



The

# Sanctuary

You are God's Temple

...God's Spirit Lives in You. 1 Cor. 3:15

BLESSED SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH + 1205 NORTH LINCOLN AVE. + O'FALLON, IL 62269 + 618=632-0126 + WWW.MYBSLC.ORG

## Upcoming Events

### December 2021

**Wed. Dec. 1, 8, 15**

Advent Dinner 6 pm

Advent Worship 7 pm

Adult Choir 7:45 pm

**Sun. Dec. 5, 12, 19, 26**

Worship 9:30 am

**Sun. Dec. 5**

Sun. School 10:45

Confirmation 4

**Mon. Dec. 6**

Elders Mtg. 7 pm

Support Group 7 pm

**Tues. Dec. 7**

Quilting 10-?

**Sat. Dec. 11**

Children's Christmas Pro-

gram Rehearsal 9 or 10

Birthday Party for Jesus  
11 am

**Sun. Dec. 12**

Children's Christmas

Program during worship

Reception following

No Sunday School or

Confirmation

**Mon. Dec. 13, 20, 27**

Support Group 7 pm

**Tues. Dec. 14**

Church Council 7 pm

**Thurs. Dec. 16**

Fellowship Mtg. 4:30

**Sun. Dec. 19**

Confirmation 4

**Tues. Dec. 21**

Christian Ed Mtg. 7

**Wed. Dec. 22**

No Bible Study

**Fri. Dec. 24**

Christmas Eve Worship

Family 7 pm

Midnight Communion 11:30

**Sun. Dec. 26 & Jan. 3**

Worship 9:30

No Sunday School



## Schedule of Holiday Services 2021

**Wed., Dec. 1, 8, 15**

Soup & Salad Advent Dinners—6 pm

Advent Service—7:00 p.m. Adult choir 7:45

**Sunday, December 12**

Children's Christmas Program—9:30

**Christmas Eve**

Family Worship 7 p.m.

Midnight Communion - 11:30

**Sunday, December 26 & January 2**

Worship—One Service 9:30 a.m.

No Sunday School





Shepherds are out in the fields doing their daily task of watching the flocks. It's nighttime. An angel of the Lord appeared. How did they know? I'm not sure they did. Whatever the angel looked like, human I imagine, what made his presence notable was Luke's description: "And the glory of the Lord shown around them." They could have easily mistaken him for just a traveler walking in the fields, but that might be unusual at night. The problem was, in that moment it appeared to be as bright as a sunshiny day, but at night! The Glory of the Lord surrounding them and the heavenly messenger definitely had their attention and they were listening.

Try to take in what you just heard. The glory of the Lord is pure light. It's nighttime, but the sky is lit up like daytime. There is so much light there isn't room for a shadow. It's one thing to see a shooting star at night, but this was something they had never seen before. Afraid? More like terrified! An encounter of the Lord's kind was what it was.

*Glory  
to  
God  
in the  
highest  
heaven!*

LUKE 2:14, NRSV

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). More information is forthcoming. The angel continued: "And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

*"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"* (Luke 2:12-14)

This could have been the imagination of a storytelling shepherd. It gets lonely out in the fields, and surely they told stories to keep themselves entertained. But they believed what they saw and heard, probably pinching themselves to wake up from what seemed like a "day" dream. But it wasn't and they knew it. How do I know? Look what follows:

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

Let's Go! What is interesting is that no one protested saying, "Hey guys, what about the sheep?" Surely some stayed behind while others went to Bethlehem. When they arrived it happened just as the angel said! There was Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. When the realization hit them that it wasn't just a dream, that they were in the presence of their Savior, Christ the Lord, I imagine the same refrain they had heard from the angels came pouring out of their souls:

*"Glory to God in the highest,*

*and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*

It wasn't the last time they sung that refrain. Luke records, "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

(Continued on page 3)

[8] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

[14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

[15] When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." [16] And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. [17] And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. [18] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. [19] But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. [20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying

(Pastor Vern article continued)

Here we are 2,000 years after this great event. The world in which we live is as dark as it was for those lonely shepherds. So at Christmas time we relive the events of that day. We re-create the scene in the fields and the nativity using our children to play the characters of this divine drama so that they learn of announcements to the shepherds of the Lord's appearing. We light candles on the anniversary of that night to remind ourselves of the great mystery of the Glory of the Lord and the Light of the world, coming to us as a child with both human and divine origins. Jesus, the Light of the world entered our darkness to bring us Light and Life!

