



December 2014

December 3, 2014

Advent and Christmas Worship



Advent One: Sunday, November 30:
Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.

Wednesday Advent Worship:

Wednesdays, December 3, 10, and 17
at 7:00 p.m.

Holden Evening Prayer

Advent Two: Sunday, December 7:
Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.
Sunday Education at 9:35 a.m.

Advent Three: Sunday, December 14:
Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.
Sunday Education at 9:35 a.m.

Advent Four: Sunday, December 21:
Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.
Sunday Education at 9:35 a.m.

Christmas Eve

Wednesday, December 24:
**Festival Worship at 3:00, 5:00
and 10:00 p.m.**

Holy Communion at all three services

First Sunday of Christmas: December 28
Two Services of worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.

Pastor Hank's Article
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Church Life Updates
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Mission Life
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Parish Nurse News
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"Children First"
Christian Preschool
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Come and Worship!

Come, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come

Notes from Pastor Hank

We have entered the season of Advent and once again we turn our minds and spirits towards Bethlehem and the great mystery of God becoming one of us in order that we might become more fully human, which is to say more fully loving. Once again we grow silent, remembering that long ago “silent night” when a young woman named Mary gave birth to a child named Jesus and the arc of the universe began bending toward love.

There is a great Christmas hymn in the Lutheran hymnal that says it well:

Love has come, a light in the darkness!
Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.
See, all heaven has come to proclaim it;
Hear how their song of joy arises:
Love! Love! Born unto you a savior!
Love! Love! Glory to God on high.

Love is born! Come share in the wonder.
Love is God now asleep in the hay.
See the glow in the eyes of his mother;
What is the name her heart is saying?
Love! Love! Love is the name she whispers;
Love! Love! Jesus Immanuel.

Love has come and never will leave us!
Love is life everlasting and free.
Love is Jesus within and among us.
Love is the peace that our hearts are seeking.
Love! Love! Love is the gift of Christmas.
Love! Love! Praise to you, God on high!



At Christmas we give gifts to those we love, to those we care about. I know that we love, we care about First Lutheran Church and its ministries to our members, our friends, and our community. If this Christmas, you could give an extra financial gift to First Lutheran above and beyond your regular giving, it will go a long way to ensure that we can continue being faithful to the God who calls us and the people who need what we do best—proclaim the gospel and serve God’s people in love.

My prayer for each of you this Advent and Christmas season is that the gift of Christmas—the love of God for you, the love of God in you, and the love of God through you—would delight you and bring you great joy and peace.

Mark your calendars for December 21 at 4:00 o’clock in the afternoon for our Children’s Christmas Program. Our kids and their teachers are working hard to bring you the Christmas story in word and song—and as always, it is going to be great fun.

Please note that we have changed the times of our Christmas Eve services. Last year we worshipped at 4:00, 6:00 and 10:00 p.m. The 4:00 o’clock service had close to 500 people which is really more than we can handle. Clearly most people like to worship before Christmas Eve dinner and so ***this year we will hold our Christmas Eve services at 3:00, 5:00 and 10:00 p.m.*** The 3:00 and 5:00 o’clock services will be identical, family-oriented services while the 10:00 o’clock service will be a more meditative candlelight service. I look forward to celebrating the “gift of Christmas” with you all.

May the light of Christmas shine brightly in your hearts and in your homes and in our world.

2014
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 12.

**Advent Wednesday Worship
December 3, 10, and 17 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. On December 10, we will include a service of healing. Invite a friend to come with you and let the quiet beauty of song prepare your heart for Christ's birth. Refreshments will be served following the service.

Advent Devotionals

You may wish to set aside a time for Advent devotions during December. There are many resources available for your use, both hard copy and online. One resource is God Pause, provided by Luther Seminary. You can sign up for a daily email at <http://www.luthersem.edu/godpause/>. We will also have the copies available at church. Contact the church office if you would like to receive a copy in the mail.



Council Highlights

- Approved designating the Thanksgiving Eve offering for hunger ministry.
- Heard that a service of healing will be offered during Advent.
- Heard that Christmas Eve worship services will be held at new times. *See page one.*
- Discussed the potential timeline for the process of calling a pastor.



