**Caring for Creation 2025: January – Finding Our Place in Creation**

**"*It seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty; the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living*."** David Attenborough

**Prayer:** Eternal Nurturer, preserve natural places for rest and rejuvenation. Guide the work of conservationists, park managers, urban planners, gardeners, and all caretakers of natural spaces. Attune us to the wonders we disregard or fail to notice.1 Help us to contemplate the wonders of God’s design and to appreciate our dependence on the natural world.

Ecosystems represent “God’s elegant and fragile web of life.”2 Their interconnected feedback loops waste nothing. A good example of this is found in the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem “Seagrasses are home to a variety of small animals that perform different jobs. Some control algae that would smother seagrasses. Others keep out invasive species. Still others provide food for striped bass and blue crabs that are served on our dinner tables. By conserving this variety of animals, we can maximize the health of the grass bed, and the benefits to people.”3 Many people living indoors may feel disconnected with the outdoor world. A group of urban college students were asked on their first day of their Environmental Science class what trees produce acorns? In a class of 48 non-science students, none of them knew. Exploring the wonders of nature perhaps we develop a sense of awe and appreciate the complex interactions necessary for a healthy ecosystem and work to conserve and preserve nature’s wonders. Take some time this month to engage with nature.

**Jan 1, Make a Green New Year’s Resolution** – use the sustainability Bingo Card on the back side of this sheet for ideas. Gen. 1:1-2:4 **Jan 7 - What are your first memories of nature?** How is nature a part of your story? Ps. 104:1-9

**Jan 14 – Celebrate Martin Luther King Day** Reflect on MLK’s call to align power with love. This alignment extends beyond humanity to include the natural world. How can you use this day to be an advocate for the protection of creation and help address over-consumption? Ps. 104:10-23

**Jan 21 - Identify a place that is sacred to you.** What makes it so? How can you care for that place? Ps 104:24-26.

**Jan 28 - Rest and reflect** –Winter is a time of rest and renewal for the earth and for God’s creatures, including us. Go for a walk if the weather allows. Look for clouds in the sky, a singing bird, pinecones, winter berries. Keep a journal to reflect on the sights and sounds of winter. Ps. 104:27-33.

1Intercessory Prayer All Saints Lutheran Church, 27 Oct 2024.

2 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. 2024, Our Kairos Moment, A Study of Earth’s Climate Crisis.

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Earths\_Climate\_Crisis\_Study\_Guide\_FINAL.pdf retrieved 10 January 2025 3Stephanie Smith, 2015, Biodiversity helps support healthy, interconnected ecosystems, Chesapeake Bay program, https://www.chesapeakebay.net/news/blog/biodiversity helps-support-healthy-interconnected-ecosystems**,** retrieved 5 Jan 2025.

**Hymn: Touch the Earth Lightly,** Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW) p. 739

Touch the earth lightly, use the earth gently / nourish the life of the world in our care: gift of great wonder, ours to surrender, trust for the children tomorrow will bear.

v. 2 We who endanger, who create hunger / agents of death for all creatures that live, 

we who would foster clouds of disaster0 God of our planet, forestall and forgive!

v.3 Let there be greening, birth from the burning / water that blesses and air that is

sweet, health in God’s garden, hope in God’s children, regeneration that peace will

complete.

v. 4 God of all living, God of all loving, God of the seedling, the snow and the sun, teach

us, deflect us, Christ reconnect us, using us gently, and making us one.

**Care for Creation 2025: February – Hope is a Thing with Feathers**

**“Hope” is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul / And sings the tune without the words / And never stops - at all.** Emily Dickinson

Bird populations have declined by 2.9 billion birds since 1970. Now, over 1,300 species of birds are threatened, and 197 are critically endangered. Habitat loss due to agriculture and urbanization, climate change are major contributors to the decline in bird species.

**Prayer:** Creator God, we thank you for the beauty that surrounds us. Attune us to the sights and sounds of nature and awaken us to a renewed sense of care for wildlife in our communities. Form us into faithful stewards of what you have made.

*Henri Nouwen suggests being like a bird. Imagine every simple repeated prayer as a twig, and as you spend time in prayer, those twigs will eventually become a nest.*

**Feb. 2 – Help build bird resiliency** – Combat non-climate threats such as outdoor cats, pesticides and glass collisions. Bird surveys have shown that 1 billion birds are lost each year to hitting windows and 2.4 billion are killed by cats in the US and Canada. *Put decals on your windows*. Gen 1:20

**Feb. 9 – Restore bird habitat** – Native vegetation is the longest-term improvement you can make for your property to attract native birds and insects. According to Missouri Department of Conservation – One clutch of baby chickadees is fed 7,000-9,000 caterpillars in just a few weeks. *Plant native vegetation*. Isaiah 40:30-31.

