



December 2016

November 30, 2016

## *Advent and Christmas Worship*



**Advent Two:** Sunday, December 4:  
Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.  
*Sunday School at 9:35 a.m.*

### **Wednesday Advent Worship:**

Wednesdays, December 7, 14 and 21  
at 7:00 p.m.  
Holden Evening Prayer

**Advent Three:** Sunday, December 11:  
Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.  
*Sunday School at 9:35 a.m.*

**Advent Four:** Sunday, December 18:  
Worship at 8:30 and 10:30 a.m.  
*Sunday School at 9:35 a.m.*

## *Christmas Eve*

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

Holy Communion at all three services

**Christmas Day: Sunday, December 25**  
One Service of worship at 10:00 a.m.

**First Sunday of Christmas: Sunday, January 1**  
One Service of worship at 10:00 a.m.

*Come and Worship!*

*Come, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come*

**Pastor Jake's Article**  
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I sometimes wonder if Mary and Joseph had any idea that the events of their humble circumstances would result in the greatest shopping phenomenon and exchange of gifts the world has ever known. Something seems to get lost in all the frenzy. But I'm a participant in the whole thing, knowing I too will find myself enmeshed in the Holiday Season, that very special time of year when we join with loved ones in scrambling for a parking spot on Main Street or at the mall. I try to retain a more authentic perspective on the "Reason for the Season." But my efforts at authenticity only go so far. There is so much more to it, I know. The whole thing is so much more powerful than getting and even giving presents. The fact that the first Holy Night was so different causes me to ponder the wonder of what God was really doing on a cosmic scale in sending his son, Jesus, born in a manger.

The truth is, as writer Max Lucado reflects in *God Came Near*, "Were it not for the shepherds, there would have been no reception. And were it not for a group of stargazers, there would have been no gifts." The shepherds came, we read in Luke 2:17, and "when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them." The Wise Men came, we read in Matthew 2:11, and "going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him" and offered him gifts.

When you head out into the culture and time in which we live, with all the busy rush, think about the quiet and powerful way it began. As Lucado

says it well, "if our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior." This is the way God rolls. Rather than say, "I'm so great, you should fear me and do my will," God hushes the world and comes as a baby in a manger. It's so humble we can't believe it, but it opens our hearts.

As we come to worship and remember how Christ came, we will gather for Wednesday Advent services until Christmas with Holden Evening Prayer at 7:00 p.m. There will be three Christmas Eve services this year on December 24th, with Festival Worship with Holy Communion at 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., and then Candlelight Worship with Holy Communion at 10:00 p.m. On Christmas Day, Sunday, December 25<sup>th</sup>, there will be one combined service at 10:00 a.m. And looking ahead, there will be just one service on New Year's Day at 10:00 a.m. God bless you in these days we remember the way Christ came.

Joy and Peace,

Pastor Jake Dyrhaug



We have enjoyed a long season of beautiful fall weather. Soon, winter will arrive, bringing with it its own beauty and challenges. Each season has its own personality, its own set of activities, clothes, footwear, and hours of daylight.

The Lutheran church also celebrates several seasons during the church year. The cycle of the church year orders our time in our Christian community around the central mystery of our faith: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here at First Lutheran, our worship services, activities and decorations all help define the personality of each season.

The Lutheran church will celebrate its 500<sup>th</sup> birthday on Reformation Sunday, October 29, 2017. In celebration of this event, the Music and Worship Ministry Team will be offering a set of articles about the Lutheran church seasons. This month we will be looking at the season of Advent.

#### **Advent – The Beginning of the Church Year**

“Advent” is from the Latin word “adventus”, which in turn is a translation of the Greek word, “parousia” which is commonly used to refer to the second coming of Christ. For Christians, the season of Advent anticipates the coming of Christ from two different perspectives, the ancient longing for the coming of the Messiah, and anticipation of Christ’s second coming.

The key words for the season of Advent are *wait* and *prepare*. In our culture of immediate gratification, *waiting* for something is a rare opportunity. While we *wait*, we also *prepare* for the Great Event, which is the birth of our Lord Jesus.

When my children were small, each year they received an Advent calendar. Every day each child would open a new little door. One year behind each door was a piece of chocolate. *Waiting* to open only one door each day was a trial for them every year. But that year, it was exceptionally

difficult for them, but also for me as I tried to enforce the word *wait*. In the end, I gave in. The doors were all opened, the chocolate was all eaten, all within the first week of Advent. *Waiting* is hard! But *waiting* for something also increases the joy we have when the great event finally arrives! Here at First Lutheran during Advent we sing songs about waiting and preparing. Our readings bring us messages of hope, peace, joy and love. We *wait* to sing Christmas carols until the Great Event, Christmas Eve.

