



The *First* Word

Volume 25, Issue 3

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH AND SCHOOL — HELENA, MONTANA

December 2023

Seek FIRST His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33

Special December/January Dates

FLY Movie Night.....	Dec. 1
First Edition Book Club.....	Dec. 2
Home of Bridget Michel	
First Sunday in Advent.....	Dec. 3
Dorcas Circle Quilters.....	Dec. 6
Women's Christmas Event.....	Dec. 7
OWLS Christmas Gathering.....	Dec. 14
Deadline to return DD Gifts.....	Dec. 15
Dorcas Circle Quilters.....	Dec. 20
Sunday School Children's Christmas Service	
FLS Christmas Program.....	Dec. 21
DD Christmas Dinner	
FLS Christmas Break.....	Dec. 22-Jan. 2
Christmas Eve.....	Dec. 24
Christmas Day.....	Dec. 25
New Year's Day.....	Jan. 1
Dorcas Circle Quilters.....	Jan. 3
The Epiphany of Our Lord.....	Jan. 6
First Edition Book Club	
Home of Tammy Anderson	
Baptism of Our Lord.....	Jan. 7
WOW Bible Study.....	Jan. 9
Dorcas Circle Quilters.....	Jan. 17
Transfiguration of Our Lord.....	Jan. 21
WOW Bible Study.....	Jan. 23

There will be no First Word in January 2024. The First Word "team" will take a well-deserved rest! Best wishes for a

Merry Christmas and happy New Year!

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Operation "undecorate" is underway

Now that the "undecorating tree" is up in the narthex, it's time for our members to purchase their gift for our developmentally disabled friends who live in group homes in Helena.

The "undecorating" of the tree is done by removing an ornament (extra special ones this year made by two members of the First Lutheran Human Care group to remind you that 'Jesus is the Reason for the Season'), purchasing your gift, wrapping it, **attaching the ornament to the package, and returning your package to the church no later than Friday, December 15.**

This year's gift is a blanket or throw, and Costco and Wal-Mart have a wide selection available. They'll go fast, so don't wait!

The gifts will be presented to our DD members at the special Christmas Service and dinner scheduled for them

on Thursday, December 21, at what was formerly the Gateway Center located at 1710 National Avenue.

Ten servers are needed for this dinner, and should be there at 5:30 p.m. that evening. You may sign up in the Fellowship Hall if you wish to help.

Thank you for your continued support of the projects we do to spread the Good News of Salvation through our Savior, Jesus Christ!

— First Lutheran Human Care Group



Advent meanings

During Advent, which begins this year on December 3, many churches and families use wreaths to symbolize watchfulness and increasing joy as Christmas approaches. Colors for the candles vary, with some traditions using blue (for hope or creation) and others preferring purple (for royalty, humility, or penitence).

The four candles that each represent a week in Advent also signify hope, peace, joy and love. (The third candle is often pink.) In the center is the white Christ candle, representing Jesus as the Light of the World. That candle is lit on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

The round, green Advent wreath has special meaning of its own. It symbolizes eternal life and the unending love of God, who sent His only Son to earth to die in our place.

— The Newsletter Newsletter

Kids: a special part of Christmas



Please join us on Wednesday, December 20, at the 6:30 p.m. worship service as the Sunday School children recount the story of Jesus' birth. May we be blessed by this opportunity to hear about "God's Amazing Grace in a Manger." If your child would like to participate in this service, please contact Tara Mercer (406-438-3402) or Darcy Goodson (406-581-5768).

Women's Christmas Event



First Lutheran Church
Thursday,
December 7, 2023
6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

- ★ Bible Study:
We Await His Coming
- ★ Carol Singing
- ★ Favors
- ★ Refreshments



Bring a snack or cookies to share.

Rides available upon request!
Leave contact information with the
church office, 442-5367.

Women of all ages are invited!

CHRISTMAS

Options clinic

Come join the
BABY BLANKET
CHALLENGE!

Let's see how
many blankets we
can make for the
"new moms" at
Options Clinic!



Fleece, flannel, crochet, quilts ...
your choice. Instructions for making a
fleece and flannel blanket are in
Ziegler Hall.

This is a great winter project when
the snow is on the ground and it's cold
outside.

We will collect all blankets at the
end of January.

If you have questions, please see
Ruth Stelter or Janice Larison.

