January 2025

# **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

I started my podcast *Glimpses of Grace* for a few different reasons. I thought it would be a good way to share just a bit of what I see God doing in and through the congregation of St. John. I thought it would be an easy way to invite people to share their faith with friends and families. I heard about a lot of friends starting podcasts, and I thought it sounded like fun. It seemed like a good way to share my thoughts in a way that might help someone else connect with their faith and see glimpses of grace in their own lives. I did not expect it to become something of a spiritual discipline for me.

When I began recording episodes, I waited for inspiration to strike before I started writing about an idea. But now, I seek out my glimpses of grace. I go into every day looking for ways that I can see God's good news at work around me. I see everyday things more and more through the lens of faith, and it has become something of a challenge for me to seek out at least one thing everyday that reminds me of God's good news amid everyday life. I keep a list of these ideas in my phone because each time I look at this list, I am blown away by what God has done, is doing, and what I know God will do in my life, in St. John, and in the world. And now, it's not an accidental spiritual discipline anymore. It's now a faith practice that has become an automatic mindset as I move through my day. Since I began being more intentional about seeking out these glimpses of grace, I have noticed that the more I look for them, the more I see. And the more I see these glimpses of grace, I feel like joining in on Mary's song: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." I end every podcast hoping that listeners got a glimpse of grace today. So my challenge to you is to join me in looking for God's grace in the world, join me in seeking God's goodness around us in all things. Notice what God has done for you and sing along with Mary with your soul magnifying the Lord and your spirit rejoicing in God your Savior. Maybe at first, you'll just catch a glimpse here and there, but the more you look, the more you'll see, because God is at work in this world, even through little everyday moments.

> Peace, Pastor Katie

#### Find Us on Social Media

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

#### Online Sunday Worship

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

#### **CONGREGATIONAL MEETING NOTICE**

Annual Meeting - Sunday, January 26, 2025 after worship

We will review 2024, vote on a budget, and approve the congregational council for 2025.

# **Worship Notes**

#### **Young Worship Helpers**

We love having our young worshipers helping with worship leadership! If you are unable to be present for your scheduled service, please try to find someone to cover and tell the office of the change. To help our new acolytes learn the role, we have paired them with an older acolyte to mentor them.

	Acolyte	Offering	Offering	Young Reader
29-Dec	Abby C	Luca K	Lydia M	
5-Jan	Lydia M and Carissa M	Ava N	Ella N	
12-Jan	Ella N and Ava N	Anna K	Nathan K	
19-Jan	Cate S and Abby C	Ava N	Lydia M	Abby C
26-Jan	Jules K and Abby C	Luca K	Eva K	
2-Feb	Anna K	Cate S	Lydia M	

#### **Adult Worship Leaders**

	Greeters	Usher	Assistant Minister	Bread Baker	Counters
29-December	VOLUNTEER	Dave K	Denise H	(No communion)	Denise H & Ruth Ann T
5-January	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	David D	Denise H	VOLUNTEER
12-January	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Valerie C	Denise H	VOLUNTEER
19-January	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Valerie C	Denise H	VOLUNTEER
26-January	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Valerie C	Denise H	VOLUNTEER
2-February	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	VOLUNTEER	Denise H	VOLUNTEER

### **New Children's Bulletins**

We love having our young people in worship with us, but sometimes our worship aids (like our bulletins) are not helpful to young worshipers. New bulletins are available in the Greeting area just for them! There are three levels: **visual bulletins** that include lots of pictures, stickers, and a tactile element with pipe cleaners; **pre-reader bulletins** that introduce sight words for worship and include simple explanations for different parts of the service with stickers to help worshipers follow along; **young reader bulletins** that invite young worshipers to read more liturgy and explore the liturgy on a deeper level that is still age-appropriate with stickers that help the worshiper follow the service.