During Advent, while we *wait* we also *prepare*. Just as when a family prepares for the birth of a new baby, we spend time getting ready for the Christmas celebration. Many preparations are physical, a Christmas tree, Christmas cookies, Christmas gifts and celebrations. We also take time for introspection, and *prepare* our hearts and lives for the coming of Christ. Each Wednesday during Advent First Lutheran offers the opportunity to *prepare* by singing and praying the quiet, meditative service of Holden Evening Prayer. This year these services are at 7:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. The dates for these services are November 30, December 7, 14 and 21.

This Advent, attempt to resist the commercialization of the holiday season. Instead, let us keep Advent by *waiting* and *preparing* for the coming of the Holy Child, and the revolution He can bring in our lives, in our churches and in our world. After all, we anticipate not just the birth of Jesus, but a new world where God’s justice and mercy reign.

Note: Advent calendars (with windows to open) for children—sorry, no chocolates!—are available at church. We also have calendars for the older folks with a reading for each day. Stop and pick one up while you wait and prepare.



### **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 Monday, December 12.

### **Advent Wednesday Worship December 7, 14 and 21 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.

### **2016 Giving**

The last date for offerings received to be credited for the year 2016 is Saturday, December 31, 2016. Thank you for your faithful giving throughout the year.



### **Council Highlights**

- Approved designating the Thanksgiving Eve offering for ELCA World Hunger and the Morrison County Food Shelf.
- Heard that First Lutheran will provide and serve a Christmas Share A Meal on Thursday, December 22.
- Heard that 559 pounds of aluminum cans were recycled for a total of \$225 in support of youth ministry. Thank you to all who faithfully bring their cans to church for recycling—save the earth!
- Continued planning for stewardship campaign.



**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 study. The weekday study meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month (December 7 and 21) 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 Jake.

### 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 22, 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!

### Thrivent Choice©

Many First Lutheran members are also members of Thrivent Financial and 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 your Thrivent representative. First Lutheran Church and "Children First" Christian Preschool are able to receive designated Choice © dollars. In 2015, these dollars amounted to over \$2,800 in additional funds for ministry here. Thank you for your support!

### Martha Circle

The Martha Circle meets Monday, December 12 at 11:15 a.m. at Pizza Ranch for 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 3 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. Thank you for your ongoing generous support!

## 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 11. 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 Morrison County Food Shelf and with ELCA World Hunger. Gifts given to World Hunger through December 31 will be matched dollar-for-dollar! Thank you for your generous giving!

### Share A Meal

#### Thursday, December 22

Each Thursday evening, Oasis Central Minnesota Share A Meal is served at First Lutheran. Many groups in the community take turns serving a free nutritious meal for anyone who wishes to come for food and fellowship. First Lutheran will provide and serve the meal on Thursday, December 22. We plan to provide a delicious and festive holiday meal to the guests. Watch for ways that you can contribute to the meal. If you can assist with serving or preparing the meal, please contact the church office. Thank you!

### 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 Monday, December 12 and Tuesday, December 13 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 each Monday through Saturday through December 24. If you are available to volunteer as a bell ringer for one hour or more, or would like more information, please call Betsy at 320-360-0332.



## God's Work – Our Hands

### Thank you!

- ☞ Thank you to those who delivered meals to the homebound during the week of November 14.
- ☞ 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 6.
- ☞ Thank you to all who use their Thrivent Action Team Grant to do ministry!

### Confirmation Ministries

**Fourth Grade:** Four-week class on Holy Baptism begins Wednesday, January 4 and meets each week thru January 25, 2017, at 7:00 p.m.

**Seventh/Eighth Grade:** Ten sessions on the New Testament begins on Wednesday, January 4, at 7:00 p.m.

**Ninth/Tenth Grade:** Students will meet together for ten sessions on the New Testament and on Lutheran Identity beginning Wednesday, January 4, at 7:00 p.m.

**Mentor Program:** Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Grade confirmands will be selecting a mentor to walk with them on their faith journey. First Lutheran members are encouraged to prayerfully consider how they can participate in the mentor program and if asked by a student to please say "Yes!"

## Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On November 19th, First Lutheran sent a group of 15 youth and 4 adults to the Northeast Minnesota Synod Middle School Gathering, which is held annually at Cragun's Resort in Brainerd. The theme this year was "iBelong", and our main speaker talked about belonging in Christ and how to include and welcome others. I think the youth learned a lot about belonging and the Apostles Creed, but they also had plenty of opportunities to have fun and meet hundreds of other youth from around our Synod. Some of our 8th and 9th graders even got to meet Tom Aiken, the Bishop of our Synod.

All of this could not have been done without the support from parents, plus the involvement of adult leaders. I could not have asked for this event to run any smoother, and that's thanks to the amazing effort put in by the leaders. Thank you!

In other youth and family news, Sunday School is still in full swing, and we'll be starting to focus in on the Christmas pageant and the story of Christ's birth.

Also, Confirmation classes are taking a break during Advent, but will continue in January.

Thank you to all the volunteers for everything you all do!

May the Lord walk behind you  
to encourage you,  
Walk beside you and be your friend.  
May he walk in front of you  
to show you the way,  
Be above you and protect you  
'till the end.  
Amen.

Daniel Ditmanson  
Youth and Family Minister

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past.

1. **Acknowledge your feelings.** If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's okay to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.
2. **Reach out.** If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.
3. **Be realistic.** The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones.
4. **Set aside differences.** Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion.
5. **Stick to a budget.** Try these alternatives: Donate to a charity in someone's name. Give homemade gifts. Start a family gift exchange.
6. **Plan ahead.**
7. **Learn to say no.** Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed.
8. **Don't abandon healthy habits.** Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt. Try these suggestions: Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks. Get plenty of sleep. Incorporate regular physical activity into each day.

9. **Take a breather.** Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm. Some options may include: Taking a walk at night and stargazing. Listening to soothing music. Getting a massage. Reading a book.

10. **Seek professional help if you need it.** Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

From [Mayoclinic.org](http://Mayoclinic.org)

**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!



## **"Children First" Christian Preschool**

Greetings!

We are excited for December activities: Pajama Day, Music, and Celebrating Christmas! We will have Christmas fun with the residents at BridgeWay. Mentoring in our classroom are Maddie Doroff and Kristina Schelonka from Little Falls Community High School Early Childhood Education Class. They are observing, assisting with project preparation, and interacting with our Preschoolers. Please welcome them!

Thank you to the Fishing Museum for inviting us to "Christmas Tree Lane." Plan to visit and check out our tree! Look for our special friend! Food donations provided have been placed under the tree, you can add food-shelf donations as you visit.

All are invited to the Preschool's Christmas Program, "Christmas in the Kitchen!" on Tuesday, December 20, 10:45-11:30 a.m. in Stoltz Hall. Fellowship and celebration follows the program. We want to share Christmas joy with everyone!

Our last class day before Christmas break is December 20. Preschool classes resume January 3.

Children ages 33 months-Pre Kindergarten are welcome to experience the fun, the educational activities and the spiritual growth in God's love. Preschoolers can register all year long. If you know of interested families, encourage them to check us out! Consider a three-day preschool week, by enrolling in Friday Friends class for an additional \$35.00 per month.

Thank you to Thrivent Members for Action Team assistance. They provide many opportunities to the preschoolers.

"Children First" Christian Preschool Advisory Team and Staff thank all 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!

Gail Hittesdorf, Director

## **Sunday Morning Education Ministry**

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

A new rotation theme, "Journey to Bethlehem" continues Sundays, December 4 and 11. Through games, music, cooking and art children will wait and prepare to celebrate the birth of the promised Savior, Jesus.

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 Friendly Beasts"**

**Sunday, December 18, 3:00 p.m.**

Sunday School Christmas Program "The Friendly Beasts" will be held Sunday, December 18, 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. Watch for an additional rehearsal time. Volunteers are welcome to organize costumes and props and to help with direction. If you can assist with this wonderful annual event or for more info, contact or Becky Nelson, 749-2336 or Daniel Ditmanson, 632-6667.

## News of the Family



Madeline Virginia Anderson, daughter of Matthew and Tina Anderson was baptized on November 13.

Jackson Jay Fairbrother, son of Shelby Fairbrother and Chris Finken was baptized on November 13.



Marlys “Marty” Engelhardt died on November 17. A graveside service was held on November 22. May God grant peace to her family and friends.

Items for the **January NEWSLETTER** are due on **December 20, 2016!**



**Church Office is closed on Monday,  
December 26.**

**Annual Meeting—Sunday, January 29, 2017**  
*Following the 10:30 a.m. service*