, hands-on workshops, critter catching, stargazing sessions, and SCIENCE! - all while mingling with fellow nature enthusiasts. In addition to immersing yourself in the natural sciences, you will be able to enjoy camp classics like worship, campfires, hikes, and crafts. All of the activities are optional to provide as much or as little time as you'd like to relax or explore Lutherlyn's beautiful grounds and trails.

Registration Deadline: March 17

Learn more at <https://www.lutherlyn.com/programs/nerds.html>

## Spring Work Day – April 26

Calling all volunteers to help get camp ready for CampBlast and Summer Camp. No skills required. 9am-4pm; lunch provided. Please RSVP at

<https://www.lutherlyn.com/support/volunteer/workdays.html>

# Stewardship

## Stewardship Reflection

To be a good steward is to be a good caretaker and manager of that which has been entrusted to us. One of the ways we can practice stewardship is how we care for the places where we gather, in our homes and in our church. Everything we do to care for the places is a part of our stewardship. We can think about what supplies we use to care for these places, where those supplies come from, and how we are developing these places as places of comfort and hospitality for all who gather there. Our building is used for much of our ministry. Our building speaks to guests about what we do and how they might see themselves becoming a part of this community on a longer-term basis. Our official stewardship campaign is ending as we collect the pledge cards, but the stewardship we practice continues all year round. Check out the information about the clean up days for how you can practice good stewardship of the building we rely on for so many things.

## Stewardship Response

With gratitude for the stories people have shared over the course of our 2025 stewardship campaign, **we now invite you to respond with your own stories and intents of participation.** Intent or pledge cards are available in the church office. **We request that all cards be returned to the office by March 3.** Everyone has something to offer to the mission and ministry of the church, so we hope that everyone will return an intention of giving time, talent, and treasure card.

# For Your Thoughts

## History and Practices of Lent

**Lent is the season of the church that precedes Easter.** We count back 40 days from Easter, and we get to Ash Wednesday... well sort of. If you take out a calendar, then you'll see that **there are actually 46 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter.** That's because Sundays are not included in the 40 days of Lent (This is why we say it's the first, second, etc. Sunday *in* Lent rather than *of* Lent). The season began as a period of fasting leading up to the Vigil of Easter. It was originally a two-day period of preparation; Lent became a three-week period in the middle of the fourth century. Later it was expanded to 40 days. By the end of the fifth century, **Sundays began to be excluded from Lenten practices because Sundays are always celebrated as feasts of the Resurrection.** Lent is a time when we maintain the **practice of renewing and deepening our faith**, whether we have grown up with faith or are new to it. It is a time when we **focus on deepening our awareness of our need for God in our lives, our need for God's forgiveness and grace.** Throughout the church, there are countless ways people strive to observe the Lenten season. Some give up things throughout the season. Some take on faith practices. Some churches have a very sparse worship service, others add elements to the service to invite reflection. There is no one right way to practice Lent. **Instead, we are invited to use the time from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday to reflect on our faith and relationship with God, focusing on the death and resurrection of Jesus and in turn our own death and resurrection found in baptism.**

## A Lenten Reflection

(Source unknown)

Fast from pessimism; feast on optimism  
Fast from criticism; feast on praise  
Fast from self-pity; feast on joy  
Fast from bitterness; feast on forgiveness  
Fast from idle gossip; feast on purposeful silence  
Fast from jealousy; feast on love  
Fast from discouragement; feast on hope  
Fast from complaining; feast on appreciation  
Fast from selfishness; feast on service  
Fast from fear; feast on faith  
Fast from anger; feast on patience  
Fast from self-concern; feast on compassion for others  
Fast from discontent; feast on gratitude

## Tell Your Story

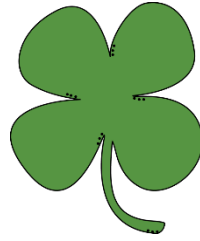
We so far have a handful of people who have told their stories to be shared through our newsletter, Facebook page, and website. Tell your story! Take 30-45 seconds and share how your faith and your participation with the mission and ministry of St. John makes a difference in your life. Record your message at home and send it to Pastor Katie or schedule a time to record it at church. Use one of the following prompts to help:

- I became a Lutheran when....
- I pray....
- In 10 years, I see the church...
- My favorite part of Scripture is... because...
- My favorite church memory is...
- People who shaped my faith and life are...
- My favorite hymn is... because....
- I am a follower of Jesus because...
- One of my faith "a-ha" moments was/is...
- My faith is important to me because...
- I see God at work through St. John...
- Being a part of St. John has helped me deepen my connection with God...
- I joined this church because...



# March 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2 Worship 9:00 am Sunday School 10:15 am Trustees Meeting 10:15am Youth Group / Kids Club 1-2:30 pm Adult Bible Study, 6:30 pm	3	4 Elders' Meeting 7:00 pm	5 Ash Wednesday Open church 10-1 Worship 7:00 pm	6	7 Lenten Lunch 12:00 pm	8 Spaghetti Dinner 4:30 – 6:30 pm
9 Worship 9:00 am Sunday School 10:15 am Deacons' Meeting 10:15am Adult Bible Study, 6:30 pm	10	11	12 Dinner Church 6:30 – 8:00 pm	13	14 Lenten Lunch 12:00 pm	15 Confirmation Class 9:30 – 11:30 am White Elephant Bingo 3-8 pm
16 Worship 9:00 am Sunday School 10:15 am Youth Group / Kids Club 1-2:30 pm (social event) Adult Bible Study, 6:30 pm	17	18 Council Meeting 7:00 pm	19 Dinner Church 6:30 – 8:00 pm	20 Newsletter Articles Due	21 Lenten Lunch 12:00 pm Messy Church 5:30 – 7:30 pm	22
23 Worship 9:00 am Sunday School 10:15 am Adult Bible Study, 6:30 pm	24	25 Worship Planners 7:00 pm	26 Dinner Church 6:30 – 8:00 pm	27	28 Lenten Lunch 12:00 pm	29
30 Worship 9:00 am Sunday School 10:15 am Birthday / Anniversary Coffee hour 10:15 am Youth Group / Kids Club 1-2:30 pm Adult Bible Study, 6:30 pm	31 Communion at Penn Mar 1:45pm					



03/01 William Greb  
03/11 Janet Ford  
03/13 Ellen Hrach  
03/16 Lydia Miller  
03/29 Barry Steigerwalt

# MARCH NEWSLETTER

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Address service requested

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