## **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 through scripture and song. **Worship is at 9:00 am**.

# Worship Notes (continued) Evening Prayer with Holy Communion – January 8, 6:00 pm

A new worship opportunity on the second Wednesday of every month. This brief, quiet, reflective service will offer an opportunity to dwell in the readings from the previous Sunday in a meditative space. We will read scripture, offer prayers, and ponder God's word in our lives as we gather around the table of Holy Communion. Worship begins at 6:00pm on the second Wednesday of each month. Worship will last 30 minutes to give individuals time to transition into Bible study

#### **Vestry Installation – January 12**

We are so grateful to those who dedicate time and energy to **serve in various leadership roles** within the congregation. As we begin a new year, the vestry will be charged with leading the congregation through the coming year during **the installation of the vestry during worship on January 12<sup>th</sup>.** 

#### What is Epiphany?

Epiphany is **one of the oldest traditions** in the Christian church, dating back to the second century. From our liturgical resource, Sundays and Seasons: "The feast of Epiphany ("manifestation") **concludes the Christmas season with a celebration of God's glory revealed** in the person of Jesus Christ for all people. Like the light of the star that guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are: children of God who are claimed and washed in the waters of baptism. **We are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God's love to all** people." **Epiphany is celebrated on January 6**<sup>th</sup>, 12 days after Christmas. In worship, we will celebrate Epiphany on the Sunday following January 6<sup>th</sup>. Following the day of Epiphany, we observe the "**season after Epiphany**" **until we begin our Lenten journey** on Ash Wednesday, which this year is March 5<sup>th</sup>.

#### Celebration of Baptism of Our Lord - January 19

Come celebrate the baptism of our Lord and the gift we receive in our baptisms in worship on Jan 19!

### Worship Volunteers Wanted

**Training** is available for any position. Sign-up in the Greeting Area or online.

### <u>Assistant Minister</u>

Help lead worship by reading scripture and prayers and assisting in the distribution of communion.

#### Greeter

Greet people as they enter for worship and hand out bulletins.

#### <u>Usher</u>

Ring the bell before and during worship, attend to lights and doors, and coordinate offering collection.

#### **Bread Baker**

Bake or purchase bread to be used for communion during worship.

<u>Counter</u> (contact Financial Secretary, no sign-up sheet)

Serve in a team of two to count the offering after worship.

<u>Eucharistic Minister</u> (contact Pastor Katie, no sign-up sheet)

Visit and take communion from our Sunday celebration to those unable to be physically in worship.

Altar Guild (contact Pastor Katie, no sign-up sheet)

Set up for and clean up after worship; change the paraments to match the color of the day.

## **Serving Others**

#### St. John Food Pantry



If you notice that the outdoor pantry is looking empty, please move stuff from the inside shelves. As the weather drops below freezing more regularly, please be aware of how any items might store in freezing temperatures (typically items with liquid should not be outside during freezing temperatures). People who use our pantries have asked that we focus our offerings on toiletries, cleaning supplies, and paper products as well as easy-to-make meals (e.g., soups or other microwaveable meals).

#### **Mission Endowment 2024 Review**

Our Endowment committee distributed a lot of funds in 2024. Our committee distributed to several organizations and/or missions this year. Here are some of those organizations:

ELCA benefiting Lutheran Disaster Response, ELCA World Hunger, Young Adults in Global Mission, Mars High School nurse, Voice, Salvation Army of Butler, Lutherlyn, Bethesda Lutheran Services, St. John food pantry, Purchasing batting to use in St. John quilt mission

This thank you note is an example of the impact and what those funds provided.

From Gretchen Baysek, Mars High School Nurse, "Thank you for the underwear and socks, toothbrushes and toothpaste. The first day I brought items in, we needed girl underwear. It doesn't happen often, but it is nice not to have a student go home because they need clean underwear. I truly appreciate it. Thank you and the Endowment Committee for a wonderful donation."

It is truly rewarding to provide much needed items and funds to our neighbors in need. Many more ministries and organizations will be funded in 2025, as there is always a need to help spread St. John's mission into our neighborhoods and the world. Blessings to you all and happy church New Year!

### Thank You!

Thank you to all those who helped to bake dozens upon dozens of cookies and goodies for the participants in the local Meals on Wheels program. The goodies were so appreciated throughout December!

### **Thank You!**

Once again, St. John took on the **challenge of 75 tags on the Angel Tree**... and once again, every single tag was taken and replaced with a gift under the tree for a person under the care of Glade Run Services! **Thank you to all who helped make Christmas special for these people!** 

# Serving Others (continued) Thank You!

TWICE the congregation of St. Johns has provided over \$500 to supply five local families in need a holiday meal. Thanksgiving meals were delivered in the week before Thanksgiving, and Christmas dinners the week before Christmas. Each family was deeply grateful for the support and care offered in these meal kits. The Sunday School class had a blast shopping for everything too!



