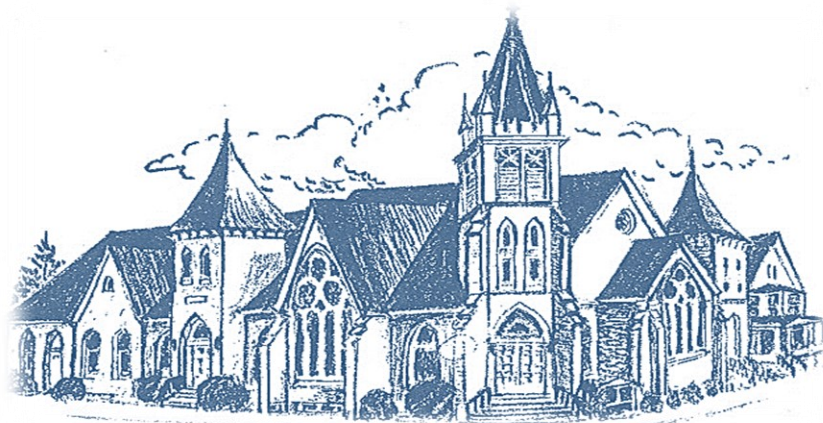


THE MESSIAH HERALD



JANUARY 2025

MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH

3 SOUTH THIRD STREET

MIFFLINTOWN, PA 17059

(717)-436-6213

PASTOR REV. SAMUEL J. LEISTER: MLCSLEISTER@GMAIL.COM

CHURCH WEBSITE: MLCMIFFLINTOWN.ORG

OFFICE EMAIL: MLCHURCHOFFICE@GMAIL.COM

TREASURER EMAIL: MLCHURCHTREASURER@GMAIL.COM

WORSHIP AND COMMUNION – 10:00 AM

CHILDREN'S SERMONS OFFERED EVERY SUNDAY!

FACEBOOK LIVE BROADCAST EACH WEEK

[USS-ARK NEWSLETTER](#)

[THE LUTHERAN MAGAZINE](#)

"Growing God's Love"

The Messiah Herald



THE PASTOR'S PONDERINGS

Dear Messiah Family,

Christus natus est! Christ is born!

We celebrated the earthly birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And we continue to share the love and compassion which He demonstrated through his ministry in this world two thousand years ago. So, "another Christmas has come and gone," we say. We put away the decorations and set aside the song books. The music and atmosphere of the season pause for another year. Let us all resolve to "un-pause" our Christmas spirit of love for all our neighbors near and far!

One of my favorite readings is the first chapter of the Gospel of John. The first verse states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jesus was in the beginning, Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. As we "un-pause" our Christmas spirit read the words of John aloud as they are printed in the present tense in this letter. ¹In the beginning, the Word is already here. The Word is with God, and the Word is God. ²He is with God in the beginning. ³All things are made through him. Nothing that is made is made without him. ⁴Life is in him, and that life is the light for all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness. As you read all scriptures, believe that you are hearing them for the first time and in the present tense, in the presence of God.

To help with maintaining the spirit of Christ's birth throughout the year, close your eyes a moment – I know it's hard to read while your eyes are closed – but in your mind remember the first Sunday of Advent, the decorations going up that day. Continue to the Hanging of the Greens Service with so many of our youth reading, the choir singing, the organists playing, and angels taking the Chrismons from the primary angel, Ella, and placing them on the trees. Follow in your mind to the third Sunday of Advent, and the fourth Sunday of Advent, again the duets, the hymns, and the Christmas story brought to the congregation by youth. Then visualize Christmas Eve with the music, the youth reading scriptures, the vocal worshipping and prayers. This culminated with the candlelight and Silent Night. Then, our commission in the sending hymn, "Go Tell It On the Mountain." Through the new year and all years to come: Tell the Good News!

As we set aside for another year the earthly trappings of the celebration of the earthly birth of Jesus, let us never put aside the love and compassion of Emmanuel, God with us, God IS with us!

May the blessings of God the Creator, Jesus Christ our Lord, and The Holy Spirit be with you all!