**Feb. 16 – Participate in Great Backyard Bird Count**, Feb 14-17, 2025. All Saints will again participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count.4 Citizen Science programs such as the Great Backyard Bird Count or FeederWatch help scientists track the numbers of birds. *Participate in Citizen Science programs through Cornell University programs, Journey North or Monarch Watch*. Mt 6:26-34.

**Feb. 23 – Drink bird friendly coffee** – Most coffees are grown in sunny areas that have been cleared of most plants. Bird friendly coffee is grown using practices that support birds such as shade-grown plants instead of on cleared land that destroys habitat. In a study of shade versus sun coffee, overall bird abundance and diversity was greater by between 15 and 30% on shaded farms than sun farms5. Ps 104:12

Why should we care about birds? Birds eat pests and disease carriers, such as the mosquitoes that carry West Nile Virus. Hawks and owls keep mouse populations in check. Crows and vultures scavenge carcasses and reduce spread of rabies and distemper. Birds disperse seeds and spread plants to new areas. Hummingbirds help pollinate plants. In many ways, birds enrich our lives and provide a gateway to learning about nature. A

4 You can report birds through the Merlin app, the eBird app, the eBird website or using a paper copy of checklist and give them to Janet Cooper. Our account with Cornell Labs: Username: aslc64015. Password: allsaintslutheran24.

5 Greenberg, R., P. Bichier and J. Sterling, 1997. Bird populations in rustic and planted shade coffee plantations of eastern Chiapas, Mexico. Biotropica 29(4):501-514.

recent study suggests that seeing and hearing birds through activities such as bird watching may result in lasting improvements to mental well being.6

**Creation Reflection:** Scientists are noting that birds are breeding farther northward. Unfortunately birds migratory patterns are geared to day length and not temperature. Yet the increase in temperature at their breeding grounds may result in their arrival past the peak of their food source. Additionally, with reduced snowpack in some areas, elk may be able to stay longer at higher elevations resulting in over-grazing of an area by the elk. This degradation of the plant community may also affect the food source of birds.

The California Condor is an example of a conservation program that has worked. The California Condor is the largest land bird with a wingspan of 9.5 ft and weighs 25 lb. In 1982 23 condors remained. In an effort to save the Condor, all wild condors were placed in a captive breeding program. As the program became successful, captive bred condors were released into the wild. By 2004, the first chick was hatched in the wild. However, in the early 2000s with the arrival of the West Nile Virus in the United States, concern grew over the potential effects of that virus on the condor breeding program. All condors in the US both in the captive breeding population and in the wild were vaccinated with a WNV vaccine, which successfully protected the Condor from the virus and potential extinction.7 Recently concern is growing over the effects of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza strain as 13 condors have died and shown to have been infected with HPAI. Several captive condors have been given the vaccine in a clinical trial.8

**Recommended Reading**: *Better Living Through Birding: Notes from a Black Man in the Natural World*, by Christian Cooper, Random House, 2023. **Hymn**: **God Speaks to Us in Bird and Song**

v. 1God speaks to us in bird and song, in winds that drift the clouds along, above the din and toil of wrong, a melody of love. v. 2 God speaks to us in far and near, in peace of home and friends most dear, from faded past and present clear, a melody of love. v.3 God speaks to us in darkest night, by quiet ways through mornings bright, when shadows fall with evening light, a melody of love. 4 O Voice divine, speak unto me, beyond the earth, beyond the sea, and let me echo joyfully a melody of love.

6 Dayer, A.A., P. C. Pototsky, R.J. Hall, D.M. Hawley, T.B. Phillips, D.N. Bonter, A.M. Dietsch, E. Greig and W.M. Hochachka, 2023. Birds are not the only ones impacted by guidance to cease bird feeding, People and Nature 6(1): 20-2633.. https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10566

7 Chang GJ, Davis BS, Stringfield C, Lutz C. 2007, Prospective immunization of the endangered California condors (*Gymnogyps californianus*) protects this species from lethal West Nile virus infection. Vaccine. Mar 8;25(12):2325-30. doi: 10.1016/j.vaccine.2006.11.056.

8 United States Department of Agriculture, March 2024, USDA Takes Action to Help Protect Endangered California Condors From Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection service. https://www.aphis.usda.gov/news/agency-announcements/usda-takes-action-help-protect-endangered-california-condors-highly retrieved 8 Jan 2025.

**Care for Creation 2025: March – Climate Change**

**“For most of history, man has had to fight nature to survive. In this century, he is beginning to realize that, in order to survive, he must protect it.” Jacques-Yves Cousteau.**

This month we will examine the effects of climate change in Missouri and ways we can reduce gas consumption. According to the EPA, the state has warmed less in the last century than most states in the US, a change in 0.5-1oF. Floods are more frequent and the state has been suffering from extremely hot days. The higher temperatures will increase humidity due to evaporation.9 And while many people scoff at the 1orise in temperature, if your temperature rose 1o you would be concerned.