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## **Around the Church**

### Night in Bethlehem and Family Carol Sing! January 4th

Keep the Christmas celebrations going into 2025 with crafts, carols, cookies, and cocoa on January 4<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm! Bring the whole family as we explore the story of Jesus' birth through interactive stations ending with an impromptu pageant and carol sing with cookies and cocoa! All are welcome to this FREE event! Invite friends and neighbors for one last Christmas hurrah before Epiphany. Registrations are not required but are appreciated. You can register by emailing Pastor Katie.

### **Vestry Retreat – January 25th**

The newly installed vestry will gather for a day of planning and visioning on **Saturday**, **January 25**<sup>th</sup> **from 9:30am – 2:30pm**. The vestry retreat is a great way to set the tone for the new calendar year as we pray for and strategically plan for the coming year.

## **Website Updates!**

We are excited to begin using a Member Portal on our website! When you visit the website at <a href="stjohnchurchmars.org">stjohnchurchmars.org</a>, there is an option to "log in" in the upper right corner. When you log in, you will have access to a member portal. Here you can offer ways to connect with other members, access the latest directory, access the online sign-up board at <a href="https://signup.com/go/JPakfVA">https://signup.com/go/JPakfVA</a>, or view the current vestry. To help keep members safe, the office will approve membership requests.

# Around the Church (continued) 2025 Church Directory

It's time for us to update our church directory! There will be a copy of 2024's directory in the Greeting Area for the first few weeks of January. Please go through the directory and add or edit any information you would like included in the 2025 directory. If you have contact information that you do not want in the directory but would like to make sure is updated for the office's records, please contact Pastor Katie or the office directly with that information.

#### **Faith Formation**

#### **Communion Classes**

Each week, we give thanks to the ways God has moved in and through God's people across scripture before we remember Jesus' last supper with his disciples. Communion class offers an opportunity for children and youth to hear the story of Jesus' last supper and its connection to the exodus in the Hebrew Bible. We will explore the different supplies and practices surrounding communion as well as bake bread to be used at an upcoming worship service. If you are interested in your child receiving their first communion this year at



the Palm Sunday worship service, please contact Pastor Katie and dates will be selected for these sessions. The Lutheran church does not have a specific age at which communion is first offered. It is a decision to be made for and with each child and their family.

### Adult Bible Study: The Apocrypha 101

In January and February, the Adult Bible Study will be dipping into the deep waters of the Apocrypha!

These fourteen books were left out of the Jewish canon of the Hebrew Bible. Many Christians throughout the centuries have considered these books canonical, though this was a major point of discussion during the reformation. (Canon being the accepted list of books of scripture). We will not have time for an in-depth study of the Apocrypha, but we will explore the context in which these books were written, several books of the Apocrypha, and the history of the Apocrypha as scripture. It is sure to be a rich discussion each week!

Zoom links are also available by contacting the office. Wednesdays and Sundays will have the same material to offer flexibility in attendance patterns.

We will meet **Wednesdays**, **Jan. 8-Feb.26** at **7:00** pm and **Sundays**, **Jan. 12– March 2** at **6:30** pm. All are welcome regardless of previous knowledge of church attendance!

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

Messy Church is an intentionally intergenerational place for people to meet and experience fun and messy ways to engage in faith and worship, 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. Faith formation topics and 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.** No registration is required for this free faith formation opportunity.

# Faith Formation (continued) Kids Club and Youth Group

The Mars Area Youth Group and Kids Club are joint ministries with Mars United Presbyterian Church. Youth Group (Grades 6-12) meets at Mars United Presbyterian Church and Kids Club (Grades 2-5) meets at St. John. We are looking forward to getting back to our regularly scheduled meetings!

Each group will meet in their respective locations on January 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 1:00 – 2:30 pm.

