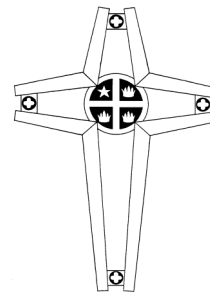


The Star

The Monthly Newsletter of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Epiphany
An ELCA Congregation



Volume MMXXIII
Number 12
December 2023

God calls us to: "**Grow** our relationship with God,
connect with each other, and **serve** the world."



Dear Epiphany Disciples,

December is always a busy month in the life of Epiphany. Thanks to everyone who helps to make the Advent and Christmas seasons so meaningful. I want to invite you to be present for these wonderful opportunities.

Sunday, December 3 – Advent begins.

In addition to Advent beginning, we are asking each household at Epiphany to prayerfully consider their financial stewardship for 2024.

9:00 am – Encounter: Faith for all ages

10:00 am – Worship

After Worship - Advent Wreath and Craft Making Party in the Fellowship Hall.

Come celebrate the start of the Advent season and make some special crafts to take home. We'll have treats and hot cocoa and enjoy fellowship as we prepare for the birth of Christ. This event is intergenerational and all are welcome to attend!

Monday, December 4 – Gifts for Ibrahim Elementary and Nora, Virginia are due.

We partner with Ibrahim Elementary School in Winston-Salem to provide gifts for needy children in our community. We also partner with the Binns-Counts Community Center near Nora, Virginia, a community in an impoverished rural area in southwestern Virginia.

Tuesday, December 5, 12, 19 – Children's Choir Practices Begin

7:00-7:30 pm – Children of Epiphany are invited to come and rehearse on Tuesday nights in December and at 9:00 Sunday mornings during Encounter: Faith. Children will be singing the song "Little Hands" during the 7:00 Christmas Eve Service.

Wednesday, December 6, 13, and 20 – Mid-Week Supper and Worship

6:00 – A light supper in the Fellowship Hall.

Our Parish Life Committee is always looking for people to help with these meals. Contact Kathy Pressley if you can help.

7:00 – Mid-Week Eucharist in the Sanctuary

This 30-minute worship service with Holy Communion will focus on three words for our life together as followers of Jesus: meaning, story, and mission.

Friday, December 8 – Youth Christmas Party

6:00-9:00 – Our middle and high school youth will be gathering with our friends from Peace Haven Baptist Church for a night of fun.

Sunday, December 10 – Advent 2

9:00 am – Encounter: Faith

10:00 am – Worship

After Worship – Children's Christmas Pageant Video

Our children have been hard at work designing sets and puppets (you heard that correctly!) for their world premiere film, A Very Special Child. You'll not want to miss it!

Poinsettia orders are due!

Sunday, December 17 – Advent 3

9:00 am – Encounter: Faith

10:00 am – Worship

Monday, December 18 – Publication Deadline

All items for Epiphany bulletins and Weekly Star through January 7 are due by December 18.

Friday, December 22 and Monday, December 25 – Church Office and EECC are closed.

(continued on next page)

(continued from front page)

Sunday, December 24

No Encounter: Faith

10:00 am – Advent Lessons and Carols

We will conclude Advent by hearing God's Word and singing beloved hymns of Advent.

3:00 pm and 7:00 pm – Christmas Eve Worship

The 3 pm worship service will be a simplified and more intimate Christmas Eve service while the 7 pm worship service will feature musical ensembles. Both will have beloved Christmas carols, Communion, and candlelight as we tell the story of Jesus' birth.

Sunday, December 31 – First Sunday of Christmas

No Encounter: Faith

10:00 am – During the 12 Days of Christmas, we will hear the story of Jesus being presented in the Temple by his parents and being encountered by Simeon and Anna.

Sunday, January 7 – Epiphany Sunday

9:00 am – Encounter: Faith

10:00 am – Worship

On this Epiphany Sunday, when we remember the Magi bringing their gifts to Jesus, we present our intentions to give for 2024 during worship.

All gifts for the ELCA Good Gifts program are also due on Epiphany Sunday. Our goal this year is to collect enough for five family farms, which cost \$715 each. The animals, tools, and training will help break the cycle of poverty and hunger for people living in low-income countries throughout the world.

Have You Ever Wondered Where Chrismons Came From??

