

December
2025

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
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Web site: www.stjohnchurchmars.org
Church Office: (724) 625-1830
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Pastor's Cell #: 412-407-3166

Please call to ensure availability before coming to the office.

How many times have you heard the story of Jesus' birth? Even those unconnected to church know a lot of the basics of the story. It's a story that is told and retold in countless ways. In many ways it is a familiar, comfortable story, yet there is still something about the story and the season in which we hear it that invites our imagination, that brings us to awe, and that surprises us. No matter how well we know the stories of the angel visiting Mary and Joseph, of the angels meeting the shepherds in the field, of the journey to Bethlehem, of the wise men seeking the newborn king, there is still much that surprises us in this season.

From the very beginning of Creation, God has always intended good for Creation. From the very first time humans strayed from God's good intentions for them, God has planned reconciliation, redemption, and restoration for all of humanity. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, God sends the message that God is with the people at all times. God has told the people that God promises salvation for the people. And yet, when God shows up, we are still surprised by God's boundless mercy as we celebrate the reign of Christ by reading the story of his crucifixion, as we remember the times God has brought life out of places we only saw death, and as we celebrate God's incarnation in an infant boy in the arms of a poor woman in a small Judean town.

As we begin the new liturgical year with the beginning of Advent, we begin our journey of meeting our surprising God in Christ again through the Gospel of Matthew. While we do not read the very beginning of this gospel in worship, Matthew invites us to hear the story of Jesus through the lens of a genealogy that roots Jesus' life, death, and resurrection in the ancient story of God's people. We hear names we know well from the Hebrew Scriptures: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesse, David, and Solomon, yet tucked between these names are names of women who were outsiders to the Israelite people, women whose stories were surprising inclusions: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba. Over and over again, God shows up in ways that are surprising, yet completely in keeping with who God has shown God to be for and to the people across the ages. Advent is the season when we try to expect the unexpected, to prepare for that which we cannot prepare, – that God would be incarnated, enfleshed, and born among us, calling us to and providing us with life in new and surprising ways.

Throughout the season of Advent, we will consider what we know... and just as often what surprises us... about what it means to follow God. Throughout the coming Advent and Christmas seasons, there are many opportunities for us to open ourselves to God's known, yet surprising, presence with and among us. Come and worship and encounter how God is showing up in ways that are familiar and yet surprising in scriptures, in our community, and in your life.

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 find someone to cover and tell the office of the change.

	Acolyte	Offering	Offering	Young Reader
7-Dec	Josie W	Jules K	Eva K	
14-Dec	Cate S	Lydia M	Carissa M	
21-Dec	Abby C	Josie W	Cate S	Abby C
24-Dec 3:00 pm	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER
24-Dec 7:30 pm	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER
25-Dec Christmas Day	N/A	N/A	N/A	
28-Dec	Anna K	Ava N	Ella N	
4-Jan	Lydia M	Anna K	Nathan K	

Adult Worship Leaders

	Greeters	Usher	Assistant Minister	Bread Baker	Counters
7-Dec	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Denise H	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
14-Dec	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Denise H	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
21-Dec	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Denise H	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
24-Dec 3:00 pm	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
24-Dec 7:00 pm	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Denise H	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
25-Dec 9:00 am	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Denise H	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
28-Dec	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Denise H	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
4-Jan	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	David D	VOLUNTEER	

Worship Notes (continued)

Adult Choir

For major festivals (like Christmas Eve!), 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.

Sung Evening Prayer

Following the Wednesday evening dinner and discussion on the titles of Jesus, we will have sung evening prayer in the sanctuary using the Holden Evening Prayer service. The service will begin at approximately 7:20pm and will conclude around 8:00pm. **This quiet, contemplative service offers space to reflect on the themes of Advent as we meditate on the titles of Jesus and how they each help us connect with God as we prepare for Christmas celebrations.**

Advent Begins – November 30



Advent is the **season of preparation** as we get ready for Christmas. Regardless of what day of the week Christmas is, Advent is always the **four Sundays leading up to Christmas**. Join us in worship as we wait for the coming Christ child and get ready for the gift of Christmas. Make sure your child gets their own **Advent calendar to count down** to Christmas during worship on November 30, the first Sunday of the church year. If you and/or your family would like to volunteer to participate in worship by **helping with lighting the Advent Wreath, please contact the office!**

Celebration of Holy Baptism – November 30

We welcome Luca M to the family of God through the sacrament of Holy Baptism on Nov. 30.