**Prayer:** Renewing God, transform your creation. Steer us from habits that harm what you have made, and guide us in practices that preserve and restore creatures and habitats. Source: Source: Intercessory Prayers, All Saints Lutheran Church from 8 Dec 2024.

**Mar 2 – Agriculture** - In Missouri, higher temperatures in the summer will reduce corn yields, decrease the production of milk from cows, and increase the severity of droughts which will lessen crop yields as well. *Cars in good repair operate more efficiently.* Is 24:1-3

**Mar 5 – Ash Wednesday** – One of the effects of climate change is an increase in the number and severity of wildfires. *With the imposition of the ashes, reflect upon the devastation fires in California have caused.* Is. 24:4-6

**Mar 9 – Forests** Changes in rainfall and higher temperatures may not reduce the amount of forested area in Missouri but is likely to change the composition of the forest. Hickory trees will probably decrease and pines will likely increase. *Reduce the use of plastics as the production of plastic is Carbon intense. Properly inflated tires improve gas mileage.* Is. 24:7-9

**Mar 16 – Precipitation**– Springtime is likely to be wetter, and summer droughts will be more severe. Heavy precipitation in the spring combined with heavy snow melt may lead to increased flooding. In 2011, flooding closed the Mississippi River to navigation and threatened several towns. On the Missouri River, 100,000 acres of farmland were flooded. The drought of 2012 threatened water users along the Missouri River and narrowed the navigation channels in the Mississippi River. *Stop at the first click when fueling your car to prevent the release of dangerous fumes.* Is. 24:10-11

**March 20, The first day of spring.** This is the season of rebirth. Go for a nature walk if the weather allows, and pay attention to budding on trees, sprouting seedlings, and listen to the bird songs you hear. Say a blessing for God’s creation. Keep a journal to reflect on the sights and sounds of spring. *Turn off the engine when idling for more than one minute.* Is. 24:12-13

9US Environmental Protection Agency, 2016, What Climate Change Means for Missouri, https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climate-impacts/climate-change-impacts state\_.html retrieved 4 Jan 2025,

**March 22, World Water Day** - celebrates water and raises awareness of the 2.2 billion people living without access to safe water. *Watch what you put down the drain and toilet.* Is. 24:14-16

**Mar 23 – Air pollution** – higher temperatures will increase the ground-level ozone that can cause lung and heart problems as well as harming plants especially soybean and winter wheat. *Fuel car in the early or late hours.* Is. 24:17-18.

**Mar 29 -Earth Hour** is a movement to show symbolic support for the planet and to raise awareness of the environmental issues. *Turn your lights off at 830 local time and spend that time doing something, anything positive for the earth*. Is. 24:19-20

**Mar 30 – Heat stress** – Urban areas are more vulnerable to heat waves which can cause heat stroke and dehydration. In Recent years, hundreds of people in the Midwest have died from dehydration and heat stress. Individuals especially vulnerable include children, the elderly, the sick and the poor. *Carrying heavy loads decreases energy efficiency.* Is. 24:21-23

**Creation Reflection:** One gallon of gasoline weighs 6.31 lbs and 87% of gasoline is Carbon. That means there are 5 lbs of Carbon in 1 gallon of gasoline. If a car gets 25 mpg – then every 25 miles the car is dumping 5 lbs of C out of the tailpipe. In the US, there are 100 million cars so each car is pumping out 330,000 Tons of Carbon / day. There are 1 billion cars in the world, so 3 million Tons of Carbon / day are being dumped into the atmosphere. If you add powerplants, factories and agriculture x 365 days, in 1 yr 125 billion Tons of Carbon are dumped into the atmosphere, represented by a mound 4 miles across and 1 mile high.

Today’s CO2 levels are 410 ppm. In 1979, the level of CO2 in the atmosphere was 317, a rise of 20% in 44 years. Last time the levels were that high, was 3 million years ago. There was ice at the South pole, but the north pole was ice free. The ocean was 90 miles inland from Virginia Beach as verified by an archeological dig. According to the Arbor Day foundation, one mature tree can absorb 48 lbs of CO2 in one year.10

**Hymn: When Pain of the World Surrounds us,** ELW 704

1. When pain of the world surrounds us with darkness and despair, when searching just confounds us with false hopes ev’rywhere. When lives are starved for meaning and destiny is bare, we are called to follow Jesus and let God’s healing flow through us.

