

December
2024

St. John Lutheran Church



Mission Statement

St. John is a living witness to the love of God as shown in Jesus Christ.

*We gather faithfully in His name to **worship** and praise Him; and we go forth in peace to **share** the Good News and to **serve** the world around us.*

St. John Lutheran Church
PO Box 411
420 Beaver Street
Mars, PA 16046
Office Hours MWF, 8a-1p
(please call ahead to confirm availability)

Web site: www.stjohnchurchmars.org
Church Office: (724) 625-1830
Office email: office@stjohnchurchmars.org
Pastor Katie's email: pastorkmcneal@gmail.com
Pastor's Cell #: 412-407-3166

Hope. Peace. Joy. Love. These words often get connected with the four weeks of Advent. The practice only started in the mid-twentieth century, and there are a few variations, but as we journey through Advent to Christmas, these four words will carry us each week. These words are more than just words. They are divine qualities of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. They are descriptors of what Jesus is doing within us through the power of the Spirit. They invite us into what God is doing as we prepare to celebrate God Incarnate in Jesus, drawing us closer to the God who is always drawing closer to us. These four simple words enrich our faith lives as they spark a transformation in us that God has already begun. They equip and inspire us. They challenge and comfort us. These four words are more than words.

Each week in Advent, we will explore a different word and how God is preparing our hearts for Christmas through these themes of hope, peace, joy, and love. These are not personal virtues. They are not a to-do list for us to add to our busy Decembers. These words are celebrations of what God is doing and how God is active in and among us. Hope is honest about suffering and hardship and is yet an agent of empowering transformation dependent on God with whom nothing is impossible. Peace is robust. It brings safety and rest to the vulnerable. It carves new roads through the wilderness. Joy catches God's vision for creation and offers it to us today. Joy stretches beyond our temporary sorrows and offers God's freeing grace to us always. Love magnifies the beloved. Love notices the unnoticed. Love calls down blessings. And they each feed into each other. Hope, peace, joy, and love. God does not offer us one without the other, and they are all born in the person Jesus at Christmas. This Advent, we will take one word each week and celebrate the way God offers us blessings beyond measure, grace upon grace, and hope, peace, joy, and love. We will celebrate the way we are transformed in God's mercy, equipped and inspired to participate in what God is already doing, has already done, and will always do.

*Peace,
Pastor Katie*

(Article adapted from *More Than Words* Series Introduction © 2024 Barn Geese Worship. Used by permission.)

Find Us on Social Media

Like us on **Facebook** (@stjohnchurchmars) or Follow us on **Instagram** (@stjohnchurchmars)

Online Sunday Worship

Join Zoom for service: <https://zoom.us/j/5663185411> Meeting ID: 566 318 5411 PW: Luther
Available on our **YouTube Channel**: <https://www.youtube.com/@St.JohnLutheranChurch-2>

Worship Notes

Young Worship Leaders

If you are unable to be present, please find someone to cover and tell the office of the change.

	Acolyte	Offering	Offering	Young Reader
1-December	Nathan K	Ava N	Ella N	
8-December	Ava N	Anna K	Nathan K	
15-December	Jules K	Ava N	Ella N	Abby C
22-December	Anna K	Jules K	Abby C	
24-December (3:00pm)	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	
24-December (7:30pm)	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	
25-Dec (9:00 am) (Christmas Day)	None Needed	None Needed	None Needed	
29-December	Abby C	Luca K	Lydia M	
5-January	Carissa M	Ava N	Ella N	

Adult Worship Leaders

	Greeters	Usher	Assistant Minister	Bread Baker	Counters
1-December	VOLUNTEER	Dave K	David D	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
8-December	VOLUNTEER	Dave K	Denise H	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
15-December	VOLUNTEER	Dave K	Denise H	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
22-December	VOLUNTEER	Dave K	Denise H	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
24-December (3:00pm)	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
24-December (7:30pm)	VOLUNTEER	Dave K	Denise H	Denise H	Denise H Ruth Ann T
25-Dec (9:00 am) (Christmas Day)	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Denise H	Denise H	Volunteer
29-December	VOLUNTEER	Dave K	Denise H	(No communion)	Denise H Ruth Ann T
5-January	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	David D	Denise H	Volunteer