Now is your chance to find out! We are planning a visit to the Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia where the Chrismon Tree originated in 1957. We will leave after worship on Sunday, December 10th and drive to Danville where we will have lunch (the restaurant is to be determined). It takes about 1 hour and 15 minutes to travel there and we will carpool from Epiphany. The viewing schedule is from 3-5 pm. We expect we would be back by 6 pm at the latest. Please let Kathy Pressley know if you are interested. www.chrismon.org



As you consider your year-end financial gifts, we want to highlight two ways of giving that are sometimes overlooked.

[In a November 16, 2023 news release](#) the Internal Revenue Service reminded traditional IRA owners age 70½ or over that they can transfer up to \$100,000 to charity tax-free each year.

Transfers, called qualified charitable distributions (QCDs), are a great way to give to charities like Epiphany before the end of the year. And, if you are at least 73 years old, QCDs count toward the IRA owner's required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year.

To start the process for a QCD, contact your account administrator. To qualify for a QCD, the electronic payment or check needs to be made out to the charity, **not** the IRA owner.

In addition, Epiphany also accepts gifts of stock. Giving stock to a charity that is worth more than you paid may result in tax savings. Stock transfers initiated and received on or before Friday, December 29, 2023 will be credited for 2023.

If you are ready to make a stock gift to Epiphany, please contact Mickey Miller in the Church Office in advance. For more information on stock gifts to Epiphany, go to www.epiphanyws.org/stocks.

Before making your QCD or stock gift, please consult your financial, legal, or other advisors.

Thank you for your generosity and support of God's work through Epiphany.





Update on the Building and Grounds portion of the Capital Campaign

The Building and Grounds identification of necessary updates to our facility got off to a great start with our meeting after church on October 22nd. A large contingency from the congregation met and divided into groups that examined and brainstormed about possible changes and updates to our facilities. We divided into several groups and looked at sections of the church such as Grounds, Sanctuary, Kitchen, Windows, Entrance, Bathrooms, Office spaces, and General. The groups then came back together and shared their ideas, and more items were added to some.

Afterwards a small group has taken those suggestions and done some work in:

- Categorizing them into Maintenance vs Capital Campaign items
- Prioritizing them
- Starting to collect estimates and costs on completing the top items.

The group consists of Jim Pierson, Mike Spain, Gene Deal, and Charlene Wellborn. If you would like to make additional comments, feel free to talk to anyone in this group.

I will post the full list of suggestions that came out of that meeting at church in the Fellowship Hall. Thanks for your support and prayers as we continue to collect estimates and work with the Capital Campaign Committee to give them updates.

Jim Pierson



Our circles are busy planning for next year and getting information together for our 2024 yearbook. We are also encouraging everyone to bring toys for the children in Nora, VA and participate in getting Christmas gifts for some of the families of children at Ibrahim Elementary School. Our executive board will be meeting in January to plan our WELCA events for 2024.

Dates:

December 12- Mary Martha Circle- Christmas covered dish luncheon- 11am in the fellowship hall

Dorothy Circle will be attending a candle tea- date and time TBD

December 14- Nora Deal Circle-cookie exchange- 11:30 am in the fellowship hall

January 14- Executive Board meeting after church



On Monday, December 4th, I will be making a special trip with new toys, books, games, underwear, and socks for the more than 600 children who our Epiphany elves help to make Christmas a happy and joyful time. These items should be unwrapped and placed in the designated fellowship hall area.

I never take this project for granted, but am always overwhelmed with the love and generosity that flows from Epiphany to these faraway mountains.

Peace and Joy,
Kathleen Tucker

To Heal a Broken World

God of compassion and justice, help us in this age of great division and polarization to learn the art of civil discourse and compassionate listening with those who worship you through other religions; particularly our Jewish, Muslim, and Hindi brothers and sisters. Guide us to recognize your image even in the faces of those who do not remind us of ourselves, looking past our differences to find our common interests and goals, that we may work together to bring healing to a broken world. Amen.

(From "A Year of Prayers to End Racism" pdf, The Episcopal Church, page 4.)



Congratulations to our new Council members: Debbie Spurlock, Penny Mothershed, and Kathy Knecht. We are thankful for everyone who was willing to serve in this capacity and look forward to our new members' contributions to Council. They replace Diana Stindt, Matt

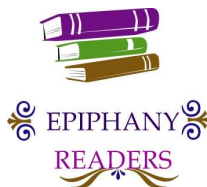
Imboden, and Terry Wiley, who have finished their three year terms. Many thanks to Diana, Matt, and Terry for their service.