Pastor Samuel Leister

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE FOLLOWING

The Family of Jerry Cook	Heather Compton	Nancy Howell	Greysley Rowles
The Family of Gloria Swailes	Fred & Dot Dowling	Terry Imes	Kelley Rusenko
The Family of Don McClure	Seth Dowling	Annie Ingle	Arlene Shearer
The Family of Kay Eby	Kim Dumais	Guy Kerstetter	Jennifer Smith
The Family of Tom Ulsh	Freda Durio	Jesse Kint	Judy Smith
The Family of Sarah Bruce	Cathy Dysinger	Carlen McClure	Joyce & Todd Spangler
Joedy Arnold	Renee Dzikowski	Andi McDanel	Donna Stoner
Linda Bahorik	Kim & Steph Eby	Cecilia Miller	Barry Strawser
Melissa Bargo	Rev. Jodi Ellis	Curt Miller	Vicki Suoja
Jeremy Barnes	Kevin Fetterhoof	Larry Miller	Molly Ulsh
Ryan Barr	Neil & Pat Fisher	Shirley Miller	George Varner
Donna Barton	Bentley Fulkroad	Marlin Milliken	Kristi Wagner & Family
Tony Beward	Terri Gayer	Claire Mummah	Heather Walton
Bill Book	Deb Geedey	Linda (Kerchner) Parks	Roscoe Warner
Linda Brouse	Sheree Goss	Kari Ann (Reagen)	Kathy Whitesel
Jim Burdge	Amanda Gregg	Petrine	Mary Jane Williamson
Andrea Cameron	Fred Gross	Cheryl Pinkerton	Jim & Heidi Woltman
Evitt Campbell	Hannah Hart	Betty Ranck	Gary Zeiders
Terry Coder	Mark Harvey	Keith Ranck	Paul Zeiders
Kenton Cohenour	Bill Heck	Dave Reed	George Zimmerman
	John (Pat) Henry	Jan Reisinger	Jean Zimmerman
	Nox Hepburn	Diane Rowles	Linda Zimmerman

AND FOR OUR SHUT INS

BROOKLINE RETIREMENT VILLAGE

(92 VILLAGE DRIVE, MIFFLINTOWN, PA 17059)

Jane Marhefka

HONNEMAN HOUSE

(58 HONNEMAN HOUSE DR, THOMPSONTOWN, PA 17094)

Ruth Cisney

Ray Bramm

(Apt. #112)

(Apt. #108)

WILLIAM PENN HEALTHCARE AND REHAB CENTER

(163 SUMMIT DRIVE, LEWISTOWN, PA 17044)

Ona Stoner

CHRIST IN OUR HOME

A reminder to anyone who would like a daily devotional to jump start their day. There are plenty of devotionals in "Christ in our Home," which can be picked up in the church office or in the Adult Sunday School Room and are FREE!

PRAYERS & CONCERNS

If you wish to be included on the email recipient list for the Messiah Prayer Chain, please send an email to Pastor Leister at mlcsleister@gmail.com. Also, if anyone has any needs or concerns, please contact Pastor Sam Leister. If you or someone you know is ill or hospitalized, please let Pastor Leister know as well. He can be reached at 717-436-8589 (home), or 717-348-1020 (cell), or email at mlcsleister@gmail.com.



NO REPORT SUBMITTED FOR DECEMBER.

Next WELCA meeting will be on Thursday, January 9th at 1:00 PM in the Youth Area.

2025 CHURCH ENVELOPES

The 2025 church offering envelopes are now available to pick up in the church library. Please pick up these before or after Sunday morning services or stop by the church office during business hours to pick yours up!

Also, anyone who would like a statement of their contributions for 2024 for tax purposes should contact the church office and your statement will be mailed to you.

2025 FLOWER CHART

The new flower chart for 2025 is now available in the Adult Sunday School Room. If you wish to place flowers on a specific date, please sign-up on the chart.

MISSION OF THE MONTH

January's "Mission of the Month" at Messiah will be for the Juniata County Library. The monies will be sent from Messiah directly to the Juniata County Library. In addition to your generosity, the PPC allocated funds to match congregational donations up to \$1,000.00. This is just one way in which we can continue to extend our mission in Christ's love beyond the walls of our church building.