Worship Notes (continued)

Advent Begins – December 1



Advent is the **season of preparation** as we get ready for Christmas. Join us in worship as we wait for the coming Christ child and get ready for the gift of Christmas. Make sure your child gets their own **Advent calendar to count down** to Christmas. If you and/or your family would like to volunteer to participate in worship by **helping with lighting the Advent Wreath, we still have an opening on December 8. Please [contact the office](#) if you'd like to volunteer!**

Welcoming New Members – December 1

We are excited to welcome the Wach family to the membership of St. John on Sunday, December 1. After worship we will have cake to celebrate and welcome them!

Advent Sung Evening Prayer – December 4, 11, and 18

The season of Advent is the dawn of the new church year and is a time of great anticipation around the birth of Jesus. To help prepare our hearts, **we will worship through readings, prayers, silence, and singing as we gather around the table of grace for Holy Communion on Wednesdays in Advent (Dec 4, 11, and 18) at 6:00 pm.** Worship will last approximately half an hour.

Blue Christmas Worship Service – December 21

While Christmas is a season of joy, not everyone feels like celebrating. Grief, illness, aging, depression, loneliness, unemployment, and loss are magnified. Many feel the stress of expectations around Christmas. **A Blue Christmas service provides a time and place of solace.**

Mars United Presbyterian Church (232 Crowe Ave) will host a service of prayers, scripture, and music that acknowledge that God's presence is for those who mourn and struggle this time of year as well. **Worship is on December 21, the longest night of the year, at 7:00 pm.**

Christmas Eve Worship Services – December 24

Come celebrate the gift of the Word Incarnate, God Immanuel, Jesus Christ born to this world as a human baby with our **traditional Christmas Eve Candlelight worship services** filled with beloved hymns and carols, prayers, and scripture readings. **All are welcome as we come to celebrate Christ's coming** into the world.

Worship is at 3:00 pm and at 7:30 pm.

After each service, there will be a brief hospitality time with cookies, hot cider, and hot cocoa. If you'd like to help supply cookies, please [contact Pastor Katie](#) (or just bring them with you to worship!)

Christmas Day Worship Service – December 25

What does it mean to celebrate God coming to earth as a human being? What was it like that first morning after everything changed? What were Joseph and Mary thinking? What would it have been like to be a shepherd keeping watch over the flocks that night? **On Christmas morning, we gather for prayers, scriptures, reflections, and music to wonder and celebrate at the gift of Christmas.**
Worship will be at 9:00 am.

Service of Lessons and Carols – December 29

A service of Lessons and Carols is an opportunity to **dwell in the richness of God's Word** and the promise of God's Word incarnate, Jesus Christ. **Worship will be at 9:00 am.**

Worship Notes (continued)

Messy Church – Third Fridays (5:30-7:30pm)



Join us for a Very Messy Christmas on December 20th! **Messy Church is an intentionally intergenerational place for people to meet and experience fun and messy ways to engage in faith, including crafts and activities, celebration, and a shared meal no matter their connection to church. At Messy Church, we celebrate the creative, joyful God revealed in Jesus Christ.** Bible stories are explored in ways that invite our whole messy selves into God's story of the good news of Jesus Christ - that we are freed and forgiven in God's abundant grace and that God's love is for us, all of us. **If you would like to help with this ministry, contact Pastor Katie.** Come and bring your neighbors and friends to share in this interactive, creative, and celebratory worship service!

Adult Choir

For major festivals (like Christmas Eve!), there is **a choir of dedicated singers** who prepare and offer a song for worship. If you'd like to be a part of this group, contact our Music Director, Maizy.

Online Sign-Ups

Did you know that St. John has **an online sign-up board**? Slots are open between now and next summer! We particularly need people to serve as Greeters. There are two slots for greeters so that we can greet people at both entrances to the sanctuary. Sign up today at <https://signup.com/go/JPakfVA>.

Congregation Meeting Notices

Vestry Election – Sunday, December 8, 2024

Vestry elections will take place following the worship service. The congregation will be asked to vote on the slate for the 2025 Vestry.



