



Epiphany means “manifestation.” In the church year, we celebrate the Epiphany of Our Lord on January 6. On this day we celebrate the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles—that is, to all nations, as the Magi are led to Bethlehem by the light of the star.

In the weeks that follow, the scripture texts reveal Jesus as the beloved Son of God as he is baptized in the waters of the Jordan. Through this epiphany, Jesus fulfills all righteousness and becomes the servant of God who will be a light to the nations. In the waters of baptism, we are anointed by the Spirit, and are named God’s beloved children.

Jesus then begins his public ministry by calling the fishermen to leave their nets and follow him. In Jesus the kingdom of God has come near. We who have walked in darkness have seen a great light. Light dawns for us as we gather around the word, the font, and the holy table. By this epiphany we are sent to share the good news that others may be caught in the net of God’s grace and mercy.

The upcoming Sundays we hear from Matthew chapter five and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Who are the blessed ones of God? For Jesus, they are the poor, mourners, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers. In baptism we find our blessed identity and calling in Jesus’ way of living and serving.

Adapted from Sundays and Seasons Year A, 2014 © 2013 Augsburg Fortress

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Pastor's Article

This past week as I was teaching 8th Grade Confirmation Class on the Old Testament, We talked about Genesis chapter 12 in which is the calling on Abram (Abraham) and God's promise to this old man of 75. That he was going to be the father of a great nation. Yet he had no children. How would he be a father? Because God said he would have descendents more than the stars in the sky. Why was God going to do this? Why was God going to bless Abram and his wife Sarai with offspring so numerous that they would be parents of a great nation? Chapter 12:2 *I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.* This is still why God blesses all of us!

A few years ago there was a movie called "Pay it Forward." It starred Kevin Spacey, Helen Hunt and a young actor named Haley Joel Osment. The character played by Osment was given an assignment by his teacher (Spacey) to do something significant for others. Osment's character came up with something simple. He was going to help three people. Instead of repayment or something in return to him for his deed, he would ask them to do something for three others and pass it on or "pay it forward."

"Pay it forward" and "blessed to be a blessing" are universal terms. They encourage us to share what we have been given. Abraham did become the father of a great nation. He didn't let being blessed by God diminish and die with him. He became the father of two great nations through both of his sons Ishmael and Isaac. Being blessed means we are to "pay it forward." We are not to let our blessings lie dormant. Each one of us has received a gift just as Abraham received a gift. Because we have received a gift (or a talent) we are called to use the blessings to bless and gift others. This, I believe, was how the world was meant to work from the beginning. In the Old Testament, Abraham wasn't meant to only be a blessing to his offspring, but to the whole world. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul was called to go out to the people "outside" of Israel. Today, as we all bump into

each other with our blessings, the good things of God get passed on.

Sometimes it's easy to forget that this is meant to happen when it comes to our greatest gift – the gift of salvation through faith and trust given to us through God's *FREE* grace in Jesus Christ. We are so excited about the "free" part that we forget that this is a gift that God wants us to pass on as a blessing to others. Christ redeemed us first to pay forward this blessing through our words, actions, and deeds that show the love we have received from him.

The Spirit works faith in our heart beginning at our baptism and keeps us in that faith. So, now, what more is there? The Apostle Paul answers that in Galatians chapter five. The Spirit produces fruit of various kinds: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Then Paul tells us to "walk by the Spirit." By bearing the fruit of the Spirit, Christians pay it forward and bless others with the gift of salvation through Christ. Bearing such fruit pays it forward and blesses others and gives the glory back to God.

Many of us often stop short of living in the fullness of God's blessing of grace because we are takers, we forget, or simply don't "pay it forward." That was not God's will for Abraham and it is not God's will for us. When it comes to the blessings of God, do not be only a receiver. Be also a giver, for you have been given all that you need. 2 Corinthians 9:8 *And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.*

Be a Blessing Passing Through.

See you in church!