Thirty to thirty-three years later, a day of darkness seemed to have won the battle. We find Jesus, the Messiah, nailed to a cross, bleeding and dying for the world just as the angel predicted. But 3 days later, our Savior Jesus would pierce the darkness of death with His incomparable Light and Life and rise from the dead. That's why we continue to tell the story to this day.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of December our Sunday School will be leading our worship in celebration of that Glorious Birth which brought salvation to the world. And on the 24<sup>th</sup> we will gather again to worship the infant King, the incarnate God, who came into our world not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.

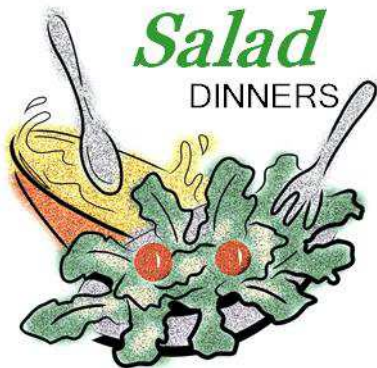
The shepherds most likely went back to their normal routine of watching sheep, but O, how their lives were changed by that event. Think about it. Because of the shepherds, the angel's message has been resonating in the fields, towns and cities of our world for over two millennia. You and I cannot go to Bethlehem with the shepherds, but we can encourage each other just as the shepherds did, saying to one another, "LET'S GO! Let's go to church to hear once again the story of the ages. Let's go, so that we don't forget that this message wasn't just for the shepherds but for the world... and more specifically for YOU!

May the Light of Christ shine on You brightly this Christmas,

Pastor Vern

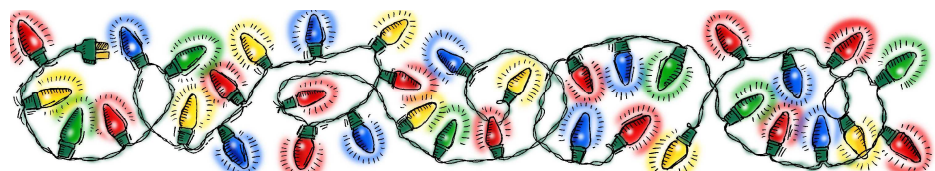


## SOUP & *Salad* DINNERS



**Advent Dinners:** Join us for Advent Soup & Salad dinners on Wednesday, December 1, 8 and 15 at 6 pm. Hope to see you there for food and fellowship before the Wednesday night services.  
The Fellowship Committee

**Adult Choir:** The Adult choir will practice immediately following Advent services.



## Chairman's Chat



Happy Holidays to all of you!

I have been busy with putting up Christmas decorations outside and inside, and it reminds me that "Jesus is the reason for season."

November was a busy month. Besides celebrating the Thanksgiving holiday, I was busy with the monthly church council meeting as well as getting ready and leading the Fall Voter's Meeting on Sunday, NOV 21<sup>st</sup>.

Speaking of the Fall Voter's meeting, we had a nice turnout for the meeting and covered several items. The biggest item was the presentation and approval of the 2022 church budget. The highlight

of the budget was that it went down about \$99K due to several factors: the biggest was the departure of Pastor Matthew and his family. We also are continuing with some of the expense cutting that we started this year. Even though the budget went down, the congregational giving has to stay the same or increase in order to keep the church open and running.

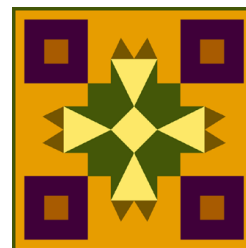
I also touched on the post-COVID 19 plan that the church council is working on. This plan will be worked into the church goals for next year as well as Strategic Committee recommendations. The plan will be focused on the 4 G's: Gather, Grow, Glorify and Go. Under each "G" will be listed things that the church does and will do in the future, like church services, prayer groups, picnic, trivia night, Thanksgiving baskets, Food Pantry, and serving in various positions at BSLC. The council will continue working on this plan during the DEC council meeting as well as the Rolls 'n Goals meeting in 2022. Watch for more information in the upcoming newsletters and emails.

Wishing all of you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. If you have travel plans, have a great time but be safe as well!!!

Stay tuned next month for some more exciting information from your congregational chairman!!!

