



December 2015

December 11, 2015

Advent and Christmas Worship



Advent One: Sunday, November 29:
Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.

Wednesday Advent Worship:

Wednesdays, December 2, 9, 16 and 23
at 7:00 p.m.
Holden Evening Prayer

Advent Two: Sunday, December 6:
Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.
Sunday Education at 9:35 a.m.

Advent Three: Sunday, December 13:
Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.
Sunday Education at 9:35 a.m.

Advent Four: Sunday, December 20:
Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.
Sunday Education at 9:35 a.m.

Christmas Eve

Thursday, 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 27
Two Services of worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.

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"Children First"
Christian Preschool
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Come and Worship!

Come, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come

Notes from Pastor Hank

As we enter Advent and so begin a new church year, our thoughts turn toward Bethlehem and the mystery of Emmanuel—God with us in the infant Jesus. It is indeed a mystery to ponder, a mystery that challenges us—who live in a self-indulgent culture—to wonder what it means for us to celebrate the birth of a child who grew to be a man who had nothing and wanted nothing other than to share the love of God. What does it mean to call such a man “Lord?” What does it mean to follow such a man? What does it mean for the way we live to call this man God and to worship him? Advent invites us to ponder these questions and to examine our lives in the light of these questions. My prayer for all of us during this Advent and Christmas season is that we would all be drawn into the mystery of Emmanuel and enter the New Year more determined than ever to follow the Way of Jesus in all the places where we live and work and play. We need this—our world needs this.

Speaking about Advent and Christmas, two things to remember:

- Every Wednesday night in December, at 7:00 p.m., we will gather in the sanctuary for Advent Worship. We will be using Holden Evening Prayer—a beautiful, haunting musical setting—and I will give a short message on the meaning of Advent, expanding on the meaning of the previous Sunday’s message.
 - On December 9 and December 16, following the Wednesday night Advent Worship, I will teach a class on the two Nativity Stories in the New Testament—one which is found in the Gospel of Matthew and the other in the Gospel of Luke. Both stories are about the birth of Jesus, but the stories of his birth are very different from each other. Stick around after worship and find out how they are different and why they are different. It will be fun and informative!
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We are going to be making a few major changes to our Confirmation Program next year—changes which are designed to enable us to do a far better job teaching our children what they need to know in order to understand and confirm the faith of the church. The changes will primarily concern 7th through 10th graders. Towards the end of this month, I will send a letter to these youth and their parents explaining the changes (which the Education Ministry Team and the Church Council has approved). We will then have a meeting in January with youth and parents to get their questions and feedback, and then we will provide an opportunity for the congregation as a whole to give feedback and ask questions. Stay tuned!

Christmas is a time for gift giving to those we love, to good friends and colleagues? It is also a time when many people balance their giving to family and friends with charitable giving. Such giving is truly within the Spirit of Christmas.

As we approach the end of the year, First Lutheran finds itself behind in offering both to the General Fund and the Building on Blessings Building Fund. We want our community of faith—which we all love and value—to begin the New Year in a strong financial position. If you have fallen behind in your giving, I encourage you to catch up before the end of December. If it is possible for you to make a one-time special “Christmas gift” to your church in this season of giving to help give us a solid financial foundation as we enter the New Year, it would be deeply appreciated.

2016 will be a transitional year. A new pastor will arrive, present ministries to our people and our community will continue, and new ministries will begin. It is a good time to be the church—thanks for helping to make it all happen.

*Peace and every blessing to you,
Pastor Hank*



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 Tuesday, December 15.

Advent Wednesday Worship

December 2, 9, 16 and 23 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. 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 the community Thanksgiving meal.
- Regretfully accepted the resignation of Tanna Stucky from the council. Thank you, Tanna, for your serving.
- Accepted with regret the resignation of Amber Sobiech from the part-time staff position of Volunteer Coordinator/Education Coordinator effective January 1.
- Agreed to a change to the commission and council meeting schedule for a trial period of three months.



**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 2 and 16) at 7:00 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. Watch for the newly selected books and keep reading! 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 during this past year, **you are invited:**

Volunteer Appreciation

Thursday, December 17, 10:00 a.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!

2015 Giving

The last date for offerings received to be credited for the year 2015 is Thursday, December 31, 2015. Thank you for your faithful giving throughout the year.

Martha Circle

The Martha Circle meets Monday, December 14 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!



Advent Craft Sale Saturday, December 5

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.