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

First Lutheran Church Staff Ministry Team

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 3 and 17) 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 Hank or Jay Kiel.

Book Club

The Book Club will not meet in December. The book that we will read and discuss in January is The Diary of Mattie Spenser by Sandra Dallas. Readers may secure their own copy of the book. We will meet on Tuesday, January 27 at 7:00 p.m. For more info., 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 11, 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: "Faith in the Family: Transforming Life and Faith"

Acts 16:15

Martha Circle

The Martha Circle meets Monday, December 15 at 11:00 a.m. at the church for potluck lunch.



The Gift of Generosity

Thank you to everyone who has supported First Lutheran Church this past year with their time, talent and financial contributions. We are thankful for your continued faithful and generous support.

Numerous members appreciate the convenience of automated giving through Simply Giving®. If you would like a convenient way to make regular offerings or if you plan to make an additional gift before the end of the year, we encourage you to look into our electronic giving options. As the pace of life speeds up, especially around the holidays, you may find electronic giving a most welcome way to make contributions. Contact Susan Gustner or Gloria Kofoed in the church office for more information. Thank you!

2014 Giving

The last date for offerings received to be credited for the year 2014 is Wednesday, December 31, 2014. Thank you for your faithful giving throughout the year.

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 14. 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 320-232-9366.



Thanksgiving Offerings

The church council has designated the offering received on Thanksgiving be given to those in need outside of the congregation. Gifts will be shared with hunger ministries both local and global. Thank you for your generous giving!

God’s Work – Our Hands

Thank you!

- ☞ Thank you to those who delivered meals to the homebound during the week of November 10.
- ☞ Thank you to those who provided items or worked at the Lutheran Care Center Fall Sale.
- ☞ Thank you to all who ordered a fresh balsam wreath! Your purchase supports youth ministry at First Lutheran.
- ☞ Thank you to all who volunteered to assist with the Lutefisk and Meatball Supper on December 2. You can still sign up!

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 will “make noise” on Thursday, December 11 from 3:00-7:00 p.m. For more information or to volunteer, contact Sue Gustner in the church office, 632-6667.

Ruby’s Pantry Food Distribution Monday, December 22 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 \$20.00. Food is distributed at Bethel Lutheran Church, 901 Broadway Ave. West on Monday, December 22 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.

Thrivent Choice© reminder:

Many First Lutheran members are also members of Thrivent Financial. This year 43 of these members are eligible to designate Thrivent Choice © dollars (contributed by Thrivent) to the non-profit organization of their choosing. As of September 30, only 15 of the eligible members have made a designation of these funds. Funds can be designated on-line or you can receive a form for designation and assistance in the church office. If you are unsure whether you are eligible to direct Choice © dollars, please contact Thrivent representative, Carlyle Olsen at 632-1655. First Lutheran Church and “Children First” Christian Preschool are able to receive designated Choice © dollars. In 2013, these dollars amounted to over \$5,000 in additional funds for ministry here. Thank you for your support!

Confirmation Ministries

Fourth Grade: Four-week class on Holy Baptism begins Wednesday, January 7 and meets each week thru January 28, 2015, at 7:00 p.m.

Seventh Grade: Ten Commandments class meets Wednesdays, January 7 through 28 at 7:00 p.m.

Eighth Grade: Old Testament class begins Wednesday, January 7, 2015, at 7:00 p.m. Pastor Hank will teach this class. Bring your Bible!

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.

Annual Lutefisk Dinner Bethel Lutheran Church Tuesday, December 2 4:30-8:00 p.m.

