



December 2012

November 29, 2012

Advent and Christmas Worship

Advent One: Sunday, December 2:
Worship at 8:00, 9:30 and 10:45 a.m.

Wednesday Advent Worship:

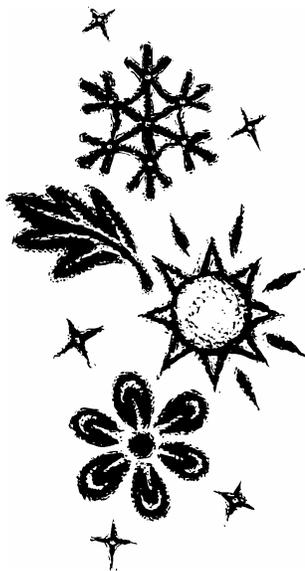
Wednesdays, December 5, 12, and 19
at 7:00 p.m.

Holden Evening Prayer

Advent Two: Sunday, December 9:
Worship at 8:00, 9:30 and 10:45 a.m.
Sunday Education at 10:30 a.m.

Advent Three: Sunday, December 16:
Worship at 8:00, 9:30 and 10:45 a.m.
Sunday Education at 10:30 a.m.

Advent Four: Sunday, December 23:
Worship at 8:00, 9:30 and 10:45 a.m.



Christmas Eve

Monday, December 24:
Festival Worship at 4:00, 6:00 and 10:00 p.m.
Holy Communion at all three services

First Sunday of Christmas: December 30
Two Services of worship at 8:00 and 10:00 a.m.

Come and Celebrate!

Come, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come

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Church Life Updates
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Enhancement
Project**
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Celebration**
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Pastor Tony's Article

A few months ago I preached on the lesson from the Old Testament: Exodus 16:2-15. As I contemplate my future and the future of First Lutheran Church – Little Falls, I cannot help but think back to this passage. I can identify with the Hebrews and I think some of you might be able to as well.

The whole company of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron there in the wilderness. The Israelites said, "Why didn't GOD let us die in comfort in Egypt where we had lamb stew and all the bread we could eat? You've brought us out into this wilderness to starve us to death, the whole company of Israel!" Exodus 16:2-3; The Message

I identify with the uneasiness, with the question of why have we been brought to this place; to this point in life? It's as if the Hebrews are saying: "ok God, we've come this far, what are we going to do next; where are you leading us next? What's next?"

This is what I identify with: "where are you leading me next? What's next?" For me, I feel this way because I know God has brought me to the point of not renewing my contract. Many in the church might also feel this way (what's next?) for a variety of reasons: personal (what am I going to do for a job, how are we going to pay for that, I'm diagnosed with what...etc), spiritual (I feel alone, I don't feel connected with God, I don't pray enough...etc) and church related (what's going to happen next, the building project is too big...etc). Whatever the reason is, we are standing, like the Hebrews, waiting to see what is next, all the while we know that God is calling us into the wilderness, the unknown. God is calling us into a place we have never been before or maybe we have and that's what scares us most. We are standing on the edge of the wilderness and are being called to journey into the unknown.

This is scary. Even with faith, traveling into the unknown can be scary. Heck the Hebrews were scared and they just witnessed the plagues in Egypt... not to mention the parting of the Red Sea.

Even with those personal encounters with God, the Hebrews were still uncertain about traveling into the unknown of the wilderness that lay before them. A wilderness filled with all sorts of uncertainties and danger. The choice to go forward, into the wilderness, or stay where they were, begged to be answered, so the whole community was gathered; "When Aaron gave out the instructions to the whole company of Israel, they turned to face the wilderness. And there it was: the Glory of GOD visible in the Cloud." Exodus 16:10; *The Message*

We too are on the edge of the wilderness, looking out into the unknown; whether it's personal, professional, family oriented, spiritual, or church related. Some of us might be scared by the thought of going forward. Some of us might be exhilarated by the thought of going forward. Still others of us do not know what to think about moving forward. No doubt the Hebrews felt the same way. Yet as they turned and looked out into the unknown, out into the wilderness, they saw God had gone before them. More than seeing God before them, they were given the promise that God would guide them along the journey and that He would give them grace (for the Hebrews this was manna and quail) along the way.