Pastor David Sperstad

**When to Contact the Church Office:
320-632-6667**

email: firstserv@flclittlefalls.org

- ☎ When you or a family member is hospitalized or will be hospitalized.
- ☎ When there is a birth or death in the family.
- ☎ When there is a crisis.
- ☎ When you change your address or telephone number.
- ☎ When new neighbors move in near you and they are looking for a church home.
- ☎ When you have good news to share.
- ☎ When you have a suggestion to make or a concern to share, you can contact a council member or a member of the Pastor Parish Relations Team.

Pastor and lay visitors are available to call on you and walk with you in sadness and joy.

**Lutheran Men in Mission Retreat
Friday-Saturday, February 28-March 1
at Trinity Lutheran Church, Brainerd
“Blueprints for Living”**

All men are welcome to attend this annual retreat sponsored by the Northeastern Minnesota Synod. Paul Scott Wilson, professor of Homiletics at Emmanuel College of the University of Toronto is the keynote speaker. Pastor and artist, Paul Oman will share his “Drawn to the Word” artistic ministry. There will be opportunities for interesting breakout sessions and of course, great food! Registration for first-time attenders and men 35 and under is \$35.00, sustainers \$40.00. Please contact Doug Luepke, 584-5957 if you are interested in attending.

Library News

New and donated books are on display by the Library. Please take a look inside and outside the Library. You are sure to find something to inspire you on these cold winter days.

Council Highlights

- ✦ Council expressed thanks to outgoing members Paula Monahan and Gail Olson and thanks to Stephanie Adams and Mark Hanson, who have accepted second terms on the council.
- ✦ Regretfully accepted the resignation of Gail Hittesdorf from the Education Coordinator position. Gail remains as Director of “Children First” Christian Preschool.
- ✦ Approved the 2014 Mission Plan for presentation at the 2014 Annual Meeting.



New Steward/Member Group

First Lutheran Church New Steward Group begins next month. We have set aside two times for this group to meet; we ask that stewards attend one of these sessions. The group will meet on Sunday evening; March 30 at 6:30 p.m. or Tuesday evening, April 1 at 6:30 p.m. New members will be received in worship on the first or second Sunday of April. First’s council and commission members will host a fellowship reception between worship services on that day.

These sessions are meant to help joining members to find their place in the mission of the congregation, get to know others in the congregation, and discuss the foundations of the faith we share. Current member stewards are encouraged to attend and make a new friend.

If God is calling you to stewardship at First Lutheran, these sessions are for you. Come and walk alongside your sisters and brothers in Christ in mission to the world. For more information, or to sign up for the group, please call the church office at 632-6667.

Adult Opportunities

Thank You!

Dear First Lutheran Church stewards,

Thank you so much for your donation. Thank you for being an advocate with us in supporting victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse and other crime. We are grateful that you have made our mission a part of your own and are privileged to receive your support.

Sincerely,
Michele Miller, Finance and Fund Development Coordinator, Hands of Hope

Members at First Lutheran,

Thank you for your assistance with the annual Lutefisk and Meatball Dinner. It was, as before, a fun and successful event. Thanks again!

Dennis Heise
and Bethel Lutheran Church Congregation

Dear Friends at First Lutheran Church,

Thank you for your donation to Habitat for Humanity of Morrison County. Your financial support directly impacts the lives of homeowner families. It's through your support that we are able to help more families realize their dream of owning their own home. You are a faith community who puts their faith into action!

Sincerely,
Kathy Kahlhamer, Habitat for Humanity

Dear members of First Lutheran Church,

Your generous gift made our day! We are grateful for your generosity and want you to know the difference your gifts make for those who face some of life's greatest challenges.

Many blessings,
Pastor Mary Brown, Director of Cong. Relations
Lutheran Social Services

Women's Bible Study

"To Live is Christ"

Wednesdays at 7:00 p.m.

"To Live is Christ" is an in-depth study of the life and ministry of the apostle Paul. This is a video study by Beth Moore. You may wish to purchase a workbook for this study with study portions for each day. For more information, contact the church office. There is room for you!