The November meeting of the Congregational Council began with a devotion about staying focused on God during the frenetic holiday season. We discussed the timeline and focus of the Capital Campaign and agreed with the Campaign organizers that we should wait to get bids for projects before beginning the campaign. The main goal for that is to present the congregation with full information as we consider potential repairs, upgrades and renovations. We will kick off the campaign right after Easter. We are also planning for the 2024 Stewardship Campaign, which will occur during Advent, and thinking about key areas of focus for 2024. The Church budget for 2023 looks good compared to our actual income and expenditures this year, so we enter the new year in a strong position.



Next meeting: December 20th, 2023
1:30 pm
Fellowship Hall

The Epiphany Readers' will not meet in December. The next meeting by Zoom will be at 7pm on Thursday, January 25th. The book that will be discussed in January is *The Rose Code* by Kate Quinn. All are welcome to join in the discussion.



To Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://bit.ly/EpiphanyReaders>



We love the children and families of Epiphany and EECC! We are grateful for the excitement that comes during the end of another year. It is a time to reflect on our connections to each other and to the community of love we share.

We pray for you and seek to continue to work alongside of you in this special ministry.

We have had challenges and celebrations in 2023. This important work has continued when other facilities have not been so fortunate. Thanks to each of you and for your time, talents and support of EECC.

We teach children about God in our various faith development opportunities. During this special time of the year, the Christmas story from scripture speaks to all ages and gives us the human connection to the Heavenly Father. Jesus' birth helps us see ourselves through the eyes of God, as His precious children. The staff and I would like to wish each of you a meaningful and memorable Christmas and the hope of a blessed new year!

In His Service,
Lisa Nichols, Director

Cynthia Jeffries, Assistant Director/Music Teacher
Meg Wester, Assistant Director/Older Three's Lead Teacher

Betsy Snow, Admin. Team/Younger Two's Lead Teacher

Jennifer May, Younger Two's Teacher

Sharonda Oates, Older Two's Lead Teacher

Sierra Hargrave, Older Two's Lead Teacher

Rebekah Cofer, Younger Three's Lead Teacher

Valeria Badillo-Ocasio, Younger Three's Teacher

Amanda Lane, Older Three's Teacher

Stephanie Clohessy, Younger Fours Lead Teacher

David Taylor, Younger Fours Teacher/Long Term Sub.

Riley Hauser, Older Four/Fives Lead Teacher

Ho-Sheng "Eric" Chung, Food Services/Classroom Support





“A Very Special Child” Film Presentation after worship 12/10



This year, Epiphany kids are filming a puppet show based on the program “A Very Special Child” by Rev. Anna Strickland. This puppet show is part of A Sanctified Art’s Advent series “How does a weary world rejoice?”. It is written in several acts to tell the Christmas story from the book of Luke and follows the interwoven birth stories of Jesus and John. Please plan to stay after worship on **Sunday, December 10th**

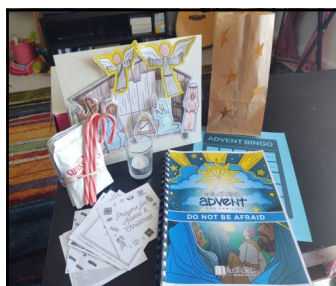
to view this wonderful puppet show video in the fellowship hall. We’ll have popcorn and celebrate the hard work of our creative artists!

ELCA Good Gifts Collection until 1/7

Remember, children and the congregation have until Sunday, January 7th to collect money for ELCA Good Gifts. This year, the children hope to raise enough money to buy a goat for a farming community in need. Fresh milk from a goat provides daily nutrition for children and their families. What’s more, goats are incredibly quick to reproduce, and they provide an opportunity for families to pass the gift on to others. Our goal for the whole congregation is to be able to purchase 5 family farms (\$715 a piece)! To find out more about ELCA Good Gifts, please visit: <https://goodgifts.elca.org/>



Advent Kits



Due to the great success of the Lent kits, the NC Synod is offering Advent kits for families. Please let Lauren Saldaña know if your family would like to receive one. This kit will include activities for whole families as well as individual children. We hope to have the kits

assembled and ready by the first Sunday in Advent (December 3rd).