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 13. 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 the community Thanksgiving meal and other hunger ministries. 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 October 26.
- ☞ 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 1.
- ☞ Thank you to all who use their Thrivent Action Team Grant to do ministry!

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” two times on Tuesdays, December 1 and 15 both from 3:00-7:00 p.m. For more info, contact Sue Gustner in the church office, 632-6667.

Who is my Neighbor? Opportunity

The Salvation Army of Morrison County is recruiting bell ringers for the Red Kettle Christmas Campaign which helps to support people in poverty who turn to the Army for assistance with needs. The campaign will take place at Little Falls WalMart and Coborn’s store on Fridays, November 27 and through December 31. If you are available to volunteer as a bell ringer for one hour or more, or would like more information, please call 320-360-0332.



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. 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!



“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.” Matthew 1:18

There is something wrong with this picture. Want to know what? Then come to Pastor Hank’s two session class on the Nativity Stories found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and it will all become clear. Come on Wednesday evenings December 9 and 16 for Advent worship at 7:00 p.m. followed by this intriguing class. We will start about 7:45 and finish about 8:30.

Let’s learn together what that “silent, holy night” was all about and what it means for Christians in the 21st Century.

Confirmation Ministries

Fourth Grade: Four-week class on Holy Baptism begins Wednesday, January 6 and meets each week thru January 27, 2016, at 7:00 p.m.

Seventh Grade: Ten Commandments class meets Wednesdays, January 6 through 27 at 7:00 p.m.

Eighth Grade: Old Testament class begins Wednesday, January 6, 2016, 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.

ELW

Evangelical Lutheran Worship

We have used the Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnal (ELW) for several years. This hymnal is also used as a service book and contains many worship helps. As we learn new worship settings and hymns, the worship and music team finds it would be helpful to have additional hymnals. You are invited to provide a \$20 donation toward the purchase of a hymnal. If desired, you may designate your gift in honor or remembrance of a loved one or event. Your donation will be acknowledged on a bookplate inside the front cover of the hymnal. Envelopes are available for this purpose on the display table in the gathering space or on ministry opportunity sheets. Please write ‘ELW’ in the memo line of your check. Thank you and let’s worship together!

Parish Nurse News

Tracy Moe, RN Parish Nurse

Reminder: The cold and flu season is a good time to do what we can to stay healthy and not spread illness to others. Worshippers share the peace of Christ with one another as a sign of the Christian community fellowship we share. For those who are experiencing respiratory or cold symptoms, please remember to sneeze into the crook of your elbow, wash your hands, and/or kindly consider refraining from handshaking. You are always welcome to use the hand sanitizer that you will find in locations around the church or consider carrying your own small bottle. Your prayers for others who are ill are appreciated. Thank you!

For Senior and their families

Minnesota Board on Aging (MBA) is the gateway to services for Minnesota seniors and their families. MBA listens to senior concerns, researches for solutions, and proposes policy to address senior needs. In addition, MBA administer funds from the Older Americans Act that provide a spectrum of services to seniors, including Senior LinkAge Line®, Insurance Counseling and more. First established in 1956, the MBA is one of the pioneers in the field of aging policy, information and assistance. It works closely with its Area Agencies on Aging, which are located throughout the state, to provide services that seniors need. Check out mnaging.org for more information.



Worship and Music

written by Paula Monahan

“It was Christmas Eve in the Austrian Alps. At the newly constructed Church of St. Nicholas in Oberndorf, a Tyrolean village near Salzburg, Father Joseph Mohr prepared for the midnight service. He was distraught because the church organ was broken, ruining prospects for that evening’s music. But Father Joseph was about to learn that our problems are God’s opportunities, that the Lord causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him. It came into Father Joseph’s mind to write a new song, one that could be sung organ-less. Hastily, he wrote the words, “Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright.” Taking the text to his organist, Franz Gruber, he explained the situation and asked Franz to compose a simple tune. That night, December 24, 1818, “Silent Night” was sung for the first time as a duet accompanied by a guitar. Were it not for a broken organ, there would never have been a “Silent Night.”

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign:
Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son,
and shall call His name Immanuel. *Isaiah 7:14*

“Silent night, holy night, All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon virgin mother and child;
Holy infant, so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace;
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight.

Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia.
Christ the Savior is born.

Christ the Savior is born.

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love’s pure light.
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace.
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth;
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.”