THANK YOU!

Thank you to Messiah Lutheran Church for your generous donation to Juniata Meals on Wheels, Inc. on November 9, 2024. Meals on Wheels, Inc. was organized to deliver prepared meals to home-bound residents of Juniata

County. Your support will aid us in furthering our goals. Again, thank you for your support. Sincerely, *ESTHER BRATTON, TREASURER*

Thank you to my family at Messiah for the annual Christmas gift. It was very much appreciated. Also, thank you to the choir and director Andrea Cameron for their gifts as well. Let's hope 2025 brings a lot of high notes (compared to 2024), and with a scent of mint and happiness in the air!! --*BOB ST. CLAIR*

"Thank you, members of Messiah and the Choir, for your very generous gifts this Christmas season. Wishing you all a Happy and Healthy New Year!" --*SLONE SMITH*

"Thank you for all the gifts and blessings folks at Messiah have given to us this year and beyond!" --*PASTOR SAM AND LINDA LEISTER*

STORE GIFT CARDS

Weis and Giant gift cards are available to purchase from the Disciples Class. This is a very important outreach ministry that helps neighbors in need in our own community. We thank each and every one for continued support of this very worthwhile project.

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

Tuesday – 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Thursday – 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Friday – 12:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

*Feeling Cold? Come on in and
feel the warmth of the Son.*

JUNIATA COUNTY FOOD PANTRY JANUARY UPDATE

Happy New Year! We are so thankful for all who shared their abundance with the Food Pantry during November and December. With your help we were able to provide over Thanksgiving and Christmas meals for neighbors who would have gone without. As we wind down our joyous celebrations of the holiday season, it's important to remember that for some folks this season has a different name: "The Season of Heat or Eat!" Many families this winter will have to choose whether to heat their homes or buy food and other necessities. Please continue to keep them in mind and in prayer as you pack away Christmas decorations and finish off leftovers.

BASIC NEEDS FOR JANUARY:

All non-perishable foods; Tissues; Toilet Paper; OTC pain; cold and flu medicines, Vicks, and any household cleaning items. We also gladly accept donations of cash and gift cards to purchase these supplies.



PO Box 44, 114 N. Main St, Mifflintown, PA 17059
Phone: 717-436-9718 Hours: Tue 9-12 and 1-5, and Sat 9-12

*PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO THE **JUNIATA COUNTY FOOD PANTRY**.
(CONTACT PERSON: GLENDA FULTZ). Email: jcfp122017@gmail.com
WEBSITE: www.jcfoodpantry.com

Our vestibule is open 24 hours a day to receive donations. Cash, checks, or gift cards may be deposited in the vestibule's mail slot. *Non-perishable foods and non-food items may be dropped off at any time in our vestibule. Please deliver perishable food only when someone is here to receive it. Thank you!

UPCOMING SERVANTS

ALTAR GUILD

December 23 to January 19
..... Chris Martin & Melissa Ehrisman
January 20 to February 16
..... Christie Yorks & Sabrina Shipp

MANNA MAKERS

January 5.....Jamie Miller
January 12..... Cynthia Smith
January 19..... Diana Wise

FLOWERS

January 5..... Ona, Dan & Michelle Stoner
January 12 and 19..... **OPEN**
January 26..... Don & Barb Geedey

LECTORS

January 5 Grace Miller
January 12..... Andrea Cameron
January 19..... Barb Geedey
January 26..... Beward Family

ACOLYTES

January 5..... Braedon Walton & Carter Ehrisman
January 12 Nick & Gabby Reed
January 19 Thea Beward & Olivia Mummah
January 26 Grace & Evan Miller

OFFERING & COMMUNION PRESENTERS

January 5
..... Silas Smith, Hannah Ehrisman and Paige Martin
January 12 Stella & Sofia Reed and Ella Harris
January 19
..... Brea Beward, Evan Miller and Olivia Mummah
January 26
... Hope Miller, Carter Ehrisman, and Braedon Walton