Welcoming New Members – December 14

We are excited to welcome several individuals to the membership of St. John on Sunday, December 14. After worship we will have cake to celebrate and welcome them!

Blue Christmas Worship Service – December 21

While Christmas is a season of joy, not everyone feels like celebrating. Grief, illness, aging, depression, loneliness, unemployment, and loss are magnified. Many feel the stress of expectations around Christmas. **A Blue Christmas service provides a time and place of solace.**

Mars United Presbyterian Church (232 Crowe Ave) will host a service of prayers, scripture, and music that acknowledge that God's presence is for those who mourn and struggle this time of year as well. **Worship is on December 21, the longest night of the year, at 7:00 pm.**

Christmas Eve Worship Services – December 24

Come celebrate the gift of the Word Incarnate, God Immanuel, Jesus Christ born to this world as a human baby with our **traditional Christmas Eve Candlelight worship services** filled with beloved hymns and carols, prayers, and scripture readings. **All are welcome as we come to celebrate Christ's coming** into the world.

Worship is at 3:00 pm and at 7:30 pm.

After each service, there will be a brief hospitality time with cookies, hot cider, and hot cocoa. If you'd like to help supply cookies, please [contact Pastor Katie](#) (or just bring them with you to worship!)

Christmas Day Worship Service – December 25

What does it mean to celebrate God coming to earth as a human being? What was it like that first morning after everything changed? What were Joseph and Mary thinking? What would it have been like to be a shepherd keeping watch over the flocks that night? **On Christmas morning, we gather for prayers, scriptures, reflections, and music to wonder and celebrate at the gift of Christmas.** **Worship will be at 9:00 am.**

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!

Around the Church

Decorating for Christmas – December 20 and 21

Help us with our final preparations for Christmas as we **prepare the church building by putting up decorations**. On Saturday, December 20th, the Trustees and any available hands will gather at the church at 9am to begin the work of decorating the church for Christmas. This day will include our outdoor decorations as well as hanging the wires for our bars of candles over the aisles and whatever else will help us with the final decorations on Sunday. On Sunday, after worship, we will decorate the sanctuary in all its Christmas splendor. If you are able to help decorate the church for Christmas, please plan to come one or both days. Your help will be greatly appreciated. **Many hands will make light work!**



Christmas Flower Sales

Help decorate the sanctuary for Christmas by purchasing a poinsettia or Christmas cactus. Poinsettia plants (\$12 each) come in a 7-inch pot with 2 stems of red, white, pink, or marble leaves. Christmas cactuses (\$11 each) come in 6-inch pots. **Orders are due by Sunday, December 7th.** Payments may be placed in the offering plate in an envelope marked for poinsettias or mailed to the church. Checks can be made payable to St. John Lutheran Church.

Pollak's Candies Sale

Pollak's Candies has been selling delicious chocolate treats in Butler County since 1948, and now **when you buy Pollak's Candies, you can support St. John!** Collect an order form in the Gathering Area of the building and purchase candy for yourself and invite your friends and family to buy some too! **If you prefer online purchases, you can order candy directly from Pollak's at pollakscandies.com** (or using the QR code to the right) and still support St. John! Simply enter "St John Lutheran Church, Mars, PA and Pastor Katie McNeal" in the order notes during check out! **Orders are due by December 14th.** All proceeds will go toward the Gathered Under One Roof Campaign. Candy will be available for pick up on Sunday, December 21st.



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.

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.