#### **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 December the students explored the concept of adiaphora (feel free to ask a student to explain it to you today!) as well as the content and structure of Luther's Small Catechism. Our next class is January 18<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Reading Invitation**

In the winter, we are surrounded by more darkness than we are at other times of the year with short days and long nights. Rather than seeing the darkness as evil or dangerous, Barbara Brown Taylor invites readers to see God working in the nighttime of life in *Learning to Walk in the Dark* In this rich darkness of winter, **Taylor invites us to put aside our fears and anxieties and to explore all that God has to teach us 'in the dark.'** Through darkness we find courage, we understand the world in new ways, and we feel God's presence around us, guiding us through things seen and unseen. Often it is while we are in the dark that we grow the most. **Taylor's** *Learning to Walk in the Dark* provides a way to find spirituality in those times when we don't have all the answers.

### Stewardship Corner from Stewardship of Life Institute

Many Christians think of "stewardship" only in financial terms, but money is only one of the gifts God entrusts us with – and it's usually the one we value <u>less than</u> our gifts of time, relationships, faith and health. Make 2025 your year for holistic stewardship - and abundant living – by taking steps to care better for ALL the gifts God entrusts to us, including our finances. Here are tips.

**Health:** Get a physical and ask your doctor to help you to form a strategy for better living. For most of us, the plan would include eating better, exercising more and practicing wellness.

**Relationships:** We not only share love and joy with family and friends, but also turn to and rely on them in times of trouble. Care for your relationships with honest and frequent communication, gettogethers and sharing. Renew and repair relationships that need it.

**Time:** Are you just mindlessly counting the hours and days? Take charge of your time by planning events and activities that enrich your life. Plan for health and relationships.

**Faith:** No matter where you are on your discipleship journey, all of us can draw closer to God and open ourselves more fully to the Holy Spirit. For 2024, commit to regular worship, prayer, Scripture reading, devotions, service and other faith practices.

**Money:** Get your finances in order. Consider the 10-10-80 plan, budgeting your income to save 10 percent, give away 10 percent, and living on 80 percent.

God has given us so much. Stewarding the most important aspects of our lives can bring us into the life of abundance that Jesus promises us in John 10:10.

--Rob Blezard

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#### **December Lookback**

#### **Angel Tree**



It's always incredible to see the pieces of paper on the tree get transformed into an abundance of gifts!

## **Live Nativity at Mars United Presbyterian**

Thank you to all who joined us for this live-action retelling of the Christmas Story alongside the people of Mars United Presbyterian and some very fuzzy animals!



#### **A Very Messy Christmas**

Messes were made as we celebrated Christ born as a baby at Messy Church!







## **Sunday School Craft**



Our Sunday School made gifts for those unable to come and worship with us in person on a regular basis.

### **Kids Club and Youth Group Caroling**

Due to masking precautions, we were unable to carol the halls of St. John Specialty Care Center, so we sang Christmas songs in the sanctuary!



#### From the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA

True and Lasting Joy
Published by Living Lutheran December 13, 2024

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified (Luke 2:8-9).

Night. A liminal time. A time when God sends messages and messengers to mortals. A time when nocturnal predators are active. A time when, while the world is asleep, greater vigilance is required of those who keep watch.

And here are these shepherds. Except for Mary and Joseph, they were the first to learn of Jesus' birth. Shepherds figure prominently in Scripture as metaphors for faithful leaders, good kings, compassionate and brave. David was a shepherd boy called into God's service. Jesus declared himself to be the Good Shepherd. But in actuality, shepherding was hard and dangerous work, and shepherds were not considered to be among the elite in society. Shepherds were an out-of-bounds people, living outside of the city, and a little suspect. Why would the news of the birth of the king be announced to them?

In the eucharist, Christ invades us with God's joy. We are intimately connected to the source of joy and grace in this gift.

What about Bethlehem? The prophet Micah called Bethlehem "one of the little clans of Judah" (Micah 5:2). Even today, Bethlehem would not be counted among the world's great cities. In 1950, Christians made up 86% of its population. Now they are under 10%. Its economy is based on tourism, which has been decimated by the current conflict. Bethlehem is in the occupied West Bank, in a war zone. To these terrified shepherds, literally sitting in the dark outside of Bethlehem, an obscure town in an occupied province of the Roman Empire, God chose to reveal the birth of the Messiah. What on earth was God thinking? Why not in Jerusalem? Why not in Herod's palace? Why not in Rome, where the emperor claimed to be *soter*, "savior."