In God's Name,

Curtis Kuppler, **BSLC Congregational Chairman**



Join the Lutheran World Relief QUILT-ERS on **Tuesday, December 7, Tuesday January 4, and Tuesday, February 1** from 10:00 - ? to tie quilts. (We don't actually quilt by hand. Instead we secure the layers by hand tying them.) Bring your lunch and join us for a time of good ole fellowship. Stay the entire time or as long as your schedule permits. Hope to see you there! Mark your calendar for the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of each month. If you have any fabric pieces, thin blankets, curtains, drapes, sheets, etc you no longer need, the quilters would love to recycle them into quilts.

## Dr. Robert Kolb to Speak at German Christmas Service



The Rev. Dr. Robert Kolb, Professor at Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Louis, will preach at the German Christmas Vesper on Sunday, December 12, 2:15 pm at Peace Lutheran Church, 737 Barracksvue Road.

He will be accompanied by music from the Liederkrantz, Men's Chorus and Frauenchor (Ladies' Choir) of the St. Louis German Cultural Society. They will render seasonal numbers in the German language.

Peace Lutheran Choristers, under the direction of Mrs. Alexia Arensmeier, will sing carols in the vernacular. Kendra Ruesler will be the organist.

The festive setting, including congregational singing, will be in German; however, English helps will be provided. Fellowship and ethnic refreshments follow.



## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Preparations are underway for the 2021 Christmas Program. The Sunday School children will perform during the regular service on December 12 with a cookie reception and short movie for the entire family to follow.

Children will be practicing songs and parts during regular Sunday School times with a special practice on Saturday, December 11. Depending on their grade level, the students will come at 9:00 or 10:00 am for practice. Ask your child's teacher for details. Everyone will celebrate Jesus' birthday party at 11:00 am with a simple lunch.

### December 11 - Program practice

Arrive at 9 or 10 as directed by your child's teacher  
Jesus's birthday party for students at 11 am  
Practice and meal completed approximately 11:30.



### December 12 - Program

Children arrive in their Sunday School room at 9:00 am  
9:30 Service/Program begins  
Cookie reception and short family film to follow service

There will be no Sunday School on December 26 or January 2.

Keep an eye out for details about a family game night in January 2022 and a family movie night in February [2022.at](https://www.blessedsaviorlutheran.org/2022) church. More details to follow.



### Christmas Giving Tree

We have been informed by Lutheran Child and Family Services that they will not be doing the Christmas Giving Tree this year due to the Covid-19 virus.

Instead they are asking for monetary donations. Your donation will put gifts under the tree for the children in their care. Foster parents will receive money specifically to buy Christmas gifts for each child—assuring they receive what

they want and need. With continuing COVID concerns this ensures we all stay safer.

To donate you may do in several ways:

**Write a check to BSLC** and place in the offering plate. Make sure you note LCFS in the memo portion. One check will be written for all donations received through Blessed Savior.

**Mail a check directly** to LCFS Christmas Drive, One Oakbrook Terrace, Suite 501, Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181

**Donate online:** [www.LCFS.org/ChristmasDrive](http://www.LCFS.org/ChristmasDrive)

There is also more information available at the online website.

Thanks for your participation and generosity.

Give from your heart and help children have a Merry Christmas!

amazon

smile

You shop. Amazon gives.

### Amazon Smile

Doing some online shopping with Amazon?

Did you know that Blessed Savior is signed up as a charitable organization on AmazonSmile?

Please consider starting at AmazonSmile next time you order from Amazon and designate Blessed Savior as your charity.

**AmazonSmile** is a program that donates 0.5% of your eligible purchases on **Amazon** to a charity of your choice. All you need to **do** is start your shopping at **smile.amazon.com**. The donation will be made at no extra cost to you and you can choose from nearly one million public charitable organizations.



# Stewardship COMMITTEE

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the great physician of both body and soul, healed a man with dropsy by His Word on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1–6). Dropsy is a paradoxical ailment, with an unquenchable craving for drink even though the body is over inflated with fluid, a craving that, when indulged, served not to ease but to feed the disease.

And so, if a man drinks a great deal but is never filled, he sees a doctor to inquire about what ails him, what is wrong with his body, and how to remedy it. For that is not thirst but a disease (Seneca, *Consolation to His Mother Helvia*, 11.3).

But if the owner of five couches goes looking for 10, or the owner of 10 tables buys up as many again, and even though he has plenty of land and money, he remains unsatisfied and desires yet more, losing sleep and always in discontent, does he not also require a physician to diagnose the cause of this distress?