OFFERING COUNTERS

January 5 Don & Barb Geedey
January 12 Cynthia Smith & Larry Goss
January 19 Ron & Christie Yorks
January 26 Tammy Brackbill & Nick Beward

DAILY BIBLE READINGS AND PRAYER CONCERNS

JANUARY 1 ----- LUKE 2:15-21
RECUPERATING PASTORS AND DEACONS

JANUARY 2 ----- JEREMIAH 31:7-14
MANUFACTURERS AND METAL FABRICATORS

JANUARY 3 ----- PSALM 147:12-20
CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

JANUARY 4 ----- EPHESIANS 1:3-14
ARTISTS AND MUSICIANS

JANUARY 5 ----- JOHN 1:[1-9] 10-18
PARK SERVICE EMPLOYEES

JANUARY 6 ----- MATTHEW 2:1-12
GLOBAL REFUGE

JANUARY 7 ----- EPHESIANS 4:17 – 5:1
THOSE WHO NEED A FRESH START

JANUARY 8 ----- PSALM 72
THOSE WHO WORK IN RETAIL

JANUARY 9 ----- ISAIAH 43:1-7
THOSE DISPLACED FROM THEIR HOMELAND

JANUARY 10 ----- PSALM 29
METEOROLOGISTS AND CLIMATOLOGISTS

JANUARY 11 ----- ACTS 8:14-17
VICTIMS OF DROUGHT AND FLOOD

JANUARY 12 ----- LUKE 3:15-17, 21-22
PEOPLE WHO YEARN FOR REFUGE, PROTECTION, AND FOOD

JANUARY 13 ----- EPHESIANS 6:10-17
PEOPLE CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

JANUARY 14 ----- JOHN 5:13-21
PEOPLE WHO NEED US TO LOVE THEM

JANUARY 15 ----- LUKE 11:33-36
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION EXPERTS

JANUARY 16 ----- ISAIAH 62:1-5
PEOPLE WHO INTERVENE WHEN ANGER REIGNS

JANUARY 17 ----- PSALM 36:5-10
MIDDLE- AND HIGH-SCHOOLERS

JANUARY 18 ----- 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11
PEOPLE WITH LOSS OF BODY, MIND, OR SPIRIT

JANUARY 19 ----- JOHN 2:1-11
THE SAFETY OF PEOPLE FLEEING DISASTERS

JANUARY 20 ----- ROMANS 12:9-21
MEDIATORS AND HEALERS

JANUARY 21 ----- 1 CORINTHIANS 1:3-17
THE HEALING OF BROKEN COMMUNITIES

JANUARY 22 ----- PSALM 145
BAND TEACHERS AND THE JOY OF MUSIC

JANUARY 23 ----- NEHEMIAH 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10
THOSE IN DEEP GRIEF

JANUARY 24 ----- PSALM 19
PRAYER MINISTRIES

JANUARY 25 ----- 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31A
MEDICAL STAFF WHO CARE FOR THE BODY

JANUARY 26 ----- LUKE 4:14-21
DISASTER RECOVERY ORGANIZATIONS

JANUARY 27 ----- PSALM 119:89-96
EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS

JANUARY 28 ----- JEREMIAH 36:27-32
TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

JANUARY 29 ----- LUKE 4:38-44
COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS

JANUARY 30 ----- MALACHI 3:1-4
PASTORS, INTERIM PASTORS, AND BISHOPS

JANUARY 31 ----- PSALM 84
THOSE WHO CARE FOR WILDLIFE

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!

JANUARY 1 – Marylou Hazard

JANUARY 5 – Marsha Piper

JANUARY 15 – Brenda Bahorik

JANUARY 17 – Ken Stuck

JANUARY 29 -- Erin Harris

CHRISTMAS EVE LOOSE OFFERING

All loose offerings that were collected at this year's Christmas Eve service will be going to the Matthew 25 Fund to help those in need throughout the year. You can also donate to the fund by writing Matthew 25 Fund on your regular offering envelope and the amount you wish to contribute.

