

The Messenger

December 2023

Volume 88, Issue 12

What's Inside

From our Pastor

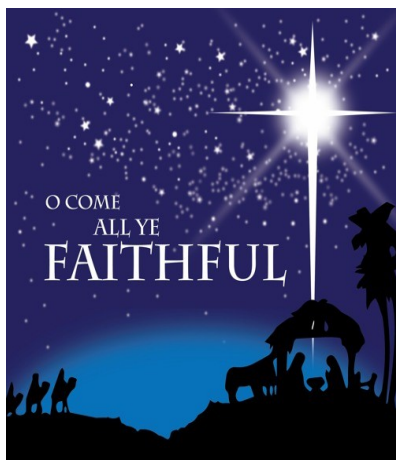
New and Noted:

- From our Pastor
- Blue Christmas
- Christmas Eve Service
- Advent Worship
- Hanging of the Greens
- Advent Coin Folders
- ELCA Council Report
- Stewardship
- From our DOM
- From our DOPM
- SCS Advent Project
- Calendar
- Office Schedule
- Bethesda Deadline

Social Ministry/Giving

- Good Shepherd Request
- Second Mile

Birthdays/Anniversaries



Welcome, Advent: We are counting

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Grace and peace to you from the One who was, who is and who is to return again.

The psalmist cries out in Psalm 90, asking God to “teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.”

We are about to enter the season of Advent, and we are indeed counting. Some of our children and families, using Advent calendars, count the days until Christmas. Hallmark offers us a Christmas countdown by starting new movies well before Halloween (and I have been watching). We are counting in other ways, as well, during this season. We count the number of presents under the tree, or the number of cookies we bake and put in the freezer, or the number of dollars we’ll owe Visa when this holiday season is finally over, or the number of days we still have to work before we can take some time off our jobs.

I have been counting as well, as I just concluded my fifth entire year with you and began a sixth year at the beginning of the month. I have been reflecting on those five years, and I have been counting the ways in which we have been God’s hands serving the world that God loves so much.

It has been a holy privilege to live and walk and work among you, to witness your cries of pain surrounding lives that have ended, to lift up the joy we celebrate in the promises of resurrected life, to learn and laugh and work and play in our little corner of God’s vast creation.

In all of our counting, we do not lose sight of the most important thing to count among us, the One, the only One, who can save. This is the baby who was born in a manger, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, the Christ, the Savior. He is the

One, born as baby boy yet God, born as human yet divine, born as king yet servant, born to show us who God is.

It is this One whose nativity we are preparing to celebrate.
It is this One who is present even now when we gather to worship.
It is this One whose coming we anticipate again in the fullness of time.

And so we wait, counting our days. As we wait, may the Christ light your world in this holy season and throughout your days.

Emmanuel, God is with us.

Pastor Brenda +

Blue Christmas: How to Celebrate When You Don't Feel Like It

December can be a really difficult month for some of us, especially those of us who have experienced a recent loss, or for those of us who experienced a long-ago loss that still dampens our holidays.

Whether the loss is the death of someone you care about, changing life circumstances in relationships or with the economy or with illness, the feeling of an empty nest while remembering holidays past ... all of these things can make it hard to find the joy in the season.

On Sunday, Dec. 17 at 2:30 p.m., we will be offering a Blue Christmas liturgy to the community as a time to gather in sacred space, sing, hear God's word, light candles, and talk openly about what it feels like to be out-of-step with everyone else at this time of year. There can be healing in the experience.

Our Greenville ministerium will join us in this service, so it will be a true community event. The Rev. Brian Riddle, campus pastor at Thiel, will be our preacher.

We invite you to join us, tell friends and family who you think might benefit, and discover how a babe born in a manger can bring wholeness to our sometimes-broken lives. Because Christ was born for this.



Christmas Worship: Only One Christmas Eve Service

There will be a change in our long-standing Christmas Eve worship this year as we move from two services to one service. The service will be at 7 p.m.