All Vestry Meeting – Tuesday, December 10, 2024

All persons elected to serve on the vestry (Boards of Deacons, Elders, and Trustees) are asked to attend an all-vestry meeting on Tuesday, December 10th at 7:00pm to elect chairpersons and secretaries for each board as well as council representatives and officers.

Annual Meeting – Sunday, January 26, 2025

We will review 2024, vote on a budget, and approve the congregational council for 2025. The congregational meeting will be held after the worship service.

Around the Community

Living Nativity – December 13

Mars United Presbyterian Church is once again hosting the Living Nativity in their parking lot at 232 Crowe Ave! **This year it will be a one-night only event on Friday, December 13, and you're not going to want to miss this!** The show runs every half hour from 6:00pm – 8:00pm.

Around the Church

Gathered Under One Roof Campaign.

About 6 months ago we began our fundraising campaign to pay off the loan for replacing our church roof and the roofs of the garage and parsonage. Our goal was to raise \$50,000 to repay the loan and re-establish our major maintenance fund. **Due to the wonderful generosity of congregation members, we have already surpassed \$31,000. Thank you to all who have contributed! Please continue to prayerfully discern your ability to donate to this fund as we close in on our ultimate goal.** Our congregation is a generous family, and we know we can achieve this goal if we all work together to maintain our church home for prayer, worship and community celebrations. You can support the capital campaign by giving during worship and designating your gift toward the "Roof Fund" or by [donating online](#) to the Gathered Under One Roof Campaign.

Christmas Flower Sales

Help decorate the sanctuary for Christmas by purchasing a poinsettia or Christmas cactus. Poinsettia plants (\$12 each) come in a 7-inch pot with 2 stems of red, white, pink, or marble leaves. Christmas cactuses (\$11 each) come in 6-inch pots. **Orders are due by Sunday, December 8th.** Payments may be placed in the offering plate in an envelope marked for poinsettias or mailed to the church. Checks can be made payable to St. John Lutheran Church.

Pollak's Candies Sale

Pollak's Candies has been selling delicious chocolate treats in Butler County since 1948, and now **when you buy Pollak's Candies, you can support St. John!** Collect an order form in the Gathering Area of the building and purchase candy for yourself and invite your friends and family to buy some too! **If you prefer online purchases, you can order candy directly from Pollak's at pollakscandies.com** (or using the QR code to the right) and still support St. John! Simply enter "St John Lutheran Church, Mars, PA and Pastor Katie McNeal" in the order notes during check out! **Orders are due by December 15th.** All proceeds will go toward the Gathered Under One Roof Campaign.



Greening of the Sanctuary – December 22

Help us with our final preparations for Christmas as we **prepare the sanctuary by putting up decorations.** If you are able to help decorate the church for Christmas, please stay after the worship service. Your help will be greatly appreciated. **Many hands will make light work!**



Around the Church (continued)

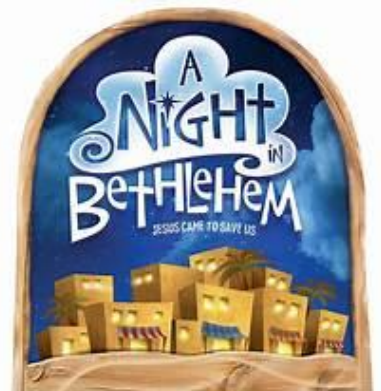
Communications Preferences

There are a lot of ways to stay tuned with everything happening in and through St. John: weekly bulletins with announcements, monthly newsletters, and social media posts. **If you'd like to be connected through any of these communication tools, please contact the office. You may also contact the office to update your communication preferences.** The bulletin and announcements are emailed every Friday as well as mailed to homebound members. The monthly newsletter is available to be mailed, emailed, and found on the [website](#) and in the greeting area. Social media posts are posted to [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

A Night in Bethlehem – December 21

Come explore the streets of Bethlehem right in the basement of St. John Lutheran Church! **Visit the baker, the blacksmith, the carpenter and more as they share the story of Jesus' birth through crafts, activities, songs, and stories.** Families will travel through the different shops of Bethlehem in 20-minute rotations. It will take a family approximately 2 hours to see everything Bethlehem has to offer.