Christian symbol

ROSE — This flower, often shown as
stylized artwork, is a symbol for
Advent, the promise of the Messiah
and Jesus' nativity. A white rose
represents the Virgin Mary, and a red
rose stands for martyrs. A wreath of
roses symbolizes
heavenly joy.



— The Newsletter Newsletter

LOOK At Our Budget

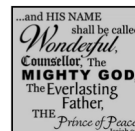
A report from your Board of Finance

	October 2023	FY 2023 Y-T-D
Income (church & school)	\$39,780.77	\$176,356.75
Expense (church & school)	\$ 34,808.87	\$133,457.82
Gain/Loss	\$ 4,971.90	\$ 42,898.93

The First Word

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Rev. Larry A. Miller.....Pastor
Linda Fromm.....Editor
Shari Miller.....Calendar/Servant Schedule
Volunteer Staff.....Printing/Collation

Deadline for the February issue of the First Word
is Wednesday, Jan. 24. Place articles in the First
Word box in the church office or
email to:
lindafromm@mac.com



Let's Follow the Star!



In these seasons of Advent and Christmas and Epiphany, we are reminded again that **it's time to find our way to Bethlehem**, where the fullness of God's love and salvation are cradled in a baby, an infant named "Jesus." **It's a time to remember again** all the divine promises and prophecies that God is determined to do: to send a Savior, to rescue and redeem his people forever. **It's time to follow the bright star of God's Word** which will lead us to the surest peace and joy we could ever know.

Often times, the Christmas story can become "old hat." We've heard it all before. Sometimes family traditions and customs can become more "sacred" than the story itself. Advent calls us to ready ourselves – ready ourselves for the mystery of Christmas – the "Word made flesh." **Prepared and ready, we follow and experience anew the source of our perfectly designed salvation with the birth of Christ.**



Advent and Christmas and Epiphany are also the perfect times to **invite others to come follow the star and discover the Savior**. There are so many people who get swept up and lost in the secular celebrations of the holidays. Their joy is shallow and temporary. Many even suffer from serious depression during these days. There is little real light among all that holiday glitter.

A young businessman was rushed to the hospital in serious condition, where the doctors who examined him thought that he might not survive. He was not a religious man, but prior to his accident he had heard the song, **"God Will Take Care of You"** on his radio. Ever since then, he wasn't able to get it out of his mind. Finally, he started to pray, and as he did, he felt a wonderful, hopeful surge of energy.

It was a Sunday morning, almost Christmas Day. He heard a group of nurses worshipping in a room just down the hall. He struggled out of bed and wheeled himself into their room **where he heard the message of Jesus** Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, **he understood for the first time ever** the meaning of the Christmas: the coming of the Savior and **he believed in Jesus**.



He recovered from his injuries and remained faithful to Christ the rest of his life.

The young businessman's name was – J.C. Penny.

At times we see the bumper sticker or the coffee mug that read: **"Wise men still follow Him."** Advent and Christmas send out the same message. As we hear that message ourselves, we, like the shepherds go and tell others the great Good News and invite them to follow the star.

Shari and I pray that this awe-filled, mysterious, joyous season will lead you to a new and lasting walk with "the Word made flesh," Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.



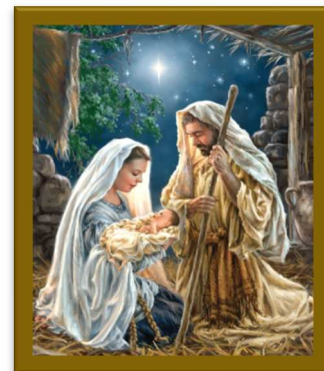
**The peace, joy, love and life in Christ be yours
this Christmas this new year and always!**

Pas+or and Shari Miller

The Light of Grace

In our worship services for Advent and Christmas, we'll celebrate that Jesus is the Light of the World who shines on us with His amazing grace. Through Scripture, song and reflections, we'll be reminded again that Jesus makes His grace known through His undeserved gifts!