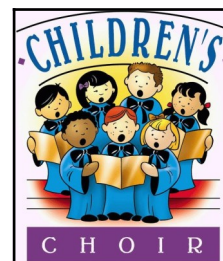
Sunday, December 3rd after worship Advent Wreath and Craft Making Party

Come celebrate the start of the Advent season and make some special crafts to take home. We’ll have treats and hot cocoa and enjoy fellowship as we prepare for the birth of Christ. This event is intergenerational and all are welcome to attend!

Children’s Choir - practices starting in December

If your children would like to sing in the Christmas Eve service, please let Lauren Saldaña know (lsaldana@epiphanyws.org).

There will be practices on Tuesday nights from 7:00-7:30 during the week with Mr. Patryck and we will also practice with Mrs. Lauren during Encounter: Faith at 9:00 on Sundays. Children will be singing the song “Little Hands” by Carol McClure. The children will sing at the 7:00 Christmas Eve service on Sunday, December 24th.



Children and Youth Needed for the Christmas Eve Service at 7:00 on 12/24



This year we will continue the Epiphany tradition of having Children and Youth lead our worship on Christmas Eve. Please let Lauren Saldaña or Liz Dinkins know if your child

will be available to participate on Christmas Eve - Sunday, December 24th. We will have a special children’s choir performance that evening and we will need readers, ushers, an acolyte, crucifer, and other important roles.



There will be NO Encounter: Faith for children or adults on Sunday, December 24th or Sunday, December 31st for a Christmas Break.



Youth Encounter Faith Has Begun - we'll be meeting the 1st and 3rd Sunday of every month to dive in before Service (9am)
(Dec 3, 17)

We'll be having a **Christmas Party!**
(See the flier, [website](#), or [facebook](#) for more details)

Want to Get Involved? Get Coffee?
Have Questions?

Liz Dinkins
336-589-6879
ldinkins@epiphanyws.org

[Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Website](#) | [Calendar](#)

ENCOUNTER
faith
YOUTH 6TH - 12TH
1st and 3rd Sunday
@ 9am
lutheran church of the epiphany
youth room
EPIPHANY Youth logo

epiphany youth
CHRISTMAS PARTY
Friends + family welcome!
FRIDAY DEC 8, 2023
6 - 9 PM
5220 Silas Creek Pkwy, WSNC
GAMES (WITH PRIZES)
SO MANY COOKIES
CHRISTMAS CHEER
Questions or Rsvp
Liz Dinkins
336.589.6879 | ldinkins@epiphanyws.org
EPIPHANY Youth logo



For the Harvest of Lands and Waters

O gracious Father, when you open your hand you satisfy the desire of every living thing. Bless the land and waters, and give the world a plentiful harvest; let your Spirit go forth to renew the face of the earth. As you show us your love and kindness in the bounty of the land and sea, save us from selfish use of your gifts, so that men and women everywhere may give you thanks; through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

(LBW prayers, sundaysandseasons.com)



LUTHERAN STUDENT MOVEMENT MEALS

Our last meeting this semester with our WFU Campus Ministry is Tuesday, December 5th!

This semester we've enjoyed partnerships and are looking forward to next semester - please pray for our students over exams - December 9 - 15 and their Christmas break.

I'm working to start a Campus Ministry Committee to support the work Epiphany is doing in partnership with Wake Students - If you're Wake Alumni, Lutheran Student Movement Alumni, or have a heart for college students / college ministry I'd love to chat with you! Please reach out and let me know!

Lastly, I'd love for you to follow us on social media:

[Wake LSM \(College\) Instagram](#) | [Wake LSM \(College\) Facebook](#)

Or Set a Meeting with Me [Here](#) or ldinkins@epiphanyws.org or 336-589-6879

Peace Be With Y'all

HOLIDAY Schedule

Sunday, December 3

9 am Encounter: Faith for all ages
10 am **Worship**
AW Advent Wreath and Crafts Party

Monday, December 4

Gifts for Ibrahim and Nora are due

Tuesday, December 5

7-7:30 pm Children's Choir Practice

Wednesday, December 6

6 pm Light Supper
7 pm **Mid-Week Eucharist with Communion**

Friday, December 8

6-9 pm Youth Christmas Party

Sunday, December 10

9 am Encounter: Faith for all ages
10 am **Worship**
AW Children's Christmas Pageant Video
Poinsettia orders due!