Admission is open between 10am and 12pm with the last group ending their journey through Bethlehem at 2pm. This event is FREE and open to all, so invite your family, neighbors, friends, and the person you met while waiting in line at the grocery store! Get a flier in the Gathering Area and hang it wherever you see fliers in the area!



Outreach Ministry – How to Invite Someone to Church

Each Sunday in Advent, we will be passing out invitations to Christmas Eve worship at St. John Lutheran Church. But what do you do with 2 invitations to Christmas Eve worship... every week? You invite people! **There are many ways you can invite people to worship.** You can take the little cards and leave them someplace for people to find: a bulletin board, a table in a well-traveled area at work, someone's front door, "accidentally" left behind at a coffee shop... be respectful, but be creative! However, the most effective invitations are those that are extended personally. **Tell them why worship on Christmas Eve is important to you. Tell them how it changes your experience of the holiday.** And hand them the card and invite them to come. **Tell them which service you will be attending if they want to come with you.** Offer to drive together if it's feasible. Offer to meet them in the parking lot so that you can walk in together. Offer to sit with them during the worship service. People might say no. They might have other plans for Christmas. They might not be quite ready to come to worship. But the first invitation is just that, the first invitation. You can always invite them again later. Sometimes it takes seven invitations before a person decides to come and see. But if we each invite two people every week in Advent, imagine how many people will be touched by the good news of God coming to earth in the person Jesus. **Imagine how many people will hear about how your faith impacts your life. Imagine how many people will hear that their presence in worship is wanted.**

Imagine.

And if you want more than two invitation cards per week, there will be a stack in the Gathering Area. Take as many as you want and enjoy inviting people to come and know the joy of Christmas as we celebrate it on Christmas Eve at St. John Lutheran Church.

Around the Church (continued)

The Boards

St. John is run by three boards, the Deacons, the Elders, and the Trustees. We also have a Mission Endowment Fund Committee and a Mutual Ministry Committee. Each December we elect individuals to serve on each of the boards and the Mission Endowment Committee (the Mutual Ministry Committee is filled by appointment). Though there is often some overlap, each board has its primary areas of responsibility. The **Deacons** are largely responsible for visiting the homebound, overseeing stewardship practices and events, and planning fellowship opportunities. The **Elders** are largely responsible for Christian education and faith formation, evangelism, and worship life within the congregation. The **Trustees** are primarily responsible for taking care of the physical property of the church and overseeing the finances and budget. The Mission Endowment Committee listens to the community and disburses funds collected as interest on an account set aside for mission support. As we elect individuals to serve in these different roles as congregational leadership in December, we hold them and their work in our prayers.

Faith Formation for All Ages

Stewardship Corner

How do you steward your time? What about your relationships? December is often a very busy month for people, and that busyness can add stress to our relationships. The late Rev. Sharron Riessinger Blezard of the ELCA offered these thoughts in an article first published November 25, 2015, entitled "Stewardship in Advent Series: Give Thanks"

"Even if we are suffering from illness, loss of job or financial stress, broken relationships, depression, or stress, we are still called to give thanks. And in giving thanks and expressing our gratitude, we may experience attitudes shifting, circumstances becoming more manageable, and hope rising like the winter sun. So yes, begin in prayer with praise and thanksgiving....

Give thanks for those around you, for your church community, your family, your friends, and co-workers. **Initiate small and simple acts of gratefulness.** When was the last time you wrote a note of appreciation to your spouse? How long has it been since you've praised your child simply for being unique and worthy as God's child? When did you last thank your server or grocery store check-out clerk for a job well-done? **Be on the look-out during this season of Advent for ways to connect with both those you know and those whom you encounter in your daily comings and goings.** Finally, take action. Prayer, gratitude, and connection lead to action. **If you see someone in need—whether it's material, relational, or emotional—take a simple step to meet that person's need.**

How about instead of an Advent Calendar this year, you make each day with a simple act of gratitude? It could be a smile to a harried shopper. It might be a note of thanks and a gift card for your mail carrier.