The change is being made because of declining attendance at the late service.

We will draw on the best elements from each service for the one combined service that will include the adult choir, leadership from our youth, and candle-lighting with the singing of “Silent Night.”

Please join us as we hear the Proclamation of the Birth of Christ, and sing our praises to the new-born king.

Advent/Christmas Worship in December

December is a month filled with worship opportunities at Holy Trinity. Of special note is that we will have only one Christmas Eve service this year at 7 p.m.

We begin the month with our Advent worship, with a calendar full of ways to stop, to listen, to reflect, and to pray in this holy season:

- Morning Prayer will be held every weekday at 8:30 a.m. in the choir pews in the chancel area. Please join us in the mornings as we begin our days with this short service that lasts about 20 minutes.
- On Wednesdays at 6:15 p.m., we will join in the stillness and dark of evening for Advent Vespers.
- Our principal weekend Advent services will center around readings that anticipate the coming savior, including the traditional lighting of the Advent wreath. The final Sunday of Advent is Dec. 24, and we will have worship at 9:30 a.m.
- We celebrate the Nativity of our Lord in our Christmas Eve service at 7 p.m.
- We also have a Christmas morning service at 9:30 a.m.

Hanging of the Greens

Because the fourth Sunday of Advent is on Dec. 24, we are moving the hanging of the greens to the previous week, Dec. 17, immediately following worship. There will be no Sunday School on that day, or on Dec. 24. Please join us after worship on the 17th to dress the sanctuary for Christmas. (We will try to be speedy, as we have the Blue Christmas service at 2:30 p.m. on the same day!)

Advent Coin Folders

Advent Coin Folders are available for pick up in the narthex for anyone interested in keeping this tradition. There is a basket in the narthex where you may return your folder.

A Report from ELCA Church Council

The ELCA Church Council convened in Chicago at the Lutheran Center the weekend of 11/9-11/12. I was able to attend the first two days and have several updates and notes to share with you.

The mood of the meetings was somber: Bishop Eaton requested and was granted a 4-6 month leave of absence. She stated that she has been doing too much for too long and needs a break. A former bishop of the Southeastern Iowa Synod, Rev. Michael Burk, was appointed to serve in her absence.

I commend to you the Draft of a Social Message on Gun-related Violence and Trauma, which is available on the ELCA website. Everyone is encouraged to share their comments with the committee. <https://elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Current-Social-Writing-Projects/Gun-Trauma>

The next social message to be addressed is “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust.” A task force will begin working in 2024 on this reconsideration. If you are interested in serving on the task force or nominating someone to be on the task force, these links are available on the ELCA website.

Update on the Commission for the Renewed Lutheran Church: the bishop reports a “steep learning curve” for the group and expressed concerns that the group may be trying to change too much, rather than looking specifically at the “purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto,” which was what was mandated by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.

The Council participated in the Prayer of Lament and Peace with participants from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

We began to learn about the data collected by the Barna group about the ELCA, which offered some insights into the difficulty our church has with awareness: many people surveyed did not feel familiar with the ELCA and knew very little about our strengths.

Olivia Martin-Call
ELCA Church Council member

Stewardship: Commitment cards for 2024

If you have not yet returned your commitment card for the new year, please do so before the end of 2023. It is important for us to receive your cards, because we use them to plan the budget for the coming year. If you have not yet returned a card, please return one in the offering plate as soon as possible so that we can plan adequately.

If you need a card, there are some in the narthex, or contact Catherine in the church office.

We thank you for your continued faithfulness in the stewardship of the church.

From Our Director of Music



To make the season of Advent even more special, on the four Sundays of Advent, the setting of the Ordinary will change to a setting by Richard R. Webster. Written in 2001, the Kyrie, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei are from his *Mass in Lydian Mode*. The Kyrie is sung in Greek, Kyrie eleison (Lord have mercy) and Christie eleison (Christ have mercy). The Sanctus and Agnus Dei are set in English. It is interesting to note that from Martin Luther's time, even through and past the time of J. S. Bach, the German Lutheran Mass included the Ordinary sung in Greek and Latin.