Outreach Ministry – How to Invite Someone to Church

Each Sunday in Advent, we will be passing out invitations to Christmas Eve worship at St. John Lutheran Church. But what do you do with 2 invitations to Christmas Eve worship... every week? You invite people! **There are many ways you can invite people to worship.** You can take the little cards and leave them someplace for people to find: a bulletin board, a table in a well-traveled area at work, someone's front door, "accidentally" left behind at a coffee shop... be respectful, but be creative! However, the most effective invitations are those that are extended personally. **Tell them why worship on Christmas Eve is important to you. Tell them how it changes your experience of the holiday.** And hand them the card and invite them to come. **Tell them which service you will be attending if they want to come with you.** Offer to drive together if it's feasible. Offer to meet them in the parking lot so that you can walk in together. Offer to sit with them during the worship service. People might say no. They might have other plans for Christmas. They might not be quite ready to come to worship. But the first invitation is just that, the first invitation. You can always invite them again later. Sometimes it takes seven invitations before a person decides to come and see. But if we each invite two people every week in Advent, imagine how many people will be touched by the good news of God coming to earth in the person Jesus. **Imagine how many people will hear about how your faith impacts your life. Imagine how many people will hear that their presence in worship is wanted.** Imagine.

And if you want more than two invitation cards per week, there will be a stack in the Gathering Area. Take as many as you want and enjoy inviting people to come and know the joy of Christmas as we celebrate it on Christmas Eve at St. John Lutheran Church.

Thank You

Dear Friends of St. John, THANK YOU! Feeling so blessed! We are so appreciative of all your kindness, bringing meals during our health challenges. We are grateful for your prayers, fellowship & generosity. Warmly, Chuck & Anne Olescyski

Congregation Meeting Notices

Vestry Election – Sunday, December 14, 2025

Vestry elections will take place following the worship service. The congregation will be asked to vote on the slate for the 2026 Vestry.



All Vestry Meeting – Tuesday, December 16, 2025

All persons elected to serve on the vestry (Boards of Deacons, Elders, and Trustees) are asked to attend an all-vestry meeting on Tuesday, December 16th at 7:00pm to elect chairpersons and secretaries for each board as well as council representatives and officers. During this meeting, a one-day vestry retreat will be scheduled for the beginning of the calendar year.

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. The congregational meeting will be held after the worship service.

The Boards

St. John is run by three boards, the Deacons, the Elders, and the Trustees. We also have a Mission Endowment Fund Committee and a Mutual Ministry Committee. Each December we elect individuals to serve on each of the boards and the Mission Endowment Committee (the Mutual Ministry Committee is filled by appointment). Though there is often some overlap, each board has its primary areas of responsibility. The **Deacons** are largely responsible for visiting the homebound, overseeing stewardship practices and events, and planning fellowship opportunities. The **Elders** are largely responsible for Christian education and faith formation, evangelism, and worship life within the congregation. The **Trustees** are primarily responsible for taking care of the physical property of the church and overseeing the finances and budget. The Mission Endowment Committee listens to the community and disburses funds collected as interest on an account set aside for mission support. As we elect individuals to serve in these different roles as congregational leadership in December, we hold them and their work in our prayers.

Around the Community

Mars Light Up Night – November 29



Mars Borough is once again hosting Light Up Night! This is a great community event to kick off the Holiday season! Light Up Night will include a **Holiday Market** on Pittsburgh Street from 4:00-8:00 pm, **Horse Drawn Carriage Rides** from 4:00 – 7:30 pm, **Tree Lighting** at the Saucer at 5:30 pm, and a **Parade** at 7:30 pm. Hope to see you there! For more information, visit marsborough.com/light-up-mars.

Three Rivers Ringers Carols of Christmas – December 6

Ring in the holiday season with Pittsburgh's premier handbell ensemble! Three Rivers Ringers performs its Winter Concert Series, **Carols of Christmas**, this December, filled with memorable tunes including the nostalgic music from *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, a popular tune from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the traditional *O Come All Ye Faithful* and a breathtaking setting of *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*. Bring the whole family to celebrate the magic of the holiday season with Three Rivers Ringers! **Concert is FREE at Perry Highway Lutheran Church (11403 Perry Highway, Wexford) at 7:00 pm.** Learn more at threeriversringers.org

Around the Community (continued)

Living Nativity – December 12

Mars United Presbyterian Church is once again hosting the Living Nativity and looking forward to the participation of St. John members! **There are going to be lots of live animals joining the performance. The performance will be Friday, December 12.** A rehearsal for participants will be scheduled ahead of time. To help all new participants better understand the performance, all participants are asked to attend the rehearsal. See Denise H to sign up to participate.

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.