Wednesday, December 13

6 pm Light Supper
7 pm **Mid-Week Eucharist with Communion**

Sunday, December 17

9 am Encounter: Faith for all ages
10 am **Worship**

Wednesday, December 20

6 pm Light Supper
7 pm **Mid-Week Eucharist with Communion**

Friday, December 22 and Monday, December 25

Church office and EECC closed

Sunday, December 24

No Encounter: Faith
10 am **Advent Lessons & Carols**
3 pm **Christmas Eve Worship**
7 pm **Christmas Eve Worship**

Sunday, December 31

No Encounter: Faith
10 am **Worship**

If you have milestones to celebrate, please contact Mickey Miller.



Our Epiphany Family

Help us keep our prayer list current by letting us know if there are those who need to be included.

Thank you from Smith Farm Elementary:

"... I believe in my higher power, and I truly believe he brought Mr. Z. Baker to Smith Farm this season. I know because of his presence so many doors have been opened. One of the doors is the ministry 'Epiphany Lutheran Church' has provided for our students to have extra food every weekend. Just as you said, you all are helping us with simple things we just can't purchase with school funds. I am very grateful for your kind spirits and warm hearts. Our students are very grateful. May you continue to be blessed and thank you, thank you and thank you."

Deronda Kee-Lucas
Smith Farm Elementary
Parent/Family Engagement Coordinator

Thank you from Ibrahim Elementary School:

...I'd like to say thank you for your support. The Food Pantry and backpacks are going well. Mrs. Applegate filled me in on your participation with the upcoming Thanksgiving meals and I'm sure there are many more contributions I could mention. Our school community is blessed to have such generous partners....Thank you for all you do.

Tamatha Fullerwinder
Principal
Prince Ibrahim Elementary School

Thank you for the many birthday cards and wishes.

Bobbie Martin



All Saints Day, 2023

GIFT OF THE MONTH ITEMS FOR DECEMBER

- CRISIS CONTROL MINISTRY** - Saltine crackers
- SAMARITAN MINISTRIES** - Bib aprons, dish cloths, men's warm winter gloves, socks, toboggans
- RONALD McDONALD HOUSE** - Paper towels; 13-gallon trash bags; individual snacks & drinks; <https://rmhcpt.org/make-a-difference/wish-list/>
- TRINITY GLEN** - Fingernail files, nail polish
- TRINITY ELMS** - Fronts of greeting cards, body lotion, body wash, bath items, deodorant, snacks, note cards
- CBC FOOD PANTRY** - Volunteers to take food donations from church to CBC and to work stocking shelves/distributing food twice a month
- EECC** - Cheerios, raisins, applesauce (individual, plain)
- IBRAHAM FOOD PANTRY** - Diapers/pullups sizes 2-6

Ministers, All the People of Epiphany
Pastor, Pastor Russell Peek
 Email: pastorrussell@epiphanyws.org
Pastor of Visitation, Pastor Joanna Stallings
 Email: jstallings@epiphanyws.org
Director of Music, Patryck Nuss
 E-mail: music@epiphanyws.org
Director of Youth & Campus Ministry, Liz Dinkins
 E-mail: ldinkins@epiphanyws.org
Director of Children's Ministries, Lauren Saldaña
 E-mail: lsaldana@epiphanyws.org
Early Childhood Center Director, Lisa Nichols
 E-mail: lisanichols@epiphanyws.org, 336-768-2140
Office Manager & Financial Secretary, Mickey Miller
 E-mail: epiphanystaff@epiphanyws.org
Monthly STAR Newsletter Editor,
 E-mail: epiphanystaff@epiphanyws.org
Epiphany - Phone: 336-765-6211 **Fax:** 336-765-1754
Epiphany E-mail: epiphanystaff@epiphanyws.org
Web Site: www.epiphanyws.org

2023 Congregation Council

Officers:
Chris Schultz, Pres.
Betty Benardo, VP
Terry Wiley, Treas.
Mark Tellefsen, Sec.

Non-Council Officers:
Mickey Miller, Fin. Sec.
Jackie Pierson, Asst. Tr. Payroll

Members:
Patti Deal
Dan Meckley
Matt Imboden
Sarah Lischer
Diana Stindt
Pastor Russell Peek

Members-Elect for 2024-2026

Kathy Knecht
Penny Mothershed
Debbie Spurlock



Turkey dinners for Abraham families



Getting ready for Christmas Pageant



"If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."
John 14:14, NRSV

LET US PRAY FOR...