Women's Martha Circle:

"In Good Company"

Session 6: Woman of Endor, a Seer and Communicator

The Martha Circle meets Monday, February 17, at 10:00 a.m. at the church. Diane Grosso is hostess.

Men's Bible Study Breakfast

All men of the congregation and friends are invited to a Men's Bible Breakfast study. The study meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month 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 Monday Bible Study

Mondays, February 23, and March 3-31

two session times: 11:00 a.m. or 6:30 p.m.

Choose a session time, bring a friend and your Bible and come for spirit-filled discussion around the lectionary texts for the coming Sunday. This is a good opportunity for in-depth conversation and learning about the assigned texts and an added dimension to weekly worship. Pastor Dave leads this study at either 11:00 a.m. or 6:30 p.m. We will meet for about an hour. See you there!

Devotionals

We have daily devotional books available in the church office for you to purchase. These books keep you grounded in God's Word each day. Bread for the Day or Daily Text are \$5.00 each.

Mini Annual Report
First Lutheran Church

The Annual Meeting of First Lutheran Church was held on Sunday, January 26, 2014. Thanks to all who made this meeting a priority! This “mini-report” is provided to help inform you of the important decisions made at this year’s Annual Meeting and to give highlights from the Annual Report. The complete Annual Report is available in the church office.

A few of the many ways that First Lutheran’s commissions and you were servants during the past year:

Serving together in mission:

- ✠ Participated in food packing events
- ✠ Support of local agencies: Morrison County Food Shelf, Hands of Hope, Habitat for Humanity, Morrison County Chaplaincy
- ✠ Increased financial support to the wider church through the ELCA

Serving together in worship and praise:

- ✠ Celebrated 50 years of worship and ministry in the building on May 5
- ✠ Rededicated the newly enhanced worship space on October 6

Serving together in faith formation:

- ✠ Supported “Children First” Christian Preschool in their 13th year of operation
- ✠ Held Vacation Bible School cooperatively with local congregations
- ✠ Sponsored mission trips for middle school and high school youth
- ✠ Regular weekly youth group meeting times

Serving together thru our building and grounds:

- ✠ Coordinated demolition teams for the worship enhancement project
- ✠ Conducted a “Building on Blessings” stewardship campaign

Statistical Reports

Baptized Membership (January 1, 2014)	1,139	Baptisms	17
Confirmed Membership (January 1, 2014)	816	Affirmation of Baptism/Confirmation	19
New Members Received	35	Marriages	3
Transferred Out	8	Funerals	11
Average Worship Attendance	2013 – 243		

Summary Notes from Congregational Annual Meeting

Not Official Minutes

Craig Ahlin, Council President, declared a Quorum and called the meeting to order.

Elected to the Church Council were: Stephanie Adams, Mark Hanson, both to a second 3-year term, Merlin Bruns and Tammy Zwilling, each to a 3-year term, and John Haas to a 1-year term.

Lois Anderson, Dan Bakke, and Doug Dahlberg were elected as the congregational representatives for the Nominating Committee.

The Heartland Conference Gathering is Sunday, February 16 at Camp Onomia, Onamia. Voting members are Kerry Olson, Mary Pfohl, and Tammy Zwilling. Alternates are Debra Yliniemi-Ahlin and Paula Monahan. The Synod Assembly will be held May 2-4, 2014, at Breezy Point. Voting members are Stephanie Adams, Jay Kiel, and Mary Pfohl. Alternates are Doug and Michelle Dahlberg.

The Luther Crest Bible Camp annual meeting is October 4, 2014. Voting members are Jeff Bigalke, Haylee Hittesdorf, Jay Kiel and Stephanie Kiel.

Debra Yliniemi-Ahlin was elected as First Lutheran’s representative for the “His Hands and Feet” Stumpf Memorial Scholarship Committee.

Two constitutional changes were approved and will be ratified at the next annual meeting.

The 2014 Mission Plan was approved as presented.

Discussion was held regarding adding a parish nurse to the ministry team staff. A task force was appointed to research this position and report back to council in March.