As we look out into the wilderness, into the unknown, we can expect to see God there before us. We can expect to see God out there in the vast unknown because He has gone before us to prepare the way and we can expect to find his grace with each and every step we take in the wilderness.

Pastor Tony Oltmann

toltmann@flclittlefalls.org

Letter from Pastor Tony:

As many of you already know, I made the difficult choice not to renew my contract for 2013. This decision was not an easy one to make. I have grown to love this church community and have thoroughly enjoyed being your pastor. I have many fond memories I will cherish for the rest of my ministry.

I am not sure what is next. I just know that not renewing my contract was the right choice for First Lutheran Church, my ongoing ministry, and my family. For now I will continue to work with the other churches and wait to see where God is leading my family. Your prayers are most certainly welcome as you all will remain in mine.

Below is the letter I gave to the executive committee and the council:

It is with a heavy heart that I inform you of my intention not to renew my contract with First Lutheran Church – Little Falls in 2013. I have found it increasingly difficult to juggle two different church schedules especially when I do not live in either community.

I was not aware of how difficult it would be to have my attention divided between two congregations; I often felt pulled in two directions. It was hard to give both congregations my best and be fully present. I feel I missed a lot of community building time, and relationship building time, by not being able to be available every Sunday.

Though I do love First Lutheran, and it's members I feel it is a necessary decision for the benefit of my ongoing ministry and my family. I have really enjoyed these past 18 months with First Lutheran Church. You are a wonderfully loving congregation who has shaped my ministry. I have learned a lot about myself and ministry and will always remember my time with First Lutheran fondly.

"I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus." 1 Corinthians 1:4

Farewell for Pastor Tony

Pastor Tony's last Sunday with us is Sunday, December 16. Please plan to be present at worship to share in fellowship and thanks to Pastor Tony and his family. We are grateful for his presence in mission and ministry here with us for the past 21 months and wish him all the best for the future. Thank you, Pastor Tony, may God continue to bless you richly!



Council Highlights

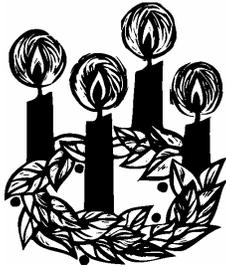
- Heard that the Pastor Parish Relations Team will coordinate the pie fellowship following the Thanksgiving Eve service on Wednesday, November 21.
- Heard that there is a positive response to estimate of giving cards for 2013.
- Plan to include part-time Associate Pastor position in 2013 Mission Plan.
- Thank you to First Lutheran stewards who assisted with the Celebration of Life for Ray Stumpf at the Little Falls Middle School.



Pastor Parish Relations Committee

Members of the congregation are selected by the leadership team of First Lutheran to serve on the Pastor Parish Relations Committee. This committee serves the congregation and the pastor as a 'sounding board,' and has a communications role between the congregation and its pastor/s. Members are: Merlin Bruns, Tifanii Dahl, Doug Dahlberg, Stephanie Doty, and Ted Pfohl. If you have feedback about our ministry together, please contact one of the committee members.





**Wishing you and yours
a Blessed Christmas Season!**

First Lutheran Church Staff Ministry Team

**Advent in Song
Sunday, December 9, 7:00 p.m.**

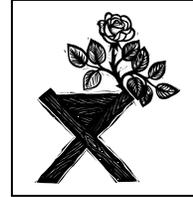
Plan to attend this evening of song at First Lutheran featuring a variety of vocal music groups. The St. Francis Community Chorale under the direction of Barb Stumpf, and Brothers in Harmony directed by Kathy Pederson, will be present as well as several groups of singers from First Lutheran of all ages. Dessert social will follow the concert. There is no charge for this event but a free-will donation will be received for Oasis Central Minnesota. For more information, contact Becky Nelson, at 749-2336.

Thank You

Thank you to the Vic and Bonnie Bieniek family for the gift of a beautiful Christmas tree for the church sanctuary.

2012

Advent and Christmas



Christmas Poinsettias

Your donations of holiday poinsettias to decorate our sanctuary for Christmas are welcome. You may donate in honor/memory of a loved one. The church office will order poinsettias for delivery for Christmas. The cost per 6" plant is \$10.00. Submit your request to Susan in the church office by Friday, December 7.

