

The Grace Lutheran

Newsletter of Grace LCMS – Greenwood, Arkansas

February 2026

From Pastor's Pen...



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This month we, along with much of the world, celebrate St. Valentine's Day, although the "Saint" in the name is usually dropped. In fact, stores have been preparing us for this celebration since the Christmas décor was taken down. Everywhere you look, you see images of hearts, red and pink decorations, and depictions of Cupid, the diaper-clad cherubic Roman god of physical attraction, i.e., "love." But what's with that name—"St. Valentine's Day"? It's not "St. Cupid's day." Why "St. Valentine"? What does this mean?

According to the majority of information found on the Internet:

The first representation of Saint Valentine appeared in the Nuremberg Chronicle, (1493); alongside the woodcut portrait of Valentine the text states that he was a Christian priest of Roman descent martyred during the reign of Claudius II, known as Claudius Gothicus. He was arrested and imprisoned upon being caught marrying Christian couples and otherwise aiding Christians who were at the time being persecuted by Claudius in Rome. Helping Christians at this time was considered a crime. Claudius took a liking to this prisoner — until Valentine tried to convert the Emperor — whereupon this priest was condemned to death. He was beaten with clubs and stoned; when that didn't finish him, he was beheaded outside the Flaminian Gate. Various dates are given for the martyrdom, although most historians settle on February 14, 269AD.

Understanding this bit of history helps us to see the connection with marriage and love (true love), although much of the activity associated today with St. Valentine's Day would *absolutely appall* St. Valentine, e.g., celebrating sex outside of marriage, making a mockery of marriage. The fact that a [false] Roman god (Cupid) is used to signify/celebrate the day when it was pagan Rome that murdered St. Valentine leaves a sour taste in my mouth that candy hearts won't fix.

But... instead of going into a long history on how the devil has once again taken a day that Christians have set aside for the purpose of giving thanks to God for such great faith, let us, in true "saintly" and God-pleasing fashion, observe the 14th of February by looking to the saint and see what we can learn from his example of the faith that God has blessed us with.

In marriage, we see the relationship between a man and a woman as being a "lesser sampling" of the love that Jesus has for His bride, the Church (all Christians everywhere), and the love that the Church/Bride has (or is supposed to have) for her Groom. (Ephesians 5:22-33). According to legend, while in prison, Valentine wrote to the Christians to encourage them, and at the end of his letters, he'd sign them, "Your Valentine," and some believe this marks the source of sending cards and letters on that day. Regardless of the truth of the legend, as we celebrate God's love as shown through the life of Valentine and other martyrs, we find a far greater love than that offered by the card and candy stores. God has given us His Son and has shown us the greatest love (John 15:12-13). So as you celebrate this month, whether married, single, or somewhere in between, know that St. Valentine's Day is for all people, a day to remember and celebrate true love—the love of God for us in Jesus Christ.

This leads in to the second point I want to highlight concerning this coming month. The penitential season of Lent begins Wednesday, February 18 (Ash Wednesday). As always, we will meet for Ash Wednesday worship at 7:00pm.

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Pastor's Pen, *continued...*

*There will be no pre-service meal. However, the remaining five midweek services will offer a pre-service meal, which begins at 6:00pm. Worship is at 7:00pm. Our midweek Lenten theme this year will focus on the cities our victorious Lord calls out in the beginning of the book of Revelation (chapters two and three). In a nutshell, *“I know these good things that you’re doing, but I have this against you....”*

Here's why this midweek penitential study works so well with February and St. Valentine's day: the true love that God has for us in Christ, and the love that the Church—the bride—is supposed to have for Christ, her Bridegroom, who loves His holy bride so much that He willingly laid down His life as a ransom for her, reminds me of the passage from the book of Revelation, specifically the part where our Lord addresses the Christians in Ephesus: “I have this against you, that you have abandoned your first love” (Rev 2:4). Can the same be said for the modern-day Church here in America? In Greenwood? What about the Christian in the mirror? Can the same be said for you? Have we abandoned/jilted our “first love,” who is Jesus Christ? Have other “lovers/paramours” come before our Bridegroom? Have we been “adulterous” and unfaithful (infidelity) to our Bridegroom? If the things of Christ (Word and Sacrament) aren’t first priority, then you have abandoned your first love. It’s that simple. I could go on, but then I’d have nothing to talk about on our Wednesday eves together.

As we prepare to enter into the penitential season of Lent, let us endeavor to “keep the first things first.” Let us endeavor to turn away from all those tempting and seductive “sirens” on the seashores of daily life, holding fast to our first love, who loved us so much that He laid down His life in order to redeem us. May this love of God for you, witnessed in the person Jesus Christ—God made flesh—be your first love, now and always.