- *Hope* ~ Zechariah (Psalm 39:7) ~ November 26 & 29 ~ In his old age, after years of waiting and not giving up hope, Zechariah is blessed with a son, John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Light of Grace, Jesus.
- *Peace* ~ Isaiah (Isaiah 9:6) ~ December 3 & 6 ~ Isaiah announces to an unsettled people that relief is coming soon through the Prince of Peace, the Son of God, the Light of Grace.
- *Joy* ~ Elizabeth (Philippians 4:4) ~ December 10 & 13 ~ The boy in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy and so does she when Mary arrives, carrying the little Lord Jesus inside her. The Light of Grace is soon to come.
- *Love* ~ Mary (Isaiah 54:10) ~ December 17 & 20 (noon) ~ The mother of the Light of Grace sings a love song to the Lord for his undeserved favor toward her and toward all the world in this contemporary service with liturgical parts set to tunes of favorite Christmas carol.
- *Amazing Grace in a Manger* ~ Children's Christmas Service ~ December 20 (evening) ~ The sounds of carols, God's Word, and children's voices draw us to God's amazing grace in a manger—Jesus—and that all of the blessings He brings resonate in our hearts.
- *Glorry* ~ Shepherds ~ December 24 ~ On Christmas Eve, we celebrate with Scripture, song and candlelight that the true Light of Grace has come. Jesus Christ graces us with his life as a baby boy. We welcome the Savior in these services as we go with the shepherds to greet God's amazing grace in a manger and bring glory to Him by spreading the word of His birth.
- *Presence* ~ Angels ~ December 25 ~ On Christmas Day, we celebrate with Scripture and song that the true Light of Grace gifts us with His holy presence in the Christ Child. We welcome the Savior in this service as we join with the angels in greeting God's amazing grace in a manger.



Please join us as we celebrate *The Light of Grace* who came for us on Christmas!

It's the thought that counts

— From your Board of Stewardship

Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38).

Why is it so hard to find that all-too-elusive "perfect gift" for the loved ones in your life? For many of us, it's because they already have everything they need and most of what they want.

It sometimes feels impossible to find a gift that won't be banished to that closet for unwanted, unneeded, and unused presents — alongside the loud ties, the strong perfumes, the unread books, and the garish sweaters.

When it comes to gift-giving, it's often said, "It's the thought that counts." If that's true, why do we still put so much emphasis on the gift?

This year focus on the thoughts behind your Christmas gifts. Thoughts in keeping with the season. Thoughts of meeting real needs and giving where it will be much appreciated. With so



many disadvantaged people in the world, at least some of our Christmas budget would be well spent helping our needy neighbors.

If you are buying for a loved one who has everything, consider instead giving a monetary donation in his or her honor to a worthy charity that helps the poor. Some charities, such as Heifer International and Good Gifts,

let you buy a specific item — such as a goat or pig for a family, or a water well for a village — to help people in the developing world.

Make the gift in your loved one's name or honor, and then describe it in a card attached to a low-cost "token" gift, such as a small box of chocolates or a bottle of wine. The better part of your gift will go to someone who truly needs it, and your loved one will share the joy of loving and helping your neighbors in need.

Just remember, "It's the thought that counts!"

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Pastor Blezard serves as pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Aberdeen, MD, and works as content editor for www.stewardshipoflife.org.*

Our God of hope

Near the end of a long bout with cancer, *Washington Post* columnist Michael Gerson realized that hope for recovery wasn't credible. The year before he died, he wrote a Christmas message from "the antiseptic wonderland of the holiday hospital ward," asking, "What sustains hope when there is scant reason for it?"

The answer, Gerson said, is found in our "God of hope," who became vulnerable, "cloaked in blood and

bone and destined for human suffering." Rather than fulfill our deepest earthly wishes, God offers eternal security: "He promises a transformation of the heart in which we release the burden of our desires, and live in expectation of God's unfolding purposes, until all His mercies stand revealed."

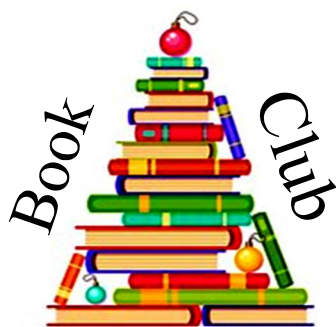
That hope-filled message echoes Gerson's 2012 Christmas column, written in the aftermath of the Sandy

Hook shooting. "The point of Christmas is not a sentimental optimism about the human condition or even a teaching about the will of God," he wrote. "It is an assertion that God came to our rescue, and holds our hand, and becomes, at the worst moments, our brokenhearted brother. It is preposterous, unless it is true. And then it would be everything."