Leaders of church & state, especially

<i>Our Congregation Council</i>	<i>Pastor Russell Peek</i>
<i>Christ's Beloved Community</i>	<i>President Joe Biden</i>
<i>Bishop Elizabeth Eaton</i>	<i>Governor Roy Cooper</i>
<i>Bishop Timothy Smith</i>	<i>Mayor Allen Joines</i>

All victims of war and any form of violence

Our sister congregations and our missionary in Mexico

Pastor Emily Norris, Deacon Brooke De Jong, and the people of the Dwelling
Fr. Javier Arias and the people of Christ's Beloved Community
Pr. David Brondos and the Theological Community of Mexico
The people of Mupini Parish, Namibia

Active duty military personnel, especially

Travis Gerdes
Randal Middleton
Connor Oldland
David Schultz

Family & friends of the congregation in need, especially

<i>Judy Allison</i>	<i>Jonathan Gomez</i>	<i>Robert & Mary Peak</i>
<i>Ashley Blackburn</i>	<i>Carolyn Graham</i>	<i>Wyatt Axel Petersen</i>
<i>Dale Blewett</i>	<i>Linda Grale</i>	<i>Steve Reno</i>
<i>Hannah Kestner Bockover</i>	<i>Pam Holcomb</i>	<i>Shelly Saldaña</i>
<i>Thomas & Mary Cannon</i>	<i>Robin Hoots</i>	<i>Nora Schweitzer</i>
<i>Clark Family</i>	<i>David Howard</i>	<i>Liz Shumate</i>
<i>William Collette</i>	<i>Jean Jarvis</i>	<i>Sue Slezak</i>
<i>Judy Crouch</i>	<i>Katie Lippard</i>	<i>Michele Stanfield</i>
<i>Rose Debruhl</i>	<i>Chad Marion</i>	<i>Laura Turlington</i>
<i>Paul DeJute</i>	<i>Linda McKenna</i>	<i>Alan Vestal</i>
<i>Sylvia Ann Derrick</i>	<i>Terry McKinney</i>	<i>Emma Wester</i>
<i>Carl Dubose</i>	<i>Allison Morris</i>	<i>Lynn Wiemann</i>
<i>Howard Flichman</i>	<i>Kirsten Nuss</i>	<i>Nicole Williams</i>
<i>Pat & Joanne Gill</i>	<i>Annette Pardue</i>	<i>Leigh Yarner</i>

Members in need, especially

<i>The Rev. John Beeg</i>	<i>Jim Lippard</i>
<i>Sharen Bond</i>	<i>Jean Mock</i>
<i>Ann Cannon</i>	<i>Wanda Rabb</i>
<i>Chad Kraft</i>	

Our Christian love and sympathy to the family and friends of

John Wooding
Virginia Schmitz



Elizabeth Horton, Homestead Hills
Bert Joines, Homestead Hills
Doris Kent, Forsyth Court
Sue Muhler, Brookdale Senior Living
Carl Schlager, The Stratford, High Point



Bonnie Bryant
Cole Lippard
Polly Rector
Robert Walker

December Birthdays

John Beeg	12/2
Connie Queen	12/2
Kelly Lichtenhan	12/3
Ada Craft	12/5
Anderson Craft	12/5
Jim Henricks	12/7
James Mothershed	12/7
Lois Clohessy	12/8
Elinore Imboden	12/10
Al Baker	12/12
Margaret Brock	12/12
Dan Brock	12/15
Laura Wiley	12/15
Connie Siris	12/16
Dottie Peoples	12/18
Wendy Watson	12/20
Jonathan Lichtenhan	12/21
Charlene Wellborn	12/21
Sue Kraft	12/22
Tracy Smith	12/22
Stephen Ball	12/24
Emma Clark	12/24
Rodger Eckard	12/25
Polly Rector	12/25
Mitzi Silverstein	12/26
Lauren Robins I	2/29
Dave Christensen	12/30
Jack Chapman	12/31
Grady Watson	12/31