How does the angels' announcement of the birth of the Messiah sound to people living in obscure places far from the centers of power in indescribably difficult circumstances today? To those living in Gaza and Ukraine, in Sudan, in the homes of immigrants in this country who fear deportation? To starving children here and across the globe? How dare we wish them "Merry Christmas"? "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord'" (Luke 2:10-11). Joy. Not happiness that is transient and human-made, but joy, given by God, that is deep and strong and unshakable.

Joy is a sign of the reign of God. The root word for "joy" in Greek is the same as that for "grace." "Gift" also comes from the same root as does "thanks." All of this points to the nature of true joy. It is gift. It is grace. It is thanksgiving. Our word "eucharist," a name for Holy Communion, ties this all together in the sacrament where Jesus' body is broken for us and Jesus' blood is poured out for us. In the eucharist, Christ invades us with God's joy. We are intimately connected to the source of joy and grace in this gift. Perhaps that is why, in the middle of the night, to terrified shepherds outside of a small town, God chose to send the angels to announce the birth of Jesus. No distraction. No interference. Just the simple, deep, profound gift of true and lasting joy. A joy that comes from God, from the essence of God, depending only on God, that no earthly power can take away.

#### **2025 Vestry**

Below is the 2025 Vestry as elected in our December Congregational Meeting. At the December Vestry Meeting, chairs, representatives to council, and secretaries were selected for each board. The Vestry also elected officers to council. Council is comprised of the officers (president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer) and the chair and representative to council from each board (Deacons, Elders, Trustees). The council will be approved by the congregation at the January congregational meeting.

Council President – David Dreher Council Vice-President – Keith Cardinal Secretary – Jen Miller Financial Secretary – Kelly Greb Treasurer – Tanya Nagel

#### **Deacons**

Sherry Davidson - Secretary
Beth Fitzgerald
Tanya Nagel
Dawn Barill
Cora Steigerwalt– Representative to Council
Jamie Weaver
Erin Weaver - Chair

#### **Elders**

Valerie Cardinal- Representative to Council Keith Cardinal Jen Miller Vern Miller Chuck Olescyski Kim Richards - Chair Ruth Ann Tully - Secretary

Trustees (Chair and representative pending)

Bob Davidson
David Dreher
Jonathan Ciora
John Fritz
John Tully
Barry Steigerwalt - Secretary
Missy Kramer

Board and Committee Meeting Schedule

Deacons: Monthly, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after worship Elders: Monthly, 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday at 7:00 pm Trustees: Monthly, 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after worship Council: Monthly, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday at 7:00 pm Mission Endowment: Quarterly, as needed Mutual Ministry: Quarterly, as needed

## Other Standing Committees Approved by the Congregation

#### **Mission Endowment**

Beverly Crislip Denise Hager Janet Senka
Beth Fitzgerald Dave Knauff Ruth Ann Tully

**Mutual Ministry** 

Keith Cardinal Ruth Ann Tully David Dreher

		Je	January 2025			
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	Night in Bethlehem and Family Carol Sing 2:00 pm
Worship 9:00 am Sunday School 10:15 am Trustees Meeting 10:15am Youth Group / Kids Club 1-2:30 pm	9	7 Elders' Meeting 7 pm	8 Bible Study - Apocrypha 7:00 pm	6	10	11
Worship 9:00 am Sunday School 10:15 am Deacons' Meeting 10:15am Bible Study – Apocrypha 6:30pm	13	14	15 Bible Study - Apocrypha 7:00 pm	16	17 Messy Church 5:30 – 7:30 pm	Confirmation Class 9:30 – 11:30 am
Worship 9:00 am Sunday School 10:15 am Youth Group / Kids Club 1-2:30 pm (social event) Bible Study-Apocrypha 6:30pm	20 Newsletter Articles Due	21 Council Meeting 7:00 pm	22 Bible Study - Apocrypha 7:00 pm	23	24	25 Vestry Retreat 9:30am – 2:30pm
Worship 9:00 am Annual Meeting, 10:15 am Sunday School 10:15 am Bible Study- Apocrypha 6:30 pm	27 Communion at Penn Mar 1:45 pm	28	29 Bible Study - Apocrypha 7:00 pm	30	31	



MENSELS CONTRACTOR

Address service requested

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