It could be the anonymous purchase of a cup of coffee for the person behind you in line. Or it could even be skipping your own cup of daily coffee to make a special offering through your congregation.... This year enter Advent with prayer and Thanksgiving. Focus on building relationships rather than credit card debt. Do random acts of kindness and generosity rather than stressing over the perfect Christmas. **Lift up your soul to God and watch your spirits lift in response.** Know this... I give thanks for your faithful witness and partnership in sharing the gospel. You are in my prayers."

Read the full article at

<https://www.stewardshipoflife.org/2015/11/stewardship-in-advent-series-give-thanks/>

Faith Formation (continued)

Confirmation Classes

Confirmation is a faith formation opportunity that helps our young people (typically grades 6-8) engage with their faith and prepare to take ownership of the promises made on their behalf at baptism. **During our meeting in November we explore the New Testament. What is in it? How does it connect to the Old Testament? When was it written and compiled? And then we began to explore the gospel of John. Our next meeting is on December 14th.**

Kids Club/Youth Group

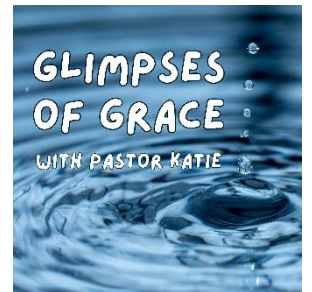
Each month the groups meet once for age-appropriate activities and discussions and once for a social or service event. **In December the groups will meet on December 8th** (Youth Group for grades 6-12 at Mars United Presbyterian Church and Kids Club for grades 2-5 at St. John Lutheran Church). On December 22nd we'll go caroling all together as a service event. (See below for more information)

Adult Advent Bible Study

We'll be looking at the book "**Christmas in the Four Gospel Homes**" by Cynthia Campbell. In each section, **Cynthia M. Campbell reflects on the distinctive perspective of the birth of Jesus, or the incarnation offered by each Gospel.** Christmas in the Four Gospel Homes creatively reimagines the season and inspires new and exciting reflection for Advent. No reading is required before discussions, though if you would like to read Campbell's book, copies are available in the church office. **Meetings are at 6:30pm on Sundays in Advent (Dec 1, 8, 15, 22). A zoom option is available at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89315025091>.**

Glimpses of Grace

There is a new podcast! **Each week, Pastor Katie will post a podcast celebrating the ways that God's love is made real all around us** in and through things that happen in and around the congregation of St. John. Sometimes it's a reflection from a moment observed on Sunday, sometimes a reflection from daily life, sometimes a story from a congregation member, sometimes it's whatever struck inspiration. **Podcast episodes are typically released on Thursdays on the [website](#), [Spotify](#), [Amazon podcast](#), and [Apple podcasts](#).** If you would like to be interviewed to share a glimpse of grace, **[contact Pastor Katie](#).**



Did You Know?

The Advent Wreath

From our liturgical resources, Sundays and Seasons: "One of the best-known customs for the season is the Advent wreath. The wreath and winter candle-lighting in the midst of growing darkness **strengthen some of the Advent images** found in the Bible. The unbroken circle of greens is clearly **an image of everlasting life**, a victory wreath, the crown of Christ, or the wheel of time itself. Christians use the wreath as a sign that **Christ reaches into our time to lead us to everlasting life**. The four candles mark the progress of the four weeks of Advent. Sometimes the wreath is embellished with natural dried flowers or fruit. Its **evergreen branches lead to the evergreen Christmas tree.**"

Serving Others

Christmas Caroling at St. John Specialty Care Center – Dec 22

The Joint Youth Group and Kids Club will be **caroling at St. John Specialty Care Center on December 22nd**. All are welcome to come and walk the halls of St. John Specialty Care Center as we bring Christmas joy to the residents. **We will meet in the lobby at 1:00pm and begin singing shortly thereafter.**

Fourth Quarter Mission Emphasis – Mars Police Dept.

Our fourth quarter (Oct., Nov., Dec.) Mission Emphasis project is the Mars Police Department. To contribute to our mission emphasis, mark your offering “mission emphasis.”