For this is not want or lack, it's a disease (Aristippus, quoted in Plutarch, *Love of Wealth*, 524b). As St. Augustine of Hippo wrote, "we may rightly compare the dropsical man to a covetous rich man: For the more the one is swollen with excess of water, the more he thirsts; so also the other: The more he abounds in riches ... the more eagerly he desires them" (*The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, 4:135). Both require physicians. Both require diagnosis and medicine applied from the outside to the inward being. For these are not desires to be fulfilled but diseases to be cured.



This is why our Lord instructs us to not to be consumed by money. "No one can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and money" (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13). Our desire for money, like the disease dropsy, is never satisfied. We always desire more. We think, "If I just had this much then I would be happy."

But even when that much comes, which God gladly gives, happiness evades us. The desire for more is never satisfied. It demands our constant energy, either in procuring more or protecting what we already have. When this happens, God, in His mercy, shows us that the money that He has given is no longer serving us, but we it. We have another master.

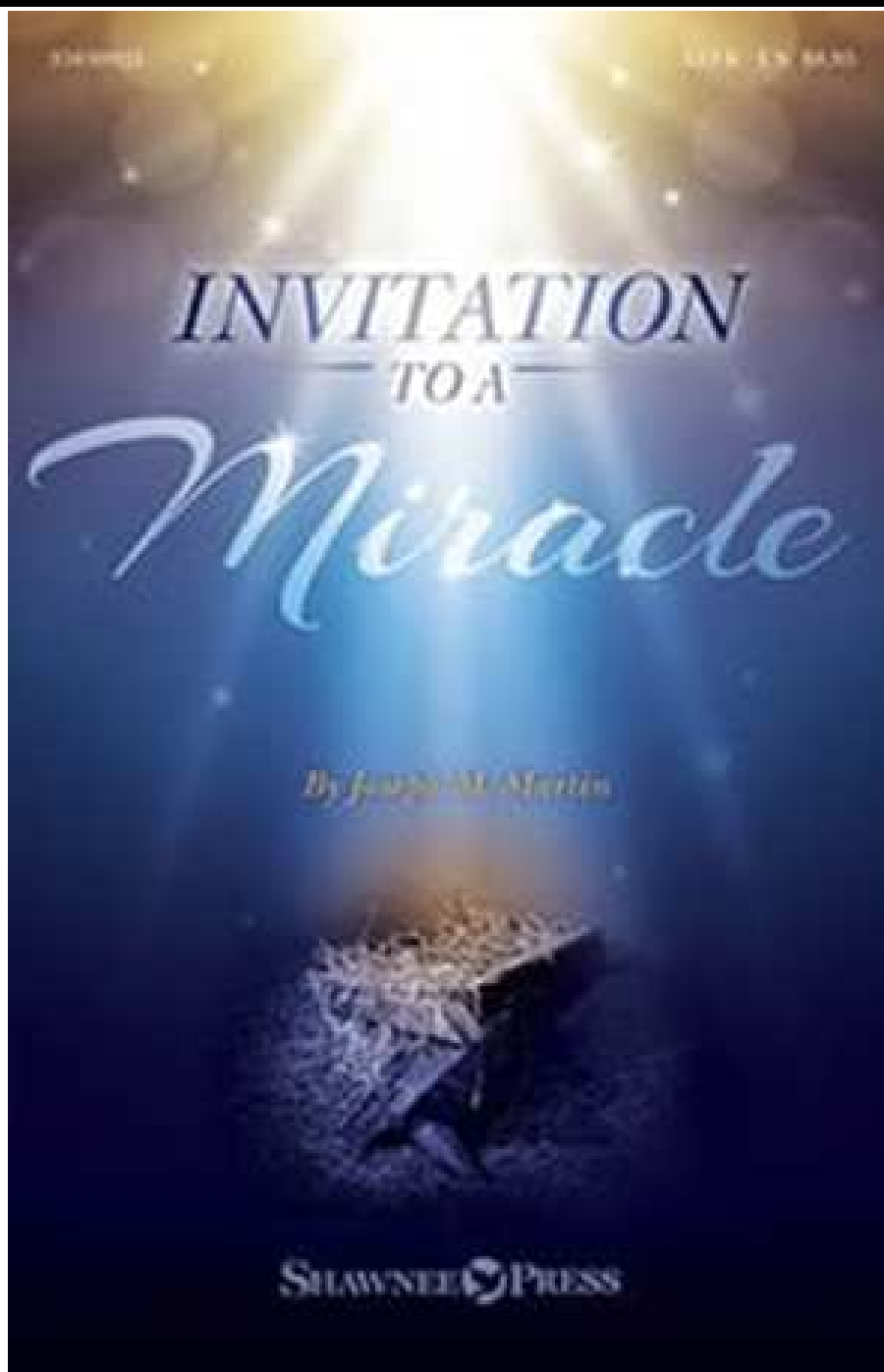
To overcome this, we need a physician's diagnosis and a physician's remedy. And our Lord Jesus Christ, our great physician of both body and soul, applies His Word to us as He did to the man healed of dropsy. He shows us how we have put our fear, love, and trust in our money and not feared, loved, and trusted in Him above all things.