— *The Newsletter Newsletter*

"May God give you peace with yourselves; may He give you good will towards all your friends, your enemies, and your neighbors; and may He give you grace to give glory to God in the highest."

— Charles H. Spurgeon
The Newsletter Newsletter



First Edition Book Club members will meet for brunch and discussion at 12:15 p.m. on Saturday, December 2, at the home of Bridget Michel.

Members are reading — and will discuss — *The Case for Christmas: A Journalist Investigates the Identity of the Child in the Manger* by Lee Strobel. If you have not done so already, please RSVP to Bridget *immediately*

at 406-438-6214.

The January luncheon and discussion is scheduled for 12:15 p.m. on Saturday, January 6, at the home of Tammy Anderson. For the January meeting, the group will read — and discuss — *Ordinary Grace* by William Kent Krueger.

Please RSVP to Tammy at 406-459-8762 by Wednesday, January 3.

Extra special Christmas cards

Christmas cards are now available for purchase in Ziegler Hall to support our First Lutheran senior youth. Card packages are \$5 each, and contain 12 multi-themed cards. They will be available for purchase through Sunday, December 17.

Many thanks to all of you who enjoy giving the cards and supporting our kids! I appreciate your donations to assist with this ministry.

—Janice Larison
CARDS 4 KIDS



Cards shown are for illustrative purposes only. They are not actual card designs.



All members and friends of First Lutheran congregation are cordially invited to attend First Lutheran School's Christmas Program on Thursday morning, December 21, beginning at 10 a.m.

The students and staff would love to have you join us as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ! We promise you will be blessed!



December/January Birthdays

December 1

Jaylyn Gardipee
Lindsay McCarthy
Rob Pentecost

December 2

Gideon Goodson
Michelle Martin
Scotty Rucker

December 3

Marissa Lebahn
Jacob Sparks

December 4

Julie Eklund
Dan Malaski
Sharon Malaski

December 5

Tammi Gozelanski
Pamela Koenig

December 6

Abigail Rose
December 7

Calvin Rucker
Jess Wareham

December 9

Patricia Jacobs
Megan Taylor
Thomas Taylor

December 10

Keith Newmeyer

December 11

Dmitri Hindman

December 14

Laura Bjerke
Howard Davis
Benjamin McIntosh

December 15

Dawn Poirer
Robert Wagner

December 16

Marilynn Petek

December 17

Megan Davis
Sydney Elvbakken

December 18

Peni Jo Jones
December 18

December 19

Jocelyn Brown
December 19

December 20

Karen Giulio
Richard Tramp
December 20

December 21

Joan Nicholls
Clara Schmeltzer
Jeff Sparing

December 22

Bruce Seiler
Joyce Burgett
December 24

December 25

Paul Baumann
December 25

December 26

Carol Robertson
December 26

December 27

David Goodson
December 27

December 28

Chantel Duty

December 28

Sandra Meek

December 29

Danielle Blair

Xuemin "Jessie" Ren
(Antonick)

Sandee Riemann

December 30

Richard Bridegroom

December 31

Sabrina Brott

Donna Pare

Malachi Rickman

December 31

Cody Pate

January 1

Jennifer Charles
William Charles

January 2

Ben Gregory
Crystal Warsinski

January 2

Mark Miner
Savannah Morgan

January 4

Robert Veach III
January 7

January 7

Clarice Cook
Lauren Hoxie
Peter Jones

January 8

AJ Buhr
Landon Gilbert
Marlys Jarvis

January 8

Jason Mercer

January 9

Orin Bjerke
Nick Jorgensen

Bob Summerer

Marge Ulmer

January 10

David Gunderson

Jana Spaulding

January 11

Wally Smith

January 12

Stephanie Giulio

Augustus Hanson

January 14

Crew Warren

January 15

Jacob Malaski
David Saulsbury

January 16

Matthew Bridegroom

January 17

Carol Barker

Trent Stefanik

Kodi Thompson-Hargis

January 18

Andre' Poirer

January 19

Cooper Brilz

Haven Humble

Steven Leitzke

January 20

Bert Poor
Kylee Gardipee

January 21

Dan McGrane

January 22

Jaiden Elvbakken

Julia Hollatz

Connor Koenig

Audrey Mandera

James McCormack

Jayden Nachtsheim

Lisa Peterson

January 23

Tara Mercer

January 24

Patricia Martin

January 26

Robin Sayler

January 28

Johanna Allen

Joni Veach

Ryan Veach

January 29

Susan Buhr

Lois Lebahn

January 30

Matthew Shields

January 31

Lauren Antonick

Brock Gardipee

Vera Lynn

Shilo Stefanik



Happenings at First Lutheran School



Director
Sue Taylor

Get Set Teacher
Shannon Champagne

Pre-Kindergarten Teacher
Lori Radtke

After Care Providers
Pam Worthy/Emily DuPre'