Lutherlyn

Worship at Lutherlyn – December 7

You are invited to worship in Lutherlyn's Baker Chapel. Worship begins at 3:30pm, so it is advised to arrive early to allow time to park and walk to worship. No RSVP is needed for worship.

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.

The Advent Wreath

From our liturgical resources, Sundays and Seasons: "One of the best-known customs for the season is the Advent wreath. The wreath and winter candle-lighting in the midst of growing darkness **strengthen some of the Advent images** found in the Bible. The unbroken circle of greens is clearly **an image of everlasting life**, a victory wreath, the crown of Christ, or the wheel of time itself. Christians use the wreath as a sign that **Christ reaches into our time to lead us to everlasting life**.

The four candles mark the progress of the four weeks of Advent. Sometimes the wreath is embellished with natural dried flowers or fruit. Its **evergreen branches lead to the evergreen Christmas tree.**"

Serving Others

Angel Tree



The tags are here! The Angel Tree is full of tags with Christmas wishes of children and youth served by Glade Run Lutheran Services. You can help **brighten the holiday season for a child or family in need this Christmas! Take a tag off the tree and replace it with an angel.** Sign out which tag you took and bring back the gift requested on the tag. Further information is available on the tags. Beyond the gifts under the tree, donated items received through Glade Run's annual drive provide joy, relief, and comfort all year long.

4th Quarter Mission Emphasis: Butler Hospital The Food Institute

Food insecurity impacts people throughout the community, and food insecurity often leads to a higher prevalence for diseases, obesity, and other measures that are tied to poor health. Food insecurity can happen due to a disruption of food intake because of lack of money or other resources. Neighborhood conditions may affect food insecurity, but food insecurity can happen anywhere. Some people experience food insecurity for just a short time; others are in a chronic state of insecurity. To support this community need, The Food Institute was created to make nutritious meals a reality for more families in the region.

How it works:

- Your doctor provides a referral for the Food Institute.
- Referral includes one monthly visit for four months.
- Each monthly visit lasts about 45 minutes where you will:
 - Receive a nutrition lesson
 - Learn healthy eating on a budget
 - Leave with nutritious food and recipes for up to 10 meals

How you can help:

Make a financial contribution through the church by marking 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 The Food Institute.

St. John Food Pantry

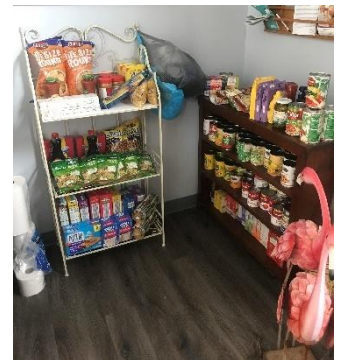
We have had several new individuals and families stopping by the food pantry. Though they frequently come outside of office hours, we are able to stop and talk with them occasionally. Each time we talk to someone who is utilizing the gift of the little food pantry, they are simply grateful for whatever it is we are able to offer. When we have a variety of food and essentials, we are able to help people find something that particularly brings a smile to their face – their favorite cereal brand or soap fragrance or a snack that they would not have the luxury of purchasing for themselves. We would not be able to have such an offering if it were not for the generosity and care of members of this community. 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!

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.

(And if anyone wants to brighten their lawns with pink flamingos, they would love to find a new home!)

We have had several special requests for favored food items. These include name-brand Rasin Bran, Lucky Charms, Carnation Instant Breakfast packets (vanilla), and pasta sauce.



Christmas Caroling at St. John Specialty Care Center – Dec 14

The Joint Youth Group and Kids Club will be **caroling at St. John Specialty Care Center on December 14th**. All are welcome to come and walk the halls of St. John Specialty Care Center as we bring Christmas joy to the residents. **We will meet in the lobby at 4:00pm and begin singing shortly thereafter.** If you are planning to attend, please contact Pastor Katie in case something changes in the plans.

Stewardship

Stewardship Corner

How do you steward your time? What about your relationships? December is often a very busy month for people, and that busyness can add stress to our relationships. The late Rev. Sharron Riessinger Blezard of the ELCA offered these thoughts in an article first published November 25, 2015, entitled "Stewardship in Advent Series: Give Thanks"

"Even if we are suffering from illness, loss of job or financial stress, broken relationships, depression, or stress, we are still called to give thanks. And in giving thanks and expressing our gratitude, we may experience attitudes shifting, circumstances becoming more manageable, and hope rising like the winter sun. So yes, begin in prayer with praise and thanksgiving....