Sister congregation Bethel Lutheran has served this annual holiday meal for many years. First Lutheran is offering helping hands for the meal again this year. We will provide support as they host the dinner. Consider how you may assist with this event, here are some possibilities:

- ☞ Setup in early afternoon, or take down following the meal, both on December 2
- ☞ Assist in the kitchen on December 2
- ☞ Serve tables in two shifts, 4:00-6:30 p.m. or 6:30-8:00 p.m.
- ☞ Bake pies – apple or pumpkin
- ☞ Bake white or rye bread
- ☞ Bake holiday cookies
- ☞ Tickets are available in the church office, advance adult tickets, \$15.00, \$17.00 at the door, youth ages 11-16, \$10.00, children ages 10 and under, free.
- ☞ Sign up while you are at church or call the church office. You’ll enjoy the evening even if you don’t eat lutefisk. ☺



Recently, the Little Falls school district has seen a rise in students diagnosed with pertussis, or whooping cough. District families have received letters to raise awareness of the increase in this disease. In my experience as a nurse at Children's Hospital in Minneapolis, I cared for many children with pertussis. They were some of the sickest children, turning blue with each coughing episode and requiring support to breathe. After becoming a mother myself, the need to immunize and protect from these deadly diseases became more important. Immunizing is essential to living in a community!

Why immunize?

People can be confused by the messages in the media. We hear that, thanks to vaccines, some diseases are gone from the U.S. so we can stop these shots, but these diseases are not truly "gone." The Minnesota Wild hockey team may be dealing with a mumps outbreak. A Minnesota Amish community suffered a breakout of polio. A lack of immunizations, or a waning immunity, allowed the resurgence of these illnesses. We are seeing an increase in pertussis when a certain number of people are not immunized. Debate persists over the possible harm immunizations may cause to developing brains or bodies. Scientific research has not yielded decisive evidence that immunizations are linked to any major condition.

Diseases are becoming rare due to vaccinations.

Diseases, such as polio, tetanus, and diphtheria are becoming rare in the U.S. largely because of vaccination against them. Tetanus is still a major killer in third world countries. It's much like bailing out a boat with a slow leak. When we started bailing, the boat was filled with water. But we have been bailing fast and hard, and now it is almost dry. We could say, "Good. The boat is dry, so we can throw away the bucket and relax." But the leak hasn't stopped. Before long we'd notice a little water seeping in, and soon it could be back to the same level.

Until we can "stop the leak" (eliminate the disease), it is important to keep immunizing. Even if there are only a few cases of disease today, if we take away the protection given by vaccination, more people will become infected and will spread disease to others.

Japan reduced pertussis vaccinations and an epidemic occurred.

In 1974, Japan had a successful pertussis vaccination program, with nearly 80% of Japanese children vaccinated. That year 393 cases of pertussis were reported in the country, and there were no deaths from pertussis. Rumors spread that pertussis vaccination was not needed and that the vaccine was not safe, and by 1976 only 10% of infants were vaccinated. In 1979, Japan suffered a major pertussis epidemic, with more than 13,000 cases and 41 deaths. In 1981, vaccination with acellular pertussis vaccine began, and the number of pertussis cases dropped.

What if we stopped vaccinating?

Diseases that are almost unknown would stage a comeback. We would see epidemics of diseases that are nearly under control today. More children would get sick and more would die.

We vaccinate to protect our future.

We vaccinate to protect our children, grandchildren, and their grandchildren. Smallpox has been eradicated by "stopping the leak" in the boat. If we keep vaccinating now, diseases like polio and meningitis won't infect, disable, or kill children. Immunizations are one of the best ways to put an end to the serious effects of certain diseases and they are a part of the shared responsibility we have as members of a community. Decisions we make personally about immunizations, we risk affecting other people in our community adversely.

I urge you to please vaccinate!

Adapted from and further information available at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

"Children First" Christian Preschool

Greetings from "Children First" Christian Preschool!

Wow—December is here! Watch for themes including music week, pajama day, and celebrating the birth of Jesus. In November, we gave thanks for family friends, teachers, pets and more. We learned about healthy foods and keeping our bodies fit by doing yoga. We experienced our five senses and shared favorite Bible stories.

"Children First" celebrates with a Christmas Program on Saturday, December 20, at 3:00 p.m. All are welcome. A cookie reception will follow the program. We look forward to seeing you!