SYNOD DELEGATES NEEDED



Two members of Messiah are needed to attend the annual Synod Assembly in June of 2025 at Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove. Synod delegates should also plan on attending the Juniata Valley Conference Assembly (*date to be announced*). If you are interested in serving, please contact Pastor Leister or the church office.

UPCOMING YOUTH FUNDRAISER

The next fundraiser which will benefit the Messiah/St. Stephens Youth Mission Trips will be on Tuesday, January 14th at Harshbarger's Sub 'N Malt. To help our groups, either cut out the ticket below and take it with you to OIP or take a picture of it with your phone and present it with your bill.

FABULOUS

Fund-raiser Tuesdays

Harshbarger's
SUB 'N MALT

St. Stevens Youth Group
Organization

1/14/2025
Date

Thank you!

TWO LOCATIONS | Route 22, McVeytown Port Royal Exit, Swamp Road
717-899-7751 717-436-5386

JANUARY CALENDAR OF EVENTS



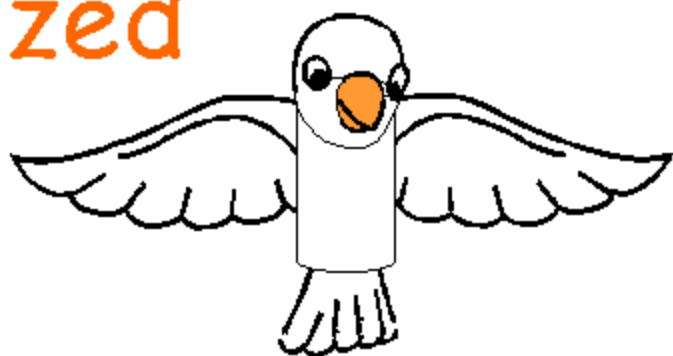
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2025:	HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!
SUNDAY, JANUARY 5:	-10:00 AM – WORSHIP/COMMUNION -AFTER WORSHIP – UNDECORATING OF THE CHURCH
MONDAY, JANUARY 6:	-5:00 PM – LION’S CLUB IN FELLOWSHIP HALL -6:30 PM – KNITTERS IN JUNIOR CHURCH ROOM -7:00 PM -- AA IN DISCIPLE’S CLASS AREA
TUESDAY, JANUARY 7:	-10:30 AM – BIBLE STUDY IN THE LIBRARY
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8:	-9:00 AM – “THE NEEDLERS” IN FELLOWSHIP HALL -7:00 PM – CHOIR REHEARSAL IN SANCTUARY
THURSDAY, JANUARY 9:	-1:00 PM -- W.E.L.C.A. MEETING IN YOUTH AREA
SATURDAY, JANUARY 11:	-9:00 AM TO 4:00 PM – QUILTERS IN FELLOWSHIP HALL
SUNDAY, JANUARY 12:	BAPTISM OF OUR LORD -10:00 AM – WORSHIP/COMMUNION
MONDAY, JANUARY 13:	-6:30 PM – KNITTERS IN JUNIOR CHURCH ROOM -7:00 PM -- AA IN DISCIPLE’S CLASS AREA
TUESDAY, JANUARY 14:	-10:30 AM – BIBLE STUDY IN THE LIBRARY
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15:	-9:00 AM – “THE NEEDLERS” IN FELLOWSHIP HALL -7:00 PM – CHOIR REHEARSAL IN THE SANCTUARY
THURSDAY, JANUARY 16:	-8:30 AM -- JCPASR BREAKFAST IN FELLOWSHIP HALL
SATURDAY, JANUARY 18:	-9:00 AM TO 4:00 PM – QUILTER’S GUILD IN FELLOWSHIP HALL
SUNDAY, JANUARY 19:	-10:00 AM – WORSHIP/COMMUNION
MONDAY, JANUARY 20:	MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. HOLIDAY -5:00 PM – LION’S CLUB IN FELLOWSHIP HALL -6:30 PM – KNITTERS IN JUNIOR CHURCH ROOM -7:00 PM -- AA IN DISCIPLE’S CLASS AREA
TUESDAY, JANUARY 21:	-10:30 AM – BIBLE STUDY IN THE LIBRARY
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22:	-9:00 AM – “THE NEEDLERS” IN FELLOWSHIP HALL -7:00 PM – CHOIR REHEARSAL IN THE SANCTUARY
SATURDAY, JANUARY 25:	-9:00 AM – MARINE CORPS LEAGUE IN FELLOWSHIP HALL
SUNDAY, JANUARY 26:	-10:00 AM – WORSHIP/COMMUNION
MONDAY, JANUARY 27:	-6:30 PM – KNITTERS IN JUNIOR CHURCH ROOM -7:00 PM -- AA IN DISCIPLE’S CLASS AREA
TUESDAY, JANUARY 28:	-10:30 AM – BIBLE STUDY IN THE LIBRARY
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29:	-NEWSLETTER DEADLINE -9:00 AM – “THE NEEDLERS” IN FELLOWSHIP HALL -7:00 PM – CHOIR REHEARSAL IN THE SANCTUARY