In essence, He says, "Stop chasing after these fleeting things. They are vanity. They are the things that moth and rust destroy. You cannot have two masters. Repent!" And in seeing our great error, we are sorry that we have not fully feared, loved, and trusted in God above all things. And, in the mercy and grace that He earned for us on the cross, He takes away this sin, restores us to health, and bids us to live.

But then what? What do we do with this healing balm and care that our great physician has given? Do we simply go back to our old ways? "By no means!" St. Paul says (Rom. 3:31; 6:2). We do not just go back to the old ways, the ways that lead us to death. No, we live a new life, a life filled with the grace, mercy and love of God toward us. And God's great mercy, grace, and love toward is so abundant that it overflows and pours out onto those around us.



So we no longer hoard money and possessions. We no longer scrape and crawl our way to amass more. We give to those around us, as God in Christ has given to us. We press our money and possessions into service for those who need it: our family, our society and our church. For money is God's gift to us to serve us and others. Not the other way around. It serves us because it is a gift from our Father in heaven. – LCMS Stewardship Ministry



## Invitation to a Miracle

Sunday, December 19, 3:00 p.m.

Zion Lutheran Church

1810 McClintock Ave.

Belleville, IL

Presented by Zion's Music Ministry

Featuring Choir, Handbells and Instruments

**Thank You!:** Karen Anders, with His Little Lambs Puppet Ministry would like to thank everyone who helped support her on her mission trip to Nebraska. Because of your support she was able to share the Good News of Jesus with her puppets to the little Native American children of the Winnebago Tribe at the Lutheran Preschool, and Bible Club in Winnebago, Nebraska. She was also able to share Jesus at a Lutheran school in Southeast Nebraska. Thank you so much. May the Lord bless each of you as you helped her to share the Good

## St. Matthew UMC presents

"The Glory of  
Christmas"

Sunday, Dec. 12,  
7:00 p.m.

1200 Moreland Dr.  
Belleville, IL

More info at  
[www.stmatthewumc.org](http://www.stmatthewumc.org)

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

1—Cheryl Krantz  
 3—Nicholas Sherman  
 5—Sloan Colvin  
 9—Dennis Brockmeyer  
 10—Todd Gorney  
 11 – Brooks Colvin  
 14—Karla Weaver  
 15 – Erik Lintvedt, Dale Schutte,  
 Gwen Borsch,  
 17 – Lauren Williams  
 17—Luke Lesire  
 20 – Tammy Ellington, Carrie  
 Johnson  
 21 - Danielle Stake, Jaye Drouin  
 24—Joseph Monaco

### DECEMBER



27 – Don Drouin, Marc Ellington  
 27—Marcie Monaco  
 28 – Audrey Lesire, Rich Williams  
 28— Mark Morton, Bill Feldmann  
 31 – Ed Brandmeyer, Joe Monaco

## HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:

### DECEMBER



1– Greg & Angie Conrad  
 9 – Bob & Charla Morton  
 18—Eric & Maurine Trapp  
 19 – Rick & Barb Applegate

If we have overlooked your anniversary or birthday,  
 please notify the church office. 632-0126.