**Advent Wednesday Worship
December 5, 12, and 19 at 7:00 p.m.**

In preparation for the coming of the Christ child we gather to worship each Wednesday during Advent using the service of Holden Evening Prayer. Let the quiet beauty of song prepare your heart for the real meaning of the season. Refreshments will be served following the service.



GoodShop.com

You can make every gift count this holiday season. You can find coupons for more than 1,600 top stores and a percentage of virtually every sale will be donated to First Lutheran Church. Just go to GoodShop.com and designate "First Lutheran Church – Little Falls" as the cause you support and then click over to your favorite store and shop! Or you can add the toolbar to your browser at <http://www.goodsearch.com/toolbar> and your purchases will automatically earn a donation for the church even if you forget to go to GoodShop first. Thank you for supporting First Lutheran through your online shopping! Spread the word.



Worship Space Enhancement Project Update

On Sunday, November 18, First Lutheran Church stewards/members gathered in a special meeting in the worship space to address the following motion:

We, the Members (stewards) of First Lutheran Church approve proceeding with the Worship Space Enhancement project as proposed on September 23 by Zerr Berg Architects; and to secure financing with ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) Mission Investment Fund for the project, including the consolidation of existing mortgage debt for a total amount not to exceed \$750,000; and to engage the service of ELCA Stewardship Key Leaders to conduct a capital campaign.

Those present voted to proceed with the Worship Space Enhancement project, with 84 'yes' votes and 9 'no' votes. The Worship Space Enhancement team met on Tuesday, November 20. Team members along with architect Brian Berg outlined the next steps and a plan for moving forward and completing this mission project.



Home-Brewed Faith Sunday, December 2, 12:00 noon

We continue the series of Home Brewed Faith (HBF). First's Commissions for Education and Youth coordinate this opportunity for people of all ages to continue to develop and enhance their faith and learn how to share their faith with others. Come and share a noon lunch and afternoon session. This event is for everyone—all ages and walks of life!

The major components of the plan include:

- Solicit bids and select a prime contractor by the end of February.
- Begin work on facility improvements outside of the worship space during March and April.
- Commence with Worship Space Enhancement in early May with targeted completion at the end of July/early August.

The Worship Space Enhancement team will continue to meet approximately every two weeks to address various aspects of the project. The next meeting is Wednesday, December 5 at 4:00 p.m. The team will continue to update the stewards of First Lutheran through the bulletin, newsletter, bulletin board postings, and provide brief updates at worship.

Questions or comments about the Worship Space Enhancement project can be directed to any member of the team, they are: Stephanie Adams, Dave Buker, LaVerne Hempeck, Bob and Sonya Just, Darrell Larsen, Bruce Moller, Paula Monahan, Becky Nelson, Mary Pfohl, Nancy Ratzloff, Tammy Zwilling and Pastor David Sperstad.

2012 Giving

The last date for offerings received to be credited for the year 2012 is Monday, December 31, 2012. Thank you for your faithful giving throughout the year.

Adult Opportunities

Men's Bible Study Breakfast

All men of the congregation and friends are invited to a Men's Bible Breakfast study. The weekday study meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month (December 5 and 19) at 6:15 a.m. at the church for breakfast. You are welcome to attend – come when you are able, leave when you must. For more information, contact Pastor Dave.

Adult Book Club Tuesday, December 18

The book for December is Christmas Jars, by Jason Wright. Readers please secure your own copy to read and we will meet together in the church library on Tuesday, December 18 at 7:00 p.m. to discuss the book. For more information, contact Tifanii Dahl at 632-8207.



Office Volunteer Appreciation Event

This year, have you helped to fold newsletters or bulletins? Have you been part of a team to put together bulk mailings? Have you answered telephones and helped with projects as an Office Hospitality volunteer? If you have used your gifts to serve in the First Lutheran Church office during this past year, **you are invited:**

Volunteer Appreciation Reception Thursday, December 13, 3:00 – 4:30 p.m.

Please come for fellowship, treats, and our thanks to you for your service to God. Your ministry is vital to the mission of First Lutheran. We look forward to seeing you there!

Women's Circle: "Gathered by God": Shake it Up Acts 4:31

Martha Circle

The Martha Circle meets Monday, December 10 at 10:00 a.m. at the church. Hostess is Ann Pederson.

Cornerstones (Seniors age 55 and better) Potluck Lunch

Wednesday, December 19, 11:30 a.m.