During Advent, the Gospel Acclamation will be accompanied by Medieval-style cup-shaped bells made by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. This is the same foundry that cast the Liberty Bell in 1752 and Big Ben in 1859. I purchased my set in 1986. Unfortunately, after 450 years in business, this company closed its doors in 2017. Here is an illustration of these bells. In a 13th century French manuscript Psalter, it depicts King David playing a set of these bells.



For the Third Sunday of Advent, the choir will sing Jan Sandström's atmospheric setting of *Lo, how a rose e'er blooming*. This anthem will be accompanied by the organ and Billie Hollenbaugh playing a Celesta. The Celesta was invented in 1886 by the Parisian Harmonium (reed organ) builder, Auguste Mustel. On this instrument, the keys connect to hammers that strike metal bars placed over resonator boxes creating a magical effect, *celeste* meaning heavenly in French. One of the best-known works that uses the celesta is Tchaikovsky's *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* from *The Nutcracker*. This instrument is also used in the main Harry Potter theme. Years ago, I bought this Celesta in an antique auction. It had been the traveling instrument for The Ernie Heckscher Cotillion Orchestra. I spent hours restoring the Celesta. It had played for many big band Cotillions in the San Francisco Bay Area from the late 1930s through the 1970s. The wood had suffered moving abuse, cigarette burns, and what looked like Whiskey Sour stains. It is now as good as new and looking forward to its new sacred music usage. This reminds me of the old adage: One never knows where life will take you.



From Our Directors of Parish Ministry

Simply Merry Christmas

As Advent charges unabated into Christmas, we would like to take a moment to wish our Holy Trinity family a very Merry Christmas and a joyous holiday season. We are so thankful for the opportunity to serve this Congregation. We also recognize that even during the Christmas season the emotional drag of discouraging current events can cast a dark cloud over the holiday so perhaps a historical perspective may help?

Now: Political animosity between political headliners is at an all-time high, voter vs voter anger is growing exponentially, and bipartisanship decision making has become a quaint exercise from the ash heap of history

Perspective: Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton fought a duel over political differences and that ended up in a much beloved Broadway musical. Hmm, bringing dueling back might speed up the political process. Fox could broadcast it live and FanDuel could give betting odds. Possibilities abound.

Now: Wouldn't it be fun to head on over to the local school board Tuesday night and angrily ban some books simply because. Apparently telling our own kids not to read them doesn't work so we'll help you out because we don't think you can monitor your kids' reading choices either.

Perspective: In 1637, Pilgrims in New England banned Thomas Morton's expose on Puritan lifestyles making his "New English Caanan" the first book banished in North America. Take that Harry Potter!

Now: Uncontrolled inflation is running rampant, our purchasing power is being eroded more every week, gas prices are through the roof and the economic plans of whatever party is in charge are foolish and untrustworthy.

Perspective: Anyone remember President Ford's WIN buttons? Does "Whip Inflation Now" ring a bell? Anyone remember gas lines or buying gas based on the number on your inspection sticker? Remember when the world was going to end when the Big Mac price hit a dollar?

As Harry Truman said: "Nothing in the world is new, only history we haven't learned yet."

Which brings us back to Merry Christmas. Despite the never-ending political silliness, God's love is consistent and perfect. He demonstrates that love every day, but it is magnified during Christmas. This year won't be any different. So once again, Merry Christmas. Take time to relax, enjoy family and take a few minutes to drown out the secular noise around you, amplify the voice of the Holy Spirit within and remember Isaiah 9:6:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

BTW, there are still 11 months of political craziness until the next election, but we'll persevere- history and God are always on our side!