Give thanks for those around you, for your church community, your family, your friends, and co-workers. **Initiate small and simple acts of gratefulness.** When was the last time you wrote a note of appreciation to your spouse? How long has it been since you've praised your child simply for being unique and worthy as God's child? When did you last thank your server or grocery store check-out clerk for a job well-done? **Be on the look-out during this season of Advent for ways to connect with both those you know and those whom you encounter in your daily comings and goings.** Finally, take action. Prayer, gratitude, and connection lead to action. **If you see someone in need—whether it's material, relational, or emotional—take a simple step to meet that person's need.** How could you mark each day with a simple act of gratitude? It could be a smile to a harried shopper. It might be a note of thanks and a gift card for your mail carrier. It could be the anonymous purchase of a cup of coffee for the person behind you in line. Or it could even be skipping your own cup of daily coffee to make a special offering through your congregation....

This year enter Advent with prayer and Thanksgiving. Focus on building relationships rather than credit card debt. Do random acts of kindness and generosity rather than stressing over the perfect Christmas. **Lift up your soul to God and watch your spirits lift in response.** Know this... I give thanks for your faithful witness and partnership in sharing the gospel. You are in my prayers."

Read the full article at

<https://www.stewardshipoflife.org/2015/11/stewardship-in-advent-series-give-thanks/>

Faith Formation

Adult Bible Study – Titles of Jesus (December)

Come and explore the varied ways in which Christ comes to us and how traditional titles and imagery from scripture helps us to connect with Jesus in our Christmas preparations.

Throughout the series we will explore titles for Christ that are drawn from the Hebrew Bible, hearing them as an opportunity to enrich our own understanding and connection with Christ and hearing them in the Jewish context in which they originated and in which they are still treasured. The same readings will be used on Wednesday and the following Sunday.

On **Wednesdays**, we will gather at **6:30pm for a light supper** while we openly discuss scripture readings related to the topic of the evening. At approximately **7:20pm, we will move to the sanctuary for sung evening prayer** with the readings of the evening read in worship. Worship will conclude at approximately 8:00pm.

On **Sundays**, we will have our **traditional Bible Study format beginning at 6:30pm**. We will study the texts that support the various titles of Jesus used in the Advent season with our typical outline of notes.

Because of the different formats of Wednesdays and Sundays, you are welcome to come to one or the other or both as you like! Due to the nature of Wednesday evenings in this series, **only Sundays will be offered via zoom** in addition to in person.

Check out stjohnchurchmars.org/upcomingevents for links for zoom access.

Kids Club/Youth Group – December 7 and 14

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 December the groups will meet on December 7th. On December 14th we'll go caroling all together as a service event. To sign up **to receive updates and the group's schedule, please fill out the form** at stjohnchurchmars.org/childreneyouth.

Confirmation Class

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.

A Very Messy Christmas – December 19



Join us for a Very Messy Christmas on December 19th as we explore Christmas through the stories and tunes of beloved carols. **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. **If you would like to help with this**

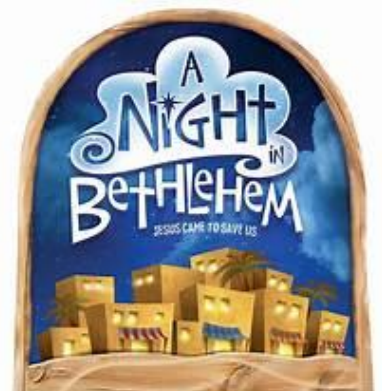
ministry, contact Pastor Katie. Come and bring your neighbors and friends to share in this interactive, creative, and celebratory worship service!

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.**

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 right in 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.



Faith Formation (continued)

Adult Bible Study – The Book of Ephesians (January)

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 in January. Stay tuned for the specific start date. Bible Study meets on Wednesdays at 7:00pm and Sundays at 6:30pm. A Zoom option is available for both days.