In Christian love,

Pastor

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“We show love to one another with our words or with a kiss, but God shows His eternal and unconditional love to us by hanging flesh on a cross.”

Martin Luther

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“Why is purple the color of Lent?”

For centuries the color purple has been closely associated with royalty. In ancient times, the “royal purple” dye was made by gathering the secretion of a particular snail native to the Mediterranean Sea called the Murex snail. Unfortunately, the secretion comes from the hypobranchial gland of this particular snail. This means that the snail must be killed in order to acquire the glandular secretion.

Given the tiny size of this snail, it goes without saying that **many** snails would have to perish in order to get a “workable” amount of dye. How many? Some scientists have determined that it would take over **10,000 snails** to produce just **ONE TEASPOON** of royal purple dye powder, which is how the dye was sold and transported throughout the far reaches of the region! Are you beginning to see just how much **true sacrifice** went into making an entire purple garment? Do you see why only royalty could afford such a garment?

This is also why you will see a king’s crown often emblazoned on the Lenten paraments. Yes—the crown does remind us of the King of Kings—Jesus Christ. However, there’s more to it than just a high and mighty title. So great was the depth and depravity of our sin that it required the death of God Himself! Only the King of Heaven and Earth could make that supreme sacrifice, and sacrifice He did—for you, for me, and for all the sins of the entire world. We can’t pay for one single sin, which is precisely why Jesus, as our Lenten King, willingly became the supreme sacrifice for all time!

In that simple purple parament that we see trotted out at Lent, I hope and pray that you will henceforth see the all-atoning blood and all-redeeming sacrifice of the very King who willingly gave up everything to become the “once-for-all” sacrifice for all mankind.

“To Christ be all the Glory!”

Life in Christ...

Pastor Zirbel's **Wednesday Bible Study** continues the study of Lamentations. All are encouraged to attend the study that begins at 10:00 am.

LWML – Regular meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, 2/3 at 12:30 pm at Grace. As always, all women of Grace are invited and encouraged to attend. Bring your own lunch, dessert and beverages provided.

Ash Wednesday Service with imposition of ashes will be provided on 2/11/2026.

Lenten Services and Suppers begin on Wednesday 2/18. Supper starts at 6:00 pm and worship service follows at 7:00 pm. Sign-up sheets will be posted for volunteers to provide meals.

Voter's Meeting Results from the meeting held Sunday, 1/25 for 2026 budget and elections for elders and auxiliary ministry leaders received by affirmation are Scott Basham and Perry Goines, elders; Alyssa Cox, PR coordinator; Kim Pinckney, fellowship coordinator; Jeannette Zirbel, human care coordinator; "The Nehemiahs" as Facility Coordinators. Additionally, the 2026 Budget was approved unanimously as presented. Minutes of the meeting are posted in the fellowship hall.

February Birthdays Blessings:

2	Nathan Cox
4	Jason Pinckney
9	Judy Bass
12	Michelle Fleer
14	Wendell Zirbel
18	Abigail Pinckney
27	Armstrong Fraiser



Remembering in Prayer:

Let my prayer be counted as incense before You, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!
Psalm 141:2

For the sick – Father of mercies and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need, look with favor upon those who suffer illness and infirmity. Assure them of Your mercy, deliver them from the temptations of the evil one, and give them patience and comfort in their illness. If it please You, restore them to health, or give them grace to accept this tribulation with courage and hope.

For those who grieve – Heavenly Father, into whose keeping we entrust our loved ones, help us to look to You in our time of sorrow, remembering the cloud of faithful witnesses with which we are surrounded, Grant that we may one day share in the joys of those who now rest in Your presence.

For those who are lonely – Ever-present Lord, You have promised never to leave us nor forsake us but to abide with us to the end of time. Grant that those who live alone may not be lonely but find both comfort from Your promises and fulfillment in loving You and their neighbors all their days.

For the joy of the resurrection among us; for the fruit of faith nourished by the Word and the Sacraments.

For faith to live in the promises of Holy Baptism; for one's calling and daily work; for the unemployed; for the salvation and well-being of our neighbors; for schools, colleges, and seminaries; for good government and for peace.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord we pray. Amen

Be with us through this season, Lord, and all our earthly days, that when the final Easter dawns, we join in heaven's praise. LSB 418

***No Anniversaries noted in February**



Grace Lutheran Church
18218 US Highway 71 South
Greenwood, AR 72936

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Bible Study & Worship Opportunities:

Sunday Worship Service 8:00 AM

Adult Bible Study 9:00 AM

Sunday Worship Service 10:15 AM

Wednesday Adult Bible Study 10:00 AM

2/11 Ash Wednesday Service 7:00PM