The Council met to elect officer, they are: President–Stephanie Adams, Vice-President–Mark Hanson, Treasurer–Scott Sobiech, Secretary–Craig Ahlin.

Excerpts from the Treasurer's Report

Thank you for your faithful support throughout the year! It was another exciting year in ministry with lots of activity in the building, and planning for future years of mission.

On the 2013 Mission Plan, we planned for receipts toward operations were \$299,403, operating expenses were \$298,193. Thank you! We ended the year with a surplus of \$1,210. These amounts are exclusive of "Children First" Christian Preschool.

"Building on Blessings" three-year pledges for the worship space project were \$303,043. Over \$110,000 was received in 2013 toward the project. The Mission Investment Fund mortgage loan was closed in November. The principal was \$569,303 with an interest rate of 3.875% adjustable after 5 years. Monthly payments are \$2,966.

The Mission Plan proposal for 2014 projects giving of \$383,600. Expenses are projected at \$377,780. These amounts are exclusive of the preschool.

Thank you for your many additional gifts, both in-kind for various ministries and projects around our church home, and those received from special offerings for the following missions and projects:

Morrison County Food Shelf	912.00
ELCA Malaria Campaign	160.00
Gideons International	215.00
Total additional cash giving	\$1,437.00

You provided supplies for 55 personal care kits during Lent. Vacation Bible School children filled 64 backpacks with school supplies for schools. You gave dollars and in-kind gifts to over 100 area families in need through the Angel Tree. Thank you for the countless unseen support for brothers and sisters around the world. You are a blessing!

Thank you for the privilege of serving as treasurer at First Lutheran Church this past year.

God's blessing,
Scott Sobiech

2013 Income and Expense Report and 2014 Proposed Mission Plan

MISSION LIFE

Souper Bowl of Caring

First Lutheran participates in the “Souper Bowl of Caring” on February 2. This Sunday, 128 million people all over the world will tune in to the Super Bowl football game. There will be parties with abundant food, friendship and fellowship. At the same time, there will be people worrying about staying warm, finding shelter and a warm meal. Please join young people at First Lutheran and around the U.S., as they demonstrate God’s love by loving their neighbors through the “Souper Bowl of Caring.” It’s a simple, yet significant act of caring for others.

Young people with soup kettles will stand by the church doors after worship. Worshipers are invited to drop \$1 or more in the soup pot. Funds raised will go directly to help hungry people in our area.

Last year, thousands of groups of young people across the country raised over \$7,500,000 in the “Souper Bowl of Caring.” Thank you for helping to fight hunger through this special offering!

Baskets of Promise for Lutheran World Relief

This Lent we will again participate in Lutheran World Relief’s Baskets of Promise appeal. Each week, we’ll collect a different item that we will use to assemble Personal Care Kits that give people around the world tools to stay healthy in life’s most challenging situations. Our goal is to assemble 50 (or more!) Personal Care Kits during Lent. Here is the collection schedule so that you can watch for these items:

March 9	Bars of soap, 4-5 ounce, any brand in original wrapping
March 16	Bath towels, lightweight, 52”X27” max, dark color is best
March 23	Toothbrushes, adult size, in original packaging
March 30	Combs
April 6	Nail clippers, metal, attached file optional
April 13	Bars of soap, as above

Who is My Neighbor? Opportunity

First Lutheran participates in the community to deliver meals to home-bound individuals. We will deliver meals again Monday-Friday, February 3-7. Volunteers meet at the Buckman Building at 10:00 a.m. to pickup meals for the route, delivery is normally finished between 11:00 and 11:30 a.m. If you can assist with this ministry during this week or at another time, please contact the church office.

Valentine Breakfast Fundraiser Sunday, February 9 Pierz Senior Center

Come for breakfast served 8:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Pierz Senior Center. Scrambled eggs, hash browns, sausage, cinnamon rolls, fruit, coffee and milk will be served. Adults, \$6.00, children ages 5-12, \$4.00, age 4 and under, free. Funds raised will support the Senior Nutrition Program and home delivered meal program. These programs assist people to live independently in their homes. Thank you for your support.