We gather for potluck lunch on Wednesday, December 19 at 11:30 a.m. at church. Please bring a dish of your choosing to share—there's always plenty to go around! Bring a friend and come for food, and fellowship!

Women's Study:

"The Journey: a Nativity Story" by Adam Hamilton

**Wednesdays, December 5, 12 and 19
9:30 a.m. or 6:30 p.m.**

All are welcome to participate in this video study during the weeks of Advent. You can choose to attend either the morning or evening session. The evening study will conclude in time to attend Advent worship with Holden Evening Prayer at 7:00 p.m. Bring your Bible and a friend and come for interesting sharing. For more information, contact Stephanie Adams, 632-3058 or Gail Hittesdorf, 632-6667 (church) or 632-2218 (home).

Ways that First Folks are “First...Servants of All”

Angel Tree Gift Giving

You are invited to share your gifts with families and children in our community who are living at or below the federally recognized poverty level. Take a tag from the Angel Tree located in the Gathering Space. Return your unwrapped gifts with their tag to the church by Sunday, December 16. Thank you for your continued participation in the Angel Tree project! Your generosity helps many around us to celebrate this holiday season with thanks and praise. For more information, contact Annalee VanDenheuvel at 320-573-1935.

Home Delivered Meals

First Lutheran participates in delivering Meals on Wheels in the community. Our next dates to deliver meals are Monday-Friday, December 3-7. Meet at the Buckman building at 10:00 a.m., you'll be done between 11:00-11:30 a.m. To sign up, contact the church office. Thank you to First Lutheran's coordinator, Kim Liebel.



Thanksgiving Offerings

Thank you to all for your generous contributions to the Thanksgiving offering. Over \$500.00 in gifts will be shared in support of our mission partners – Lutheran Social Service and Morrison County Chaplaincy. On Sunday morning, November 25, many hands worked in Stoltz Hall to help package nutritious meals for the hungry around the world through Food for Kidz. Stewards from First Lutheran and friends from the community packed over 5,000 meals! Well done! Thank you for your generosity as you give thanks to God for his many blessings by sharing with others.

Making a Joyful Noise!

For the Morrison County Food Shelf

Blessed are the Noisemakers! This Advent season, “noisemaking” volunteers from various churches are stationed at cash collection boxes at Coborn's in Little Falls to raise funds for the Morrison County Food Shelf. Shoppers are encouraged to place cash in the collection boxes, to benefit those for whom the holidays are less than joyful. Keep an eye out for the “noisemakers,” and please help us make a joyful noise by giving your time and treasures generously for those less fortunate. First Lutheran's time to “make noise” is Thursday, November 29, 3:00-7:00 p.m. For more information, contact Sue Gustner in the church office, 632-6667.

Ruby's Pantry Food Distribution Monday, December 17 Bethel Lutheran Church

Oasis Central Minnesota coordinates Ruby's Pantry Food Distribution in Little Falls. Ruby's Pantry is a community outreach of Home and Away Ministries a non-profit organization that provides surplus food to anyone interested, there is no income qualification. Recipients are asked to bring their own box and a cash donation of \$15.00. Food is distributed at Bethel Lutheran Church, 901 Broadway Ave. West on Monday, December 17 from 4:30-6:00 p.m. (Normal schedule is the fourth Monday of each month.)

For more information or to volunteer to assist with food distribution, call Oasis Central Minnesota, at 632-9140.

Can Care Collection

Keep saving those aluminum cans!

Save a can – Save the earth –

Save our youth budget! Keep those cans coming!

Please place your securely tied bag by the church shed door. Thank you!

"Children First" Christian Preschool Update

Greetings from "Children First" Christian Preschool!

Wow! December is here! In November we gave thanks for family, friends, teachers, pets and more. You can check out our Thanksgiving turkeys in the education wing hallway. We had visits from community helpers: Police Officer Derrick Nagorski, Firefighter Lisa Lintner, and Nurse Tracy Moe. Thank you all for your service to the community. We also learned about healthy food and keeping our bodies fit for service.

"Children First" celebrates with a Christmas Program on Saturday, December 15, at 3:00 p.m. All are welcome. We are looking forward to sharing the gift of Jesus with everyone!