Taken from “Then Sings My Soul” by Robert J. Morgan

"Children First" Christian Preschool

Greetings from "Children First" Christian Preschool!

December activities to look forward to include Music, Pajama Day and Celebrating Christmas!

Thank you to the Fishing Museum for inviting us to participate in "Christmas Tree Lane." We collected food items and gift cards to decorate our tree. Our hope is our tree will be auctioned off with intent of paying the food/tree forward to a family in need. Thank you to all who donated food and gift cards.

All are invited to celebrate with "Children First" at the Preschool's Christmas Program on Saturday, December 19, at 3:00 p.m. Fellowship follows the program with cookies and refreshments. We look forward to sharing Christmas joy with everyone!

Our last days of Preschool for 2015 will be December 21 and 22. We will enjoy a Christmas Break and resume school January 4 and 5, 2016.

All preschoolers age 33 months-Pre Kindergarten are welcome to experience the fun, the educational activities and the spiritual growth in God's love. "Children First" registers preschoolers all year long. If you know of interested families, please encourage them to check us out! Families interested in creating a three-day preschool week, consider enrolling in Friday Friends class. The class is an additional \$35.00 per month. A phone call or verbal "yes" registers you for this class.

"Children First" Christian Preschool Advisory Team and Staff would like to thank everyone for their contributions of time, talents and monetary giving this past year. 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, "The Lord's Prayer." It was exciting to see the activities, food and art projects.

A new rotation theme, "Jacob" continues Sundays, December 6 and 13. Through games, music, storytelling, cooking and art children will learn about brothers Jacob and Esau who had a lifelong struggle to get along with each other. Love and forgiveness brought them together.

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.



Sunday School Christmas Program "The Holy Moly Christmas Story" Sunday, December 20, 3:00 p.m.

Sunday School Christmas Program "The Holy Moly Christmas Story" will be held Sunday, December 20, beginning at 3:00 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. One full rehearsal is planned for Saturday, December 19 at 9:00 a.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 Jay Kiel, 616-581-4425, Amber Sobiech, 616-9626, or Becky Nelson, 749-2336.

Call Committee Update

In early November, Brenda Tibbetts, Assistant to the Bishop, and our advocate in our search for a pastor, shared that “things were starting to shake loose” and more pastors were exploring a possible change in their call. What a true statement that has been for us! Since November 10, seven pastors have submitted their Rostered Leader Profiles (RLP) to First Lutheran.

At the time of this writing the Call Committee is reviewing the RLPs and supplemental information to ascertain our next step with each pastor. Some pastors may be a better “fit” than others and thus we turn to prayer for direction. With the Spirit’s guidance we will determine whether or not we complete an interview, review supplemental information, and contact references. And then we will pray some more to discern God’s will for us with each pastor we interview. We join in prayer with each pastor that we all might feel the touch of the Spirit.

As we go through this process, we continue to ask for your prayers and support so that we might hear God’s voice and leading. We encourage you to join us as we pray for our new pastor, unknown to us at this point. Pray for our pastor to love God, love God’s Word, and to love His people.

Your questions and comments are welcome keeping in mind we can respond to questions regarding our process but not about candidates. The members of our Call Committee are Doug Anderson, Matt Dahl, Willard Doucette, Darrell Larsen, Camilla Larson, Monica Makela, Cassie Neumann, Mary Pfohl, Will Riitters, and Liz Rydeen.

Submitted in Christ’s Peace,

Mary Pfohl
Call Committee Chairperson



**Wild and Crazy Saints
Grades 6-8
Roller Skating at Skatin’ Place
Friday, December 11
5:30-10:00 p.m.**

Bring a friend for a fun night of skating at Skatin’ Place. Your cost of \$12 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.

**Gospel Gang
(Grades 3-5)
Three Bears Waterpark
Sunday, January 10, 2016
1:00-5:00 p.m.**

Mark your calendars for this fun event at the waterpark in Baxter! Signup sheets are located in the gathering space.

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!

News of the Family

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Wesley James Olson, son of Todd and Kerry Olson was baptized on November 1.

Abigail Paige Nagorski and Jacob Henry Nagorski, children of Derrick and Lindsey Nagorski were baptized on November 22.

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Norma Lowry died on October 27. Pastor Hank presided at her funeral service on November 2. May God grant peace and comfort to her family and friends.

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Items for the **January NEWSLETTER** are due on **December 18, 2015!**



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

Annual Meeting—Sunday, January 31, 2016
Following the 10:30 a.m. service