OUR SYMPATHIES...

We extend our sympathy to Pat Cook and family on the passing of her husband, Jerry, on December 16, 2024 at his home. Please keep Pat and family in your prayers. Sympathy is also extended to Kevin Swailes and family on the passing of his grandmother, Gloria Swailes, on December 13, 2024 at William Penn Nursing Home. Please also keep Kevin and family in your prayers.

Unscramble the letters to find the words in our

Jesus is Baptized Anagram



aertw _____

aceghinpr _____

closstu _____

ehnoy _____

iiprst _____

deov _____

ahsw _____

beeeilv _____

blmosy _____

aceeennprt _____

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO GAVE POINSETTIAS to decorate the church in honor of Christ's birth.

TO THE GLORY OF GOD:

In loving memory of our parents, Ansel B. and Jean A. McNaight, by daughters Jane Shearer and Anne B. McNaight.

In loving memory of Abram and Ruth Shoener and Daniel and Thelma Dreibelbis by the Stephen Dreibelbis family.

In memory of Jean, George and Bill Flint and George, Sr. and Mary Lorraine Hazard by the George Hazard, Jr. family.

In honor of family and friends by George and Marylou Hazard.

In memory of family members who have passed on by Debrann and Ron Meinsler.

In memory of Rich VanGavree by Cindy and Phillip VanGavree and Susan Bahr.

In memory of my parents, Paul and Dorothy Patterson, by Cindy VanGavree.

In memory of my students: Sam Brown, Kyle Knepp, Susan Hoffman Colyer, Allison McClure Garver, Tammy Pines Walton, Susan Huss Dare, Ryan Hackett, Randy Thompson, Michael Hockenberry, Jeffrey Marks, Antonio Wells, Bill Swartz, Jed Phelan, Zachary Pellman, Kathy Beaston, Jackie Gilliland Swartwood, Chip Jabs, Sean Boyer, and Kyler Keller by Cindy VanGavree.

In memory of my grandparents, John and Hulda St. Clair and Lester and Grace Parsons, by Bob St. Clair.

In loving memory of my father, Robert St. Clair, Sr. by Bob St. Clair.

In loving honor of my mother, Jeanette St. Clair, by Bob St. Clair.

In memory of my grandparents by Kenton Stuck.

In memory of our beloved wife and mother, Kay Stuck, by Ken and Kenton Stuck.

In memory of loved ones by Judy and Herman Armstrong.

In honor of my children, Susan, Carol and Kenneth and their spouses, Reg, John and Tawny, by Ruth Mummah.

In honor of my grandchildren, Harrison, Haley and Olivia, by Ruth Mummah.

In memory of my husband, Kenneth B. Mummah, and parents, Dale H. and Charlotte Henry and Harry and Martha Mummah, by Ruth Mummah.

In loving memory of Barry T. Stratford by Betty and family.

In memory of Butch Pines and Tammy Pines Walton by Sandy Pines and Dan and Michelle Stoner.

In honor of Braedon Walton by Sandy Pines and Dan and Michelle Stoner.

In memory of Robert E. 'Hap' and Dorothy Smith, Lloyd and Flossie Showers and Clarence and Beulah Leister by Pastor Sam and Linda Leister and family.