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 God's people in the Hebrew Scriptures 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:

November 30 – Esther (Esther 4)

December 7 – Jonah (Jonah 3:1-5)

December 14 – Daniel (Daniel 6)

December 21 – Holiday Meal Kit Shopping

December 28 – No class

January 4 – Epiphany Celebration

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

We are currently discussing what it means to explore the Bible through a Lutheran understanding. We will use the Rediscovering the Bible study through December with a few breaks for community events. Beginning in the middle of January, we will begin exploring several specific stories that help carry us in God's Good News from Genesis through Revelation.

November 30 – No meeting

December 7 – The New Testament is Correspondence of the Church Learning to be Church

December 14 – Approaches to Reading and Studying the Bible for Every Purpose

December 21 – No meeting (decorating church)

December 28 – No meeting

January 4 – Epiphany Celebration

An Advent Activity

Attention glue gun slingers and craft store fanatics, have I got a project for you!



Go find five tealight candles, five mason jars, a small box, some blue or purple paint, glue, and something to use as a base (think of the cardboard base of a frozen pizza).

Then paint four of the mason jars blue (or three purple and one pink), glue them onto the base, and put tea lights inside the jars. Then set the box in the center and put the Advent Centerpiece Wreath you've just made in a place of gathering in your home or a place you regularly spend time (i.e., a dining table).

Next to the Advent Centerpiece, place a stack of small papers and a pen to be used throughout the coming Advent season.

As many times as you'd like throughout the week, do as follows:

- Between **November 30th and December 6th** light one tealight, and consider the following question: "What has made me **hopeful** about the future this week?" Write down or draw what you all come up with and put it into the box. As you put your paper in the box, pray for God to continue to offer you hope in your life.
- Between **December 7th and 13th** light two tealights, and consider the following question: "Where have I found **peace** this week?" Write down or draw what you all come up with and put it into the box. As you put your paper in the box, pray for God to continue to offer you peace in your life.
- Between **December 14th and 20th** light three tealights, and consider the following question: "What has given me **joy** this week?" Write down or draw what you all come up with and put it into the box. As you put your paper in the box, pray for God to continue to offer you joy in your life.
- Between **December 21st and 24th** light all four tealights, and consider the following question: "Where have I found **love**?" Write down or draw what you all come up with and put it into the box. As you put your paper in the box, pray for God to continue to offer you love in your life.
- Then, on Christmas morning or any of the **12 days of Christmas** before Epiphany on January 6th, remove the box, replace it with the 5th mason jar and tea light. **Light all five of the candles and read through all the hope, peace, joy, and love** accrued over the season of Advent! All a blessing come to full fruition in Christmas!

May the coming Christ bless you all!

*Please take these materials as a suggestion and have fun modifying it as makes sense for you!

Originally created by Pastor Chris Halverson (ELCA) in 2017.

December 2025

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3 Bible Study and Midweek Worship 6:30p	4 Worship Planners 7p	5	6
7 Worship, 9a Faith Formation 10:15a Kids Club/Youth Group, 4p Bible Study, 6:30p	8	9	10 Bible Study and Midweek Worship 6:30p	11	12 Living Nativity, 6p	13
14 Worship with new member welcome, 9a Faith Formation 10:15a Congregational Meeting 10:15a Caroling, 4:00p Bible Study, 6:30p	15	16 All Vestry Meeting 7p	17 Bible Study and Midweek Worship 6:30p	18	19 Messy Church, 6p	20 Decorating Church, 9a
21 Worship, 9a Faith Formation 10:15a Greening of the Sanctuary, 10:15a Bible Study, 6:30p Blue Christmas at MUP, 7p	22 Blue Christmas/ Communion at Penn Mar 1:45p	23	24 Christmas Eve Candlelight Services 3p & 7:30p	25 Christmas Day Worship, 9a	26	27 Confirmation Class, 9:30a
28 Lessons & Carols 9a Birthday/Anniversary Celebration, 10:15a	29	30	31	Jan 1	Jan 2	Jan 3 One Night in Bethlehem



12/01 Dominic Cardinal
12/07 Nathan Kramer
12/04 David Dreher
12/11 Serafina Julio
12/25 Jim Hager



December Newsletter



Address service requested

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