December Baptisms

Jennie Hinshaw	12/1
Rita Planitzer	12/1
Jane Stribling	12/3
Dave Hinshaw	12/7
Andrew Lichtenhan	12/7
Wesley Peek	12/7
Jim Lippard	12/8
Jaime Rabb	12/11
Lucie McCormick	12/14
Gus Phillips	12/19
Margaret Brock	12/24
Donna Bridger	12/25
Laura Canrobert	12/25
Brad Davis	12/26
Justin Siris	12/27
Joshua Golden	12/29
Patrick Mullane	12/30
Erica Williams	12/30



<i>Al & Pat Baker</i>	<i>12/2</i>
<i>Don & Carole Witte</i>	<i>12/18</i>
<i>Joe & Brenda Middleton</i>	<i>12/22</i>
<i>Ryan & Laura Arens</i>	<i>12/28</i>

We wish you many more years of happiness!



We received thanks from:
 Lutheran Services Carolinas

Lutherans have always loved a good paradox. In a world that would seduce us into either/or camps—us vs. them—we’ve always known that we are saint AND sinner, already AND not yet, justice AND mercy, law AND Gospel people. I get that there are times when we must indeed choose, perhaps in the political realm and especially from a military perspective. Still, false dichotomies drive a wedge into God’s greatest gift of relationship.



Fundamentalism is the weapon of choice in these extreme dichotomies. History shows us over and over that with fundamentalism’s absolutes, in order for me to be right, you must be wrong. In order for me to be saved, you must be damned. Ultimately, in order for me to live, you must die. This is where, once again, we find ourselves in the ancient conflict between Israelis and Palestinians manifesting this time around in the Israel-Hamas war.

The brazen and brutally ruthless recent sneak attack on innocent Israeli and other citizens by Hamas is unthinkable, unacceptable, and we appropriately denounce it thoroughly. That much most people in the international community, including many, if not most, Palestinians, seem to agree on. One could hardly expect no retaliation for such atrocity. But anything beyond these statements hinting at not just pulling drowning folks out of the river but going upstream to see if you can help them from falling in evokes visceral reactions from religious as well as political pundits. We have received more negative communication than ever before over what our ELCA presiding bishop said early on about this conflict. The most common accusation tying all those contacts together is one word: antisemitic. Lutherans are antisemitic, folks said, for even hinting that there might have been any systemic persecution or abuse of the Palestinians that—while not excusing the actions of Hamas (nothing could)—might explain some of the realities contributing to desperate measures by victims of Israeli settlements, occupation, walls, sanctions, etc. In other words, in a world that in grief, fear, and anger seems bent on choosing “We stand with Israel” or “We support the Palestinians,” we dare to consider *both/and* in terms of support and *neither/nor* in terms of Zionist or jihadist platforms.

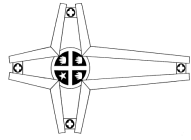
Israel maintains, not incorrectly, that Hamas is a terrorist group, that Hamas is, even so, the official government of Gaza, that Hamas hides in tunnels under hospitals and refugee camps thereby putting fellow innocent Palestinians in danger, and so on. So complicated. So tragic. This is where I think—perhaps strangely at first glance—of Eve, the mother of Cain and Abel, near the very beginning of scripture’s narrative about the challenge of human interaction and relationship. Abel’s offering was pleasing to God, but Cain’s wasn’t, so Cain killed his brother Abel. Aren’t you just certain that while Eve grieved her murdered son, she also grieved her murderer son who was then banished? And that the Father of the so-called Prodigal Son grieved not only his wayward and squandering son but also his self-righteous son who refused to celebrate? My point is that life and relationships are complicated. Like the social media meme simply yet poignantly states, it’s entirely possible to be heartbroken for more than one group embroiled in brokenness and conflict. While consequences are real and unavoidable, humanly speaking, we long for and cling to the ultimate promise of reconciliation.

I’m surely no expert on this conflict in the Holy Land that is thousands of years old. But in 1990 I read a book that helped open up my understanding of that conflict from the point of view of the Palestinians. The book was called *Blood Brothers* by Elias Chacour. He spoke to the NC Synod group on our 2018 trip to the Holy Land, along with Mitri Raheb and others. They are Palestinian Christians, and Raheb is a Lutheran pastor. [Augusta Victoria Hospital](#) is our Lutheran World Federation hospital serving Palestinians in the Holy Land and funded, in part, by the U.S. Government. Whatever else I might say here, I need to assure you that not all Palestinians, not even most Palestinians, are terrorists. Likewise, as evidenced by increasing protests among Israelis prior to this current war, not all Israelis agree with the settlements and occupation of Palestine. And neither does international law that established both the nation of Israel and the Palestinian territories in 1948.