St. John Food Pantry

Maintaining the food pantry is a community effort! Help us to keep it stocked with items with a long shelf life, especially **personal hygiene, cleaning, and paper products**. And be sure **to invite people to make use of the food pantry as they need!** Outdoor pantries can be tricky with the fluctuating weather, especially as temperatures dip below freezing, so we want to be careful of what we keep in it. **Access to the indoor pantry is every Monday and Wednesday 9a-1p** with additional times available by calling Pastor Katie or the office.

Angel Tree



Sign up for a tag and help **make Christmas special for kids served by Glade Run Lutheran Services!** On the Tree in the Gathering Area are tags with information for kids who need gifts this Christmas. Gift cards should be placed in an envelope with Glade Run's tag attached. Please write the amount on the tag or on the card itself. Donated items should be unwrapped. **Attach Glade Run's tag to your donation** so it is visible. **Gifts are due by December 8th. As you place your gift under the tree, add an angel ornament decorated by the Sunday School class to the tree.**



Wishing all of the St. John congregation and your families a blessed and Peaceful Christmas season.

November Lookback

Trunk or Treat

About 100 kids were excited to explore the cars in St. John's annual Trunk or Treat presence during Mars Trick or Treating. Thank you to all who brought their cars and offered goodies to be passed out!



Chili Cookoff

Thank you to everyone who supported the Chili Cookoff! It was a fun fellowship event with a little friendly competition tossed in! Congratulations to our winners and thank you to our celebrity judges!



All Saints Worship

Each November we remember those who have died in faith. The list of those named during worship is available in the office for anyone who was not able to be present that day.



Youth-Led Worship

Thank you to everyone who supported our young people as they led us in a youth-led worship on November 17th. Leadership was provided by members of the Join Kids Club and Youth Group offered by Mars United Presbyterian Church and St. John Lutheran Church.



Sunday School Thanksgiving Meal Offering

The Sunday School did a great job of creating a shopping list and buying groceries for five Thanksgiving meal kits! The families supported by these meal kits were all incredibly grateful for the church's generosity which enabled us to not only provide complete meal kits but also a gift card for Giant Eagle for other food they may need.



Youth Group/Kids Club Roller Skating

We had a great turnout with the Joint Youth Group and Kids Club at Skate Castle. Some people enjoyed a favorite pastime. Some people tried it out for the first time. And some people cheered from the sidelines. But everyone had a great time!



December 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 Worship 9:00 am New Members Sunday School 10:15 am Trustees' Mtg. 10:15 am Book Study 6:30pm	2	3 Elders' Meeting 7 pm	4 Sung Evening Prayer w/ communion 6:00 pm	5	6	7
8 Worship 9:00 am Congregational Meeting Sunday School 10:15 am Youth Group / Kids Club 1-2:30 pm Book Study 6:30pm	9 Worship Planners 7:00 pm	10 Vestry Meeting 7:00 pm	11 Sung Evening Prayer w/ communion 6:00 pm	12	13 Living Nativity @ Mars UP 6:00-8:00 pm	14 Confirmation Class 9:30 – 11:30 am
15 Worship 9:00 am Sunday School 10:15 am Book Study 6:30pm	16	17	18 Sung Evening Prayer w/ communion 6:00 pm	19 Cranberry Men's Choir @ MUP 7:00 pm	20 Messy Church 5:30 – 7:30 pm Newsletter Articles Due	21 Night in Bethlehem 10 – 2 pm Blue Christmas @ MUP 7:00 pm
22 Worship 9:00 am Breakfast in Bethlehem 10:15 am Youth Group / Kids Club 1-2:30 pm (Caroling/party) Book Study 6:30pm Decorating 10:15 am	23	24 Christmas Eve 3:00 pm & 7:30 pm	25 Christmas 9:00 am	26	27	28
29 Worship 9:00 am Sunday School 10:15 am	30 Communion at Penn Mar 1:45 pm	31				



12/01 Dominic Cardinal
12/07 Nathan Kramer
12/04 David Dreher
12/11 Serafina Julio
12/25 Jim Haer



December Newsletter



Address service requested

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