In memory of Dorothy and Karen Swab and Rick Fultz by Nick, Bethanie, Thea and Brea Beward.

In memory of Johnny, Donald, Sr., Margaret, Donald, Jr., and Ronnie Beward by Nick, Bethanie, Thea and Brea Beward.

In honor of our Pappy and Mam-Maw Leister and Nammy Beward by Thea and Brea Beward.

In memory of Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Knisely and Mrs. and Mrs. Harry S. Mummah by Warren and Claire Mummah.

In memory of John and Helen Sieber by George and Kay Varner and family.

In memory of Martin and Ruth Varner by George and Kay Varner and family.

In memory of loved ones by Ray and Jane Miller.

In memory of Sue Collins by family.

In memory of loved ones by Don and Barb Geedey.

In memory of George and Evelyn Shirk and Gerald and Evelyn 'Nootie' Davis by family.

In memory of Al and Alice McClure by Kay and Ken Eyler.

In memory of Warren 'Dutch' and Kitty Walters by Deb, Cyndi and Bob.

In honor and memory of loved ones near and far by Larry and Diana Wise.

In memory of our parents by Ron and Christie Yorks.

The large Poinsettia in the front of the sanctuary was placed in memory of Joyce Yetter by Vernon Gunnion and family.

In honor of God's people at Messiah by Pastor Sam and Linda Leister

MEMORIALS FOR LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE

In loving memory of our parents, Ansel B. and Jean A. McNaight, by daughters Jane Shearer and Anne B. McNaight.

In memory of Kenneth Geedey and Ronald Chambers by Barbara P. Geedey.

In honor and memory of loved ones near and far by Larry and Diana Wise.

In memory of loved ones by Don and Barb Geedey.

In memory of Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Knisely and Mrs. and Mrs. Harry S. Mummah by Warren and Claire Mummah.

In memory of family members who have passed on by Debrann and Ron Meinsler.

In loving honor of my parents, Warren and Claire Mummah, and our children and grandchild, Shane, Kailey and Reece, Todd and Claire by Mary and Glenn Grimm.

In loving memory of Don and Sylva Grimm by Glenn and Mary Grimm.





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

—Luke 2:8-9

True and lasting joy

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

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

What about Bethlehem? The prophet Micah called Bethlehem "one of the little clans of Judah" (Micah 5:2). Even today, Bethlehem would not be counted among the world's great cities. In 1950, Christians made up 86% of the population. Now they are under 10%. Its economy is based on tourism, which has been decimated by the current conflict. Bethlehem is in the occupied West Bank, in a war zone.

To these terrified shepherds, literally sitting in the dark outside of Bethlehem, an obscure town in an occupied province of the Roman Empire, God chose to reveal the birth of the Messiah. What on earth was God thinking? Why not in Jerusalem? Why not in Herod's palace? Why not in Rome, where the emperor claimed to be *sofer*, "savior"?

How does the angels' announcement of the birth of the Messiah sound to people living in obscure places, far from the centers of power, in indescribably difficult circumstances today? To those living in Gaza and Ukraine, in Sudan, in the homes of immigrants in this country who fear deportation? To starving children here and across the globe? How dare we wish them "Merry Christmas"?

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord'" (Luke 2:10-11). Joy. Not happiness that is transient and human-made, but joy, given by God, that is deep and strong and unshakable.

Joy is a sign of the reign of God. The root word for "joy" in Greek is the same as that for "grace." "Gift" also comes from the same root, as does "thanks." All of this points to the nature of true joy. It is gift. It is grace. It is thanksgiving. Our word "eucharist," a name for Holy Communion, ties this all together in the sacrament where Jesus' body is broken for us and Jesus' blood is poured out for us. In the eucharist, Christ invades us with God's joy. We are intimately connected to the source of joy and grace in this gift.

Perhaps that is why, in the middle of the night, to terrified shepherds outside of a small town, God chose to send the angels to announce the birth of Jesus. No distraction. No interference. Just the simple, deep, profound gift of true and lasting joy. A joy that comes from God, from the essence of God, depending only on God, that no earthly power can take away.

Elizabeth A. Eaton

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America