"Children First" Christian Preschool accepts registration of preschoolers the entire year pending class openings. 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.

2015 "God's Creation" wall calendars are available for purchase at \$10.00 each. We have a limited quantity available. These make great gifts. You can purchase one in the church office or you may contact Gail.

"Children First" is thankful to all who give of their time, talents, financial support and prayers. Thank you to all who participate in the 2015 Gifting Campaign. We have received \$1,540 in gifts to date. Thank you to all who assist with the Santa Parade float and the "Tree of Giving" at the Fishing Museum Christmas Tree Lane event. We are blessed with your ongoing support.

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

Sunday Morning Education Ministry

Thank you to everyone who participated and led stations for the last rotation, "Respect." It was exciting to see the activities, food and art projects.

A new rotation theme, "Christmas Around the World" continues Sundays, December 7, 14, and 21. Through games, music, storytelling, cooking and art children will learn about the how the Christmas story is celebrated around the world. Thank you for sharing your faith by leading a station!

Come for Sunday School at 9:35 a.m. All ages gather in the sanctuary for opening music. Preschool and Pre-kindergarten meets in the Moses Classroom in the education wing. TREK Rotation (K-5) meets in Stoltz Hall. Grades 6-12 meet in the Youth Room.

"But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people." *Luke 2:10*



Sunday School Christmas Program "A Christmas to Believe In" Sunday, December 21, 4:00 p.m.

Sunday School Christmas Program "A Christmas to Believe In" will be held Sunday, December 21, beginning at 4:00 p.m. Families, guests and friends of all ages are invited to attend.

Sunday School children and leaders will rehearse the songs during the Sunday School hour beginning November 30. One full rehearsal is planned for Saturday, December 20 at 1:00 p.m. Volunteers are needed prior to program day to organize costumes and props and to help with direction. If you can assist with this wonderful annual event or for more info, contact Amber Sobiech, 616-9626, or Becky Nelson, 749-2336.



**Advent Craft Sale
Saturday, December 6
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.



Lefse-Making

Bring your rolling pin and come to help prepare this favorite treat on Saturday, November 29 at 8:30 a.m. Lefse will be sold at the Advent Craft Sale and Luncheon on Saturday, December 6. This project is open to all ages!

Can Care Collection

Keep saving those aluminum cans!
Save a can – Save the earth –
Save our youth budget! (The last collection brought in over \$200.00) – thank you!

Keep those cans coming!

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



**Wild and Crazy Saints
Grades 6-8
Roller Skating at Skatin' Place
Friday, December 12
5:30-10:00 p.m.**

Bring a friend for a fun night of skating at Skatin' Place. Your cost of \$10 covers admission, transportation, unlimited laser tag, pizza and pop, and roller skate rental. In-line skate rental is \$2 extra or you may bring your own. Sign up on the youth table in the gathering space.

Looking Ahead – Put these events on your calendar now:

**Gospel Gang
(Grades 3-5)
Three Bears Waterpark
Sunday, January 11, 2015
1:00-5:00 p.m.**



**Gospel Gang
(Grades 3-5)
Snow Tubing at Camp Ripley Bennet Hill
Sunday, February 8, 2015
12:30 – 4:30 p.m.**

News of the Family

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Donald James Kray, son of Linnea Kasper and Shawn Kray was baptized on November 9.

Savanna Rose Pirnie and Emma Lynn Margaret Pirnie, daughters of Amanda Kray and Stephan Pirnie were baptized on November 9.

Mathias John Anderson, son of Matthew and Tina Anderson was baptized on November 16.

Allie Rae Giese, daughter of Tony and Teresa Giese was baptized on November 16.

Autumn Marie Pollock, daughter of Norm and Sarah Pollock was baptized on November 23.

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Mary Jane Wolters died on November 17. Her funeral was November 25 at Bethel Lutheran.

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Items for the **January NEWSLETTER** are due on **December 19, 2014!**



**Church Office is closed on Christmas Day,
Thursday, December 25.**

Annual Meeting—Sunday, January 25, 2015
Following the 10:30 a.m. service