## JANUARY

### Birthdays & Anniversaries

1-Charla Morton  
 5-Natalie Bartimus  
 6-Terry Colvin, Matthew Bowman,  
 7-Connie Schatz, Rachel Schmidt  
 Mikaila Soberanis  
 8—Hadley Williams  
 10-Gwen Kemp  
 12—Don Drouin, Sr.  
 16—Phillip Sterling  
 21-Anna Satrom, Eric Stake, Ellie  
 Ernst  
 22-Stephanie Williams

24 -Cheryl Vohlken, Hayleigh Williams,  
 Thomas Borsch, Mary Bruns, Talek  
 Aarsvold  
 25-Nathaniel Ellington,  
 26- Andrew Mabry  
 26-Simoriah Longhorn  
 27—Amy Boggs  
 28-Mark Berens, Paul Monaco  
 29-Thomas Satrom, Tom Sotiropoulos,  
 30-Rick Applegate, Isabel Calzada

6—Don & Jaye Drouin  
 29 George & Kim Kruse

## The Example of Mary

"We must look to Mary's example to know how to deal with the glorious impossibilities of God," writes Calvin Miller in *The Christ of Christmas*. "Look how she turned the world upside down by making one simple statement."

Jesus surely could have come to earth without Mary's aid. But God seems to prefer partnering with people to accomplish miracles such as salvation and healing. So God chooses Mary to carry the Savior. Later, Jesus often declares people's own faith crucial to their healing. And today, God works justice through us, not apart from us.

God doesn't force us into collaboration. Yet, notes Miller, "God needs only a little of our agreement in order to work mighty wonders." Like Mary's humble assent: "I am the Lord's servant. ... May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38, NIV). And like yours — for whatever partnership God invites you into. God will do the heavy lifting, for certain, but he hopes you'll say yes.



## BSLC Launches Shoe Drive Fundraiser

**Blessed Savior Lutheran Church** is conducting a shoe drive fundraiser beginning **NOW** to raise funds for the



BSLC Elder's Benevolent Fund and the Mary Rust Mabry Scholarship Endowment Fund. We will earn funds based on the total weight of the pairs of gently worn, used and new shoes collected, as Funds2Orgs will issue a check for the collected shoes. Anyone can help by donating gently worn,

used and new shoes at Blessed Savior.

All donated shoes will then be redistributed throughout the Funds2Orgs network of micro-enterprise (small business) partners. Funds2Orgs works with micro-entrepreneurs in helping them create, maintain and grow small businesses in developing countries where economic opportunity and jobs are limited. Proceeds from the sales of the shoes collected in shoe drive fundraisers are used to feed, clothe and house their families. One budding entrepreneur in Haiti even earned enough to send her son to law school.

We know that most people have extra shoes in their closets they would like to donate to us. By doing so, we raise money for our causes and we have the chance to help families in developing nations who need economic opportunities. It's a win-win for everyone."

By donating gently worn, used and new shoes to BSLC, the shoes will be given a second chance and make a difference in people's lives around the world.

For more information contact Ginger Kieffer at 622-5171 or [gkief-fer24@gmail.com](mailto:gkief-fer24@gmail.com).



## If Only ...

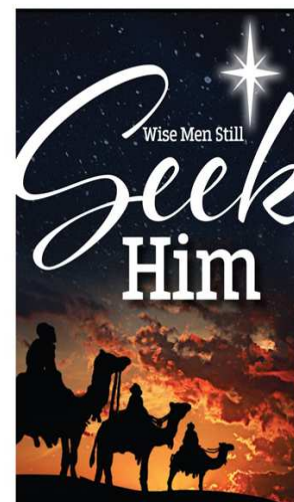
There are many of you ... who think to yourselves: "If only I had been there! How quick I would have been to help the Baby! I would have washed his linen. How happy I would have been to go with the shepherds to see the Lord lying in the manger!"

Yes, you would! You say that because you know how great Christ is, but if you had been there at that time, you would have done no better than the people of Bethlehem. ... Why don't you do it now? You have Christ in your neighbor. You ought to serve him, for what you do to your neighbor in need you do to the Lord Christ himself. —Martin Luther

## Remember to Reach Out

For many people, the holidays bring sorrow, grief and stress. If you're hurting, turn to Jesus and his power. Learn from the woman who, desperate to be healed, reached out to touch the edge of Jesus' robe and was immediately cured.

Sometimes we think our healing process will be so exhaustive that we hesitate to take the first step. Or we doubt that Jesus still performs miracles. Amid your pain, have you reached out? Have you dared to touch Jesus' robe? He is there, waiting to say: "Your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mark 5:34, NIV).