Equal Exchange Fair Trade Products

For several years First Lutheran has purchased coffee, tea, hot cocoa, and other Equal Exchange fair trade food items through Lutheran World Relief. We serve this coffee at all congregational fellowship times and events. Anyone is welcome to purchase from the inventory in the church office for their own use or for gifts. We recently received a personal ‘thank you’ phone call from staff at Equal Exchange. Why? Even though we don’t specifically keep track, Equal Exchange does, and we have increased our purchases 34% in the past year! What a great way to support growers and farmers around the world to make better lives for themselves and to treat the earth kindly through environmentally sound growing practices. Not to mention that we have delicious coffee to drink ☺ That is a win-win! Thank you for your support of this ongoing mission opportunity.

"Children First" Christian Preschool Update

We have enjoyed the month of January at "Children First" Christian Preschool, in spite of the cold weather and the days off. We spent time reading, playing, creating, and enjoying Snow and Polar Animals, Dinosaurs, Ocean Fun with Jellyfish, Whales and Jonah. We talked about germs and exercising our bodies. We beat the heat with "Beach Day." The Tuesday/Thursday classes will enjoy their "BeachDay" in February. The month of February has themes such as Dental Health, Valentines, America and "I Love to Read." We welcome classroom volunteers to assist with projects, read stories, share your special talents or develop relationships. If you wish to volunteer please contact Gail, Jessica Gustafson or Sarah Olson to arrange a time.

Planning for Fall 2014/2015 begins! Registration for current Preschool families and First Lutheran Church stewards begins in March with community registration beginning April 1, 2014. Interested Preschool families are encouraged to drop in for a visit. Advance notice is appreciated so that preschool staff can prepare project materials and snacks for visiting children.

"Children First" continues to raise added funds and acquire classroom learning materials through our on-going fundraisers. We participate in the Labels for Education Program sponsored by Campbell's. Please continue to cut and save the points label from Campbell's, Pepperidge Farm, Bic, Prego, V8, People, Goldfish, Emberal, Danimals, Popsecret, Glad and Post products. When you purchase Food Club, TopCare, or Full Circle (organic) products at Coborn's or Cashwise, please save the points receipts attached to your cash register receipt. Coborn's pays us cash for these points. You can recycle your empty printer ink cartridges in collection boxes located in the Preschool area and First Lutheran gathering space. Also available, are Chico reusable, washable tote bags for \$5.00 each. They are available in various colors. They make a great gift!

The main fundraiser for the past two years has been our "Gifting Campaign" in which families have mailed letters to friends and family requesting prayers and/or support for "Children First" Christian Preschool and our mission of educational growth as well as our ministry activities with St. Otto's Care Center and Bridgeway Estates. We appreciate everyone who has provided a assistance or prayers to continue this mission and ministry. We would like to thank the Exchange Club of Little Falls for the overwhelming and generous gift of \$1,000.00.

"Children First" Christian Preschool continues to partner with families to build and strengthen the academic, physical, social, emotional and spiritual growth of our children and families. Thank you to all who continue to support the Preschool in so many ways. You are appreciated!

Yours in Christ's Service,

Gail Hittesdorf, Director

"Teach a child how he should live, and he will remember it all his life" Proverbs 22:6



Family Information

In an effort to improve communication with parishioners, we are asking for current contact information for members/stewards and participating individuals and families. If you have not already done so, you can complete the following information and return to the church office at your earliest convenience. Your assistance with providing current data for each family member is appreciated!

Family Name: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____

Family Member:

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Receive Text? Yes _____ No _____

Email address: _____

Preferred form of contact: _____

Place of employment: _____

Hobbies, interests: _____

Family Member:

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Receive Text? Yes _____ No _____

Email address: _____

Preferred form of contact: _____

Place of employment: _____

Hobbies, interests: _____

Family Member:

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Receive Text? Yes _____ No _____

Email address: _____

Preferred form of contact: _____

Place of employment: _____

Hobbies, interests: _____