"Children First" Christian Preschool accepts registration of preschoolers the entire year pending class openings. We have openings for currently enrolled children in the Friday Friends Class which creates a 3 day preschool week. Please encourage families who have children ages 33 months through Pre-kindergarten to stop by for a

visit. All are welcome to experience the fun, the educational activities and the spiritual growth in God's love.

"Children First" Christian Preschool Advisory Team and Staff would like to thank everyone for their contributions of time, talents, financial support, and prayers. Thank you to all who have participated in the Giving Campaign. We have raised over \$2,000. Thank you to all who assisted with our Santa Parade Float and our "Tree of Giving" at the Fishing Museum Christmas Tree Auction.

Especially thank YOU for keeping the children and families of "Children First" in your prayers.

God's Blessing to all for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Yours in Christ's Service,

Gail Hittesdorf, Director

Confirmation Ministries

Fourth Grade: Four-week class on Holy Baptism begins Wednesday, January 9, 2013, at 7:00 p.m.

Seventh Grade: Ten Commandments class begins Wednesday, January 9 through January 30, 2013 at 7:00 p.m.

Eighth Grade: Old Testament class begins Wednesday, January 9, 2013, at 7:00 p.m. Pastor Dave will teach this class.

Tenth Grade: Tenth grade confirmands and their mentors have begun their faith journey. Thank you to the adults who have agreed to mentor a tenth grade student. Pray that both student and mentor will grow in relationship with Jesus and with each other during their time together.

Ninth and Tenth Grade Retreats: Mark your calendars – Ninth Grade and Tenth Grade retreat on Relationships is scheduled at Luther Crest Bible Camp on Friday-Sunday, February 8-10, 2013. Watch for a letter about this retreat!





**Advent Craft Sale
Saturday, December 1
9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

Come and enjoy the start of the Advent season at the annual Advent Craft Sale and Luncheon.

Handcrafts and bake sale items will be available to purchase. There will be a delicious soup luncheon, and lots of treats and gift items! Proceeds from this year's sale will support youth ministry programming at First Lutheran.

Your support of this great FUNdraiser is appreciated.

Sunday Morning Education Ministry

Thank you to everyone who participated and led stations for the last rotation.

A new rotation theme, "Journey to Bethlehem" meets Sundays, December 2, 9, and 16. Children will prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus as they explore the meaning of "God with us," hear that Jesus is the Messiah and talk about what that means; discover the significance of the Messiah's coming, not as a king or warrior, but as a baby born in a humble place and be able to locate the story of Jesus' birth in the Book of Luke. Sign up on the gathering space board to share your faith by leading a station!

Come for Sunday School and Morning Education at 10:30 a.m. Preschool and Pre-kindergarten meets in the Moses Classroom in the education wing. TREK Rotation (K-5) meets in Stoltz Hall. Grades 6-12 meets in the Youth Room.



**Sunday School Christmas Program
"God With Us"
Sunday, December 16, 3:00 p.m.**

All children are invited to participate in this year's Christmas program. We will experience a traditional style program "God With Us." Many helping hands are important in order to make the program shine. With the spirit of Christmas in your heart, consider how you can share your gifts to assist with the program.

Rehearsal is Saturday, December 15, 9:00-11:00 a.m. for children K-5. Preschoolers please arrive at 10:20 a.m.

For more information or to volunteer, contact Beth Cooper, 632-0064 or Amber Sobiech, 616-9626, or the church office, 632-6667.

Looking Ahead:



**Gospel Gang
(Grades 3-5)
Snow Tubing at Camp Ripley Bennet Hill
Sunday, February 3, 2013
1:00 – 4:30 p.m.**

**See the White Pages in this newsletter for
Many More Youth Events and Activities
and a message from Youth Minister,
Jay Kiel.**

News of the Family

+

Kade Richard Schlagel, son of Cory and Tara Schlagel was baptized on November 18.

+

Received as new steward/members in November were, Mark and Therese Meyer and Brady.

+

Sunshine Chairperson is Mary Larson. Please call 632-8203 if you know of someone who is ill, hospitalized, etc., so that she may send them a card.

Items for the **January NEWSLETTER** are due on **December 20, 2012!**



Church Office is closed on Tuesday, December 25. Office hours for December 26-28 are 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

Annual Meeting—Sunday, January 27, 2013

Following the 10:45 a.m. service