Parish Education Advent Projects 2023



THANK YOU SO MUCH to everyone who took tags from the little tree in the narthex and provided gifts for the children served by the Good Shepherd Center! Once again this effort was a big success, thanks to the generosity of our Holy Trinity people. If you happened to miss out, we'll likely be doing it again next year, and in the meantime there is another Parish Education Advent/Christmas project that you can help us with if you're able.

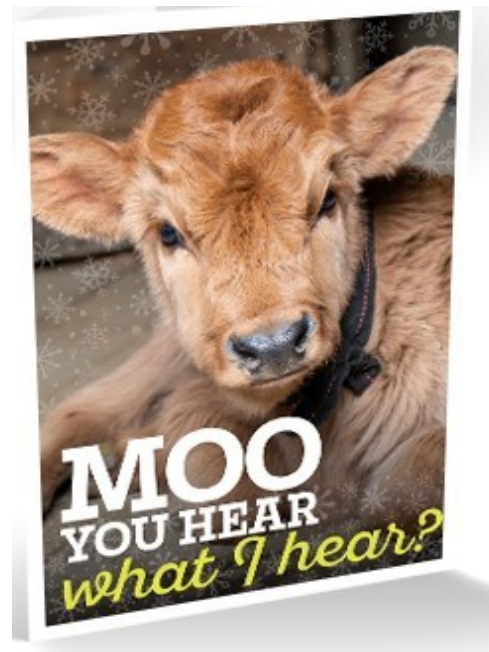
The Confirmation and Sunday School students (including our adult learners) are repeating the **ELCA Good Gifts Program** collection that Pastor and the Parish Education Committee introduced last year. Each Sunday from mid-November until December 10 (the last day of classes before Christmas), we will set aside all Sunday School offerings especially for the Good Gifts program. All the money collected during that time will go toward a gift from Holy Trinity to this special program that works to grow the church, fight hunger, and transform lives around the world. We invite anyone in the congregation looking for a giving opportunity to consider a donation as well! The more we collect, the more lives we can touch. Last year, with the congregation's help and with an advantage of good timing whereby the ELCA matched our gift, we were able to purchase 4 piglets, 3 goats, 5 chicks, supplies for a health clinic for one week, a start-up package for a Sunday School class, school supplies for an entire classroom, and school/uniform fees for one underprivileged child. The effort was a resounding success, and we hope to rise to the challenge again this season!

If you are not a Sunday School or Confirmation student and you would like to contribute, you can enclose your gift in a sealed envelope marked "ELCA GOOD GIFTS PROJECT" and give it to Pastor Brenda or Kris Abraham. If you prefer to make your gift anonymously, please follow the same instructions and slide the envelope under Catherine Richardson's office door.

Also, this year, a member of the congregation has agreed to match up to \$500. Please consider giving as we try to reach our goal of raising \$500.

We thank everyone at Holy Trinity for supporting our Parish Education efforts, now and throughout the entire year.