## Everlasting Joy

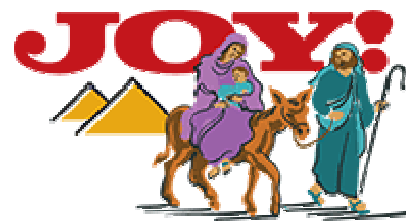
In a *Chicken Soup for the Soul* sampler, Karen Asire tells of a particularly difficult Christmas after her husband left and began divorce proceedings. As Karen and her three young children set up their tree, she fought tears and secretly tucked aside certain ornaments, such as one announcing "Our First Christmas Together."

Several days later, a neighbor stopped by with a gold decoration proclaiming JOY. "We've hung this ornament on our tree for several years," she explained, "but this year we wanted you to have it." When Asire hung it on the tree and stepped back, "all the other ornaments seemed to fade into the background, and all [she] saw was the shimmering gold of the JOY ornament." She allowed herself to cry then, grateful for the reminder that amid grief and heartache, God's love shines.

Pain fades in time, while  
God's Christmas gift — Jesus  
— brings joy that lasts forever.

## Joy Amid Suffering

Only Matthew records the holy family's "flight into Egypt," linking Advent with Lent and Christmas with Good Friday. In an article titled "Joy to the World/Pain in the World," James I. Cook expresses gratitude that Matthew documents the slaughter of the innocents: "I turn to it again and again, when someone I know loses a loved one at the height of the Christmas season. It helps me — and I hope it helps them — to remember that theirs are not the first tears to fall on Christmas; to recall that there has never been a Christmas of pure peace and happiness; [to recognize] that 'joy to the world' has always been sung to the accompaniment of much 'pain in the world.'" —adapted from *Homiletics*



## Many Happy Returns

Somehow, not only for Christmas,  
But all the long year through,  
The joy that you give to others,  
Is the joy that comes back to you.  
And the more you spend in blessing  
The poor and lonely and sad,  
The more of your heart's possessing  
Returns to you glad.

—John Greenleaf Whittier

## Seasons of Hope

The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity — hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory — because at the Father's will Jesus Christ became poor, and was born in a stable so that 30 years later he might hang on a cross. —J.I. Packer

## Joy Seekers

In northern Minnesota several years ago, some women formed a "joy circle." They settled into a routine of meeting every couple of weeks to share joys they've noticed. Their aim, amid our troubled world and chaotic lives, is to deliberately focus on the positive. The women don't simply hope to stumble upon good news among the outrage, bitterness and tragedy surrounding us; they actively seek out joy and report it to the group.

Joy is a fruit of the spirit named in Galatians 5:22-23. As Christians, we don't ignore or dismiss life's struggles and sorrows, and neither do joy-circle participants. But God promises that life is stronger than death, and Jesus' resurrection is proof. With the Holy Spirit's help, we can make a spiritual discipline of seeking and sharing joy — and thanking God for it. (Visit [joycircles.network](http://joycircles.network) online to learn more.) —Heidi Mann

## Wild Hope

What keeps the wild hope of Christmas alive year after year in a world notorious for dashing all hopes is the haunting dream that the child who was born that day may yet be born again even in us. — Frederick Buechner



## The Greatest Gift-Giver

When we give each other Christmas presents in [God's] name, let us remember that he has given us the sun and the moon and the stars, the earth with its forests and mountains and oceans — and all that lives and moves upon them. He has given us all green things and everything that blossoms and bears fruit and all that we quarrel about and all that we have misused. And to save us from our own foolishness, from all our sins, he came down to earth and gave us himself. —Sigrid Undset

## Live in the Light

Often we want to be able to see into the future. We say, “How will next year be for me? Where will I be five or 10 years from now?” There are no answers to these questions. Mostly we have just enough light to see the next step — what we have to do in the coming hour or the following day.

The art of living is to enjoy what we can see and not complain about what remains in the dark. When we are able to take the next step with the trust that we will have enough light for the step that follows, we can walk through life with joy and be surprised at how far we go. Let's rejoice in the little light we carry and not ask for the great beam that would take all our shadows away. — Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*

## A Season of Waiting

Our oven recently bit the dust, and the needed replacement part is no longer manufactured. Due to an appliance shortage, we had to wait eight weeks for a new oven! Yet even amid inconvenience, I see God's purpose. We were thankful to have a grill and slow cookers in the meantime. We creatively attempted to cook favorite meals in different ways. And though we craved anything baked in an oven — cookies, casseroles, even chicken nuggets — we realized that waiting eight weeks for an oven isn't truly a trying time.