Pastor
Larry A. Miller

Our First Lutheran School students know that Christmas is all about celebrating the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. They love to talk about ways that this is celebrated, one way being the giving of gifts in recognition of the greatest gift of all, Jesus! Here are some of their ideas about what they would like to give to mom and dad for Christmas.

Pre K Class

Beckham: A real baby bulldog. And a trampoline.

Charli: I want to give Mommy a kitty and another kitty. But Daddy is allergic to kitties, so he gets a dog.

Hollyn: I want to give them a book, a learning book.

Isabella: Daddy gets a yellow monkey (just like mine). I would give Mommy flowers and a ballerina music box.

Kaden: A dog for me and a cat for them. And a good time of playing with me.

Percy: A pet cat! And I really want to give Mommy a rabbit and a squirrel for my brother.

Presley: I would give her some new special socks.

Rhys: A big soft blankie. It is really warm and cozy.

Rory: A buggy that has one wheel in the front. And, also, a hover board.



Get Set Class

Avram: Um ... candy corn. (He said this very clearly and with a smile.)

Colten: Ya ... okay ... shoes. (He pointed to his shoes, then pulled on socks and said, “feet.”)

Isaac: A Christmas tree and decorations.

Isla: A microphone. And they would sing like this: “Everything they want to be they will be right now.”

Jacie: Pictures and a Christmas tree.

Myles: Nothing, 'cause all our things are fixed.

Titus: A race car, because they go really fast.

Trey: A present, like from Santa, because he knows what to get them.

Wyatt: Light up Christmas trees to put by everyone's beds so we can light them up for Christmas time.

Raiden: A microwave, because the handle is broken.



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FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH is a Congregation of
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

THE MISSION of First Lutheran Church is
“Sharing God’s Word with Everyone, Everywhere!”

Tune in to **“The Lutheran Hour”** — Sundays at 8 a.m. on the Christian Satellite Network 91.1-FM
or listen on **“Family Talk”** on Sirius XM 131
“Woman to Woman” — Sundays at 9:30 p.m. on KMTX 105.3-FM

Lutherans for Life celebrates 45th anniversary

First Lutheran’s Ruth Stelter, who works closely with Lutherans for Life locally, wants to know if our members have noticed the Lutherans for Life LIFEDATE magazine on the table in Ziegler Hall next to the models of the stages of development of a baby in the womb. She points out that the national LFL organization publishes news quarterly, and each issue includes compelling articles such as the story about Timothy, a 12-year-old who won a Spotlight Award for his essay in the LFL essay contest. With his mom’s help, he told how he has Downs Syndrome, autism, and Baptism. Among the many interesting articles is an article about Vincent, who was adopted by the Wilsons; one on transhumanism; and one on projects designed to help the homeless population.

A new logo has been adopted by the national LFL organization in honor of its 45th anniversary. In an article by Pastor Michael Salemink, he explains that the updated insignia keeps the sky-blue legacy coloring. It evokes the joy and hope of our sacred vocation to receive life as a gift and privilege, no matter what age, appearance,

or ability. At the center, of course, stands the cross of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Every human life has purpose because this God creates, redeems, and calls (Isaiah 43:1-2) each one as His own precious treasure from fertilization to forever.

Like the roots and limbs of a tree, Pastor Salemink notes that the cross branches out into an EKG tracing. Its linear symbol for heartbeat and lifeblood (Leviticus 17:14) connects the whole course from the embryo in the mother’s belly to the final breath the Father bestows.

He points out that the horizon behind (or is it ahead?) takes the shape of a heart. This background indicates the courage and compassion of our Gospel-motivated message and mission.

Ruth says this new logo will be a symbol for all of us, especially the Y4Life teens who will be attending the

national March for Life in Washington D.C. in January. These young folks support life as precious and a gift from God.

LFL can be followed online at lutheransforlife.org with links to various sites.