Like Hawkeye reminded Father Mulcahy during a MASH episode, war is worse than hell. When Fr. Mulcahy asked why, Hawkeye asked, “Who goes to hell?” “The wicked,” said the priest. Hawkeye went on to explain that in war that’s not how it is. The innocent suffer the most, not the wicked, at the whims of the relatively few powerful in government, military, and economic terms. For the life of me, as horrific as it is to fathom what Hamas did and is doing, it doesn’t seem that killing and destroying and displacing and annihilating tens if not hundreds of thousands more innocent people will somehow bring an end to this conflict. More violence will beget more violence, history has taught us. I, therefore, join the voices calling and praying for a ceasefire and an upcoming Advent-renewed focus on the Jew who comes among us as the one who will fulfill the ancient prophecies of our swords beat into ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks for all nations, the Prince of Peace who taught us, “You have heard it said, an eye for an eye, but I say to you, ‘Love your enemies...’”

Lord, have mercy.

Walking with you,
Tim Smith, NC Synod Bishop



December

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<p>Every Sunday</p> <p>9 am Adult Encounter: Faith</p> <p>9 am Encounter: Faith</p> <p>9:30 am Backpack Prep</p> <p>10am Worship</p>					1	2
<p>3 1 Advent</p> <p>9 am Handbells Warmup (sanctuary)</p> <p>AW Advent wreaths (FH)</p>	<p>4</p> <p>6:30 pm CC Steering Team</p> <p>7 pm Executive Comm.</p>	<p>5</p> <p>11 am Bible Study</p> <p>6 pm LSM</p> <p>6 pm Handbells</p>	<p>6</p> <p>10 am EECC Ch.</p> <p>3 pm Staff</p> <p>6 pm Advent Supper</p> <p>7 pm Mid-Week Eucharist</p>	<p>7</p> <p>6 pm Choir</p>	<p>8</p> <p>6-9 pm Youth Christmas Party (YR)</p>	<p>9</p>
<p>10 2 Advent</p> <p>3-5 pm Christmas filming</p>	<p>11</p> <p>6 pm Endowment</p> <p>6:30 pm Congregation Council</p>	<p>12</p> <p>11 am Mary-Martha Christmas Lunch</p> <p>11 am Bible Study</p> <p>6 pm Handbells</p> <p>7 pm Dorothy Circle</p>	<p>13</p> <p>10 am EECC Ch. ()</p> <p>3 pm Staff</p> <p>6 pm Advent Supper</p> <p>7 pm Mid-Week Eucharist</p>	<p>14</p> <p>11:30 am Nora Deal Cir.</p> <p>6 pm Choir</p>	<p>15</p> <p>4-6 pm EECC Program (sanctuary)</p> <p>Star Deadline</p>	<p>16</p> <p>10 am Epiphany Quilters</p>
<p>17 3 Advent</p>	<p>18</p>	<p>19</p> <p>6 pm Handbells</p>	<p>20</p> <p>10 am EECC Ch.</p> <p>1:30 pm Widows Might (FH)</p> <p>3 pm Staff</p> <p>5:45 pm Handbells Warmup (sanctuary)</p> <p>6 pm Advent Supper</p> <p>7 pm Mid-Week Eucharist</p>	<p>21</p> <p>6 pm Choir</p> <p>EECC break thru 1/2/24</p>	<p>22</p> <p>Christmas Eve Observed</p> <p>Office & EECC Closed</p>	<p>23</p>
<p>24 4 Advent Lessons & Carols</p> <p>No Encounter: Faith</p> <p>Christmas Eve</p> <p>3 pm Christmas Eve Svc.</p> <p>7 pm Christmas Eve Svc.</p>	<p>25</p> <p>Christmas Day</p> <p>Office & EECC Closed</p>	<p>26</p> <p>6 pm Handbells</p> <p>EECC break</p>	<p>27</p> <p>6 pm Choir</p> <p>EECC break</p>	<p>28</p> <p>EECC break</p>	<p>29</p> <p>EECC break</p>	<p>30</p>
<p>31 New Year's Eve</p> <p>No Encounter: Faith</p> <p>9 am Handbells Warmup (sanctuary)</p>						