Many of us wait for much greater milestones and miracles: physical healing, the return of a prodigal child, an end to financial struggles. Paul offers us hope as we wait: “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had” (Romans 15:5, NIV).

When you're in a season of waiting — including Advent! — consider what you're thankful for and what you crave. Tell God how you're feeling and ask for endurance while you wait.

—Janna Firestone

## Why Advent?

Waiting can be hard, and not just for children. But I do love Advent: this four-week time when the Christian church prepares for Christmas.

Maybe I like Advent so much because it involves active waiting, not thumb-twiddling. It is a gift the church offers the world, to be active (which isn't the same as busy) in ways that open our hearts — and the hearts we touch — to the true meaning of Christmas.

Mother Teresa said, “At this Christmas when Christ comes, will he find a warm heart? Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving others with God's own love and concern.”

When I take time during Advent to remember in prayer and with gifts of money and time those who have less food than I do, those who are lonely, those without a home; when I pause to share love with a child or an elder, or gratitude for a healthcare worker, pastor or teacher; when I wait for justice to replace oppression but, while I wait, find ways to work for that result ... the Spirit's warmth fills my waiting heart. I am ready to welcome Jesus. —Heidi Mann



## How to keep Christmas

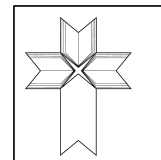
Inspirational author Wilferd Peterson pondered ways to “best keep Christmas” and “defeat the little bit of Scrooge in all of us.” After reading his suggestions, add your own!

- By following the Star ... to stand again in awe and wonder before the Babe in the manger.
  - By rediscovering the faith and simplicity of a little child.
  - By being still and listening to the angels sing within our hearts.
  - By quietly evaluating our lives according to the Master's standards as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.
  - By resolving to give ourselves away to others.
- By using the light of Christmas to guide us through ... the coming year.

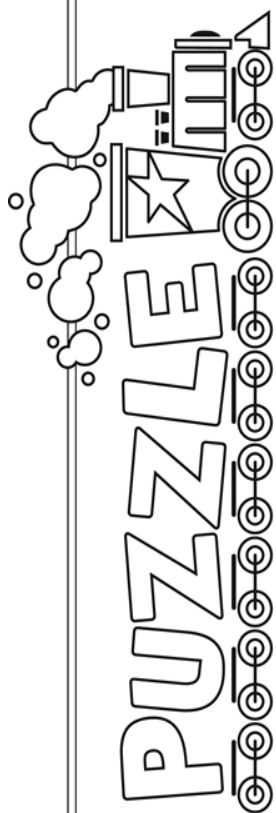
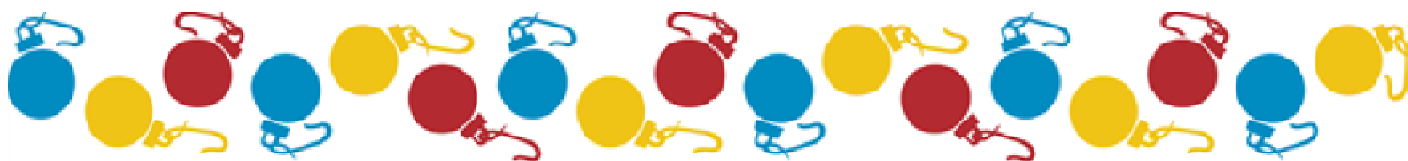
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DECEMBER



F M K N L A D E G S C E J A T S U E L W B A R V H P Q E F L S R Z M  
H M V S R B O L Y Q O X A V H R T A I N G F I P H S C I B E J H A

**What's in a name?**  
An angel told Joseph what to name Mary's baby.  
Solve the puzzle to discover the name's meaning.

*Directions: Begin at the circled H below and follow the arrows. Circle every other letter, and then place them in order to complete Matthew 1:21.*

"S\_e w\_ll \_ \_ve b ir\_\_  
to \_ s\_n, and \_ \_u a\_e to  
gi\_e \_i\_ the \_ \_me J \_ \_us,  
b\_c\_u \_ \_ he \_ill s \_ \_e his  
\_ \_ \_op\_e f\_o\_ t \_ir s\_n\_."

MATTHEW 1:21, NIV

START HERE

Answer: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21, NIV