Kris Abraham, Chairperson



December 2023

							1	2
								5:30 Liturgy of Holy Communion (with prayers for healing)
3 1st of Advent	4	5	6	7	8	9		
8:30 Parish Choir Rehearsal	8:30 Morning prayer 7:00 Property	8:30 Morning prayer 7:00 AA and AA Women's discussion	8:30 Morning prayer 6:15 Evening Vespers 7:00 Parish Choir Rehearsal	8:30 Morning prayer 7:00 Happy Hour (Zoom)	8:30 Morning prayer	5:30 Liturgy of Holy Communion (spoken)		
9:30 Liturgy of Holy Communion								
10:45 SCS/Confirmation Classes								
7:00 AA Big book meeting								
10 2nd of Advent	11	12	13	14	15	16		
8:30 Parish Choir Rehearsal	8:30 Morning prayer	8:30 Morning prayer 9:00 Flying Quilts 10:30 Staff meeting	8:30 Morning prayer 6:15 Evening Vespers 7:00 Parish Choir Rehearsal	8:30 Morning prayer	8:30 Morning prayer	5:30 Liturgy of Holy Communion (spoken)		
9:30 Liturgy of Holy Communion								
10:45 SCS/Confirmation Classes								
7:00 AA Big book meeting								
17 3rd of Advent	18	19	20	21	22	23		
8:30 Parish Choir Rehearsal	8:30 Morning prayer	8:30 Morning prayer 7:00 Congregation Council 7:00 AA and AA Women's discussion	8:30 Morning prayer 6:15 Evening Vespers 7:00 Parish Choir Rehearsal	8:30 Morning prayer 7:00 Happy Hour (Zoom)	8:30 Morning prayer	5:30 Liturgy of Holy Comm. (spoken)		
9:30 Liturgy of Holy Communion								
10:45 Hanging of the Greens								
2:30 Blue Christmas Service								
7:00 AA Big book meeting								
NO SCS								
24 4th of Advent	25	26	27	28	29	30		
9:30 Liturgy of Holy Comm.	9:30 Liturgy of Holy Comm.	9:00 Flying Quilts 7:00 AA and AA Women's discussion	NO CHOIR REHEARSAL	7:00 Happy Hour (Zoom)		5:30 Liturgy of Holy Communion (spoken)		
7:00 Liturgy of Holy Comm.								
NO SCS								
Christmas Eve								
31 First Sunday of Christmas								
9:30 Liturgy of Holy Comm.								
NO SCS								
New Year's Eve								

December Birthdays

2	Judy Leary
3	Jennifer Martin
4	Dan Spence
8	Easton Mozes
9	Catherine Snyder
11	Tris Hall
12	Kaitlyn McCann
13	Garrett Daniello Frances Wackenhut
24	Patricia Leax
25	Allen Davis Alyssa Martin
26	B. J. Mozes Jonathan Schultz
29	Erin McKinney



December Anniversaries

The following members of our congregation are celebrating anniversaries this month. Congratulate them when you see them.

Bill and Judith Bubeck	64 years	December 5, 1959
Chris and Judi Moinet	46 years	December 23, 1977
Mike and Mary Beth Bradley	35 years	December 27, 1988
Ken and Cathy Anderson	41 years	December 28, 1982
Jim and Jennifer Martin	34 years	December 29, 1989
Gene and Gretchen Minetti	62 years	December 30, 1961

Altar/ Columbarium Flowers for 2024

The sign up sheet for Altar and/or Columbarium flowers is up in the Narthex if you are interested in signing up for the coming year.

We will not have any flowers during Lent which as noted on the sign-up sheet.

The cost is \$25.00 for one Altar vase or \$50.00 for both. The cost is the same for each Columbarium Vase or a total of \$50.00 for both.

As always, you will be billed direct from the florist.

Good Shepherd December Request

The Good Shepherd Center is our church community social service agency that supports the needs of many in the area. The Good Shepherd Center's request for Holy Trinity for December is **canned soups and stews**. Donations may be placed in the marked box in the cloister.

Office Closed for Christmas

The Church Office will be closed **Monday, December 25 through Friday, December 29** so that the staff may enjoy the Christmas holiday with their families. In case of emergency, please call Catherine, our office administrator, at 724-301-2988. Have a safe and happy holiday!

Christmas for Bethesda

In the narthex there is a bulletin board with the names of some youth who receive services from Bethesda in Meadville and Erie. If you are interested in providing a gift for one of the youth, please choose a gift tag, purchase the gift, and return it ***unwrapped*** to the church ***with the tag attached to the gift*** and ***in a plastic bag***. Donations may be dropped off in the box in the narthex or at the church office. The deadline for all items to be returned is **Wednesday, December 13.**

Evangelical Lutheran Church
of the Holy Trinity
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Sexton:

Jennifer Martin

Property Manager:

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Mike Bradley
Tammy Daniello
Debbie Faber
Chuck Lanning
Jim Martin
Bob Massing
Matt Morgan
Bob Olson
Barry Oman
Barbara Swartz
Nicole Weaver

Office Hours:

Monday - Thursday
9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Closed Fridays