2. We see with fear and trembling our aching world in need, confessing to each other our wastefulness and greed. May we with steadfast caring the hungry children feed. We are called to follow Jesus and let God’s justice flow through us.

3. The church is a holy vessel the living waters fill to nourish all the people God’s purpose to fulfill. May we with humble courage be open to God’s will. We are called to follow Jesus and to let’ God’s Spirit flow through us.

4. We praise you for our journey and your abundant grace your save word that guided a struggling human race. O God, with all creation your future we embrace. We are called to follow Jesus and let God’s Changes flow through us.

10 United States Department of Agriculture, May 2015, The Power of One Tree – The Very Air We Breathe, USDA, https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/blog/power-one-tree very-air-we-breathe. retrieved 8 Jan 2025

**Care for Creation 2025: April – Trees**

**“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we have borrowed it from our children.”** Chief Seattle of the Duwamish and Suquamish tribes of western Washington.

**“And yet we have not borrowed it from our children. We’ve stolen it! When you borrow something, the expectation is that you will repay. We have been stealing their future for countless years and the magnitude of our theft has now reached absolutely unacceptable proportions.”11** Jane Goodall

This month we will examine the role forests play in the ecosystem and ways we can help preserve forests.

**Prayer for our Forests:** Almighty Creator, we ask for Your guidance in restoring our forests. Help us nurture and protect these vital ecosystems, ensuring they thrive for future generations.12

**April 6 – Tropical Rain Forest** – Found in the equatorial regions with abundant rainfall year-round, 200-400 cm per year. As many as 100 species of trees can be found in a hectare (2.471 acres). Competition is for light in this ecosystem and there is very little leaf litter hence the soils are very mineral deficient. Threats to the tropical rain forests include: Increasing human population, demand for tropical hard woods, palm oil plantations and cattle grazing. *Take a hike but recreate responsibly. Tread lightly on nature.* Ps. 1:1-3

**April 13 – Coniferous forests** – characterized by long, severe winters with a constant cover of snow. These forests are composed of evergreen trees with needle-leaves such as pine, fir and spruce. These needles with darker color and triangular sides are efficient for sunlight collection and contain little sap so freezing is not a problem. Instead of shrubs and flowers on the forest floor, mosses and lichens are abundant. Warming temperatures force out native species and invasive species such as the bark beetle find a home. *Pull invasive weeds and pick-up trash*. Job 14:7-9

**April 20 - Easter Sunday – Yellowstone: An Ecological Resurrection**. “In Yellowstone, with the wolves gone, the elk overgrazed the park and the ecosystem suffered. Mice and rabbits could not hide, as the underbrush was gone, and their numbers plummeted. Bees had fewer flowers to pollinate. Even grizzly bears did not have enough berries to eat to prepare for their hibernation. The wolves had kept the elk away from the riverbank where they were exposed and vulnerable to attack. Without the wolves, the elk spent more time by the river, and the hooves of the large herds eroded the riverbank and caused the rivers to get muddy. Fish stocks declined in the cloudy water, and beavers could not build dams because overgrazing destroyed so many young trees. Once reintroduced into the park, the wolves brought the elk population down from about seventeen thousand to a more sustainable four thousand. Scavenger species like coyotes, eagles, and ravens started thriving, as did the grizzlies. Even the elk were better off as their population stabilized at a healthier and more resilient size—they are no longer starving to death in the winter. For humans, the drinking water in the area around the park became cleaner and the tourism industry grew dramatically with the wolves back. I was beginning to

11 Goodall, J and D. Abrams. The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times. Celadon books. 2021. Kindle edition, p. 112.

12 Cox, J., Feb 2025, 25+ Powerful prayers for the environment, Prayers.com , https://www.prayersfor.com/blog/the-environment Retrieved 6 Feb 2025.

see what Jane meant about the tapestry of life and the interconnection between all species.”13 *Get engaged and share your experiences on social media.* Rev. 21:3-11.

**April 22 – Earth Day – Prayer for Earth Day** The Blue Dot A tiny blue dot in the vast universe, Earth is our magnificent home that sustains all of life.14 Cause new trees to be planted. Restrain the melting of polar ice caps. Save land from destruction. Like a shepherd tends her sheep, raise up from among us caretakers of all you have made. 21 Jul 2024 Ez. 17:22-24.

**April 25 – Arbor Day – plant a tree.** Prayer for Arbor Day: We thank you, O God, not only for the uses of trees, but also for their beauty. That beauty helps sustain the spirit of humanity*. Use Ecosia search engine. Ecosia uses 100% of its profits for the planet and produces enough renewable energy to power all searches twice over.* Ez. 31:3-9.

**Apr 27 - Temperate Deciduous Forest** – found where warm, mild growing season with moderate precipitation is followed by cold that is not suited for plant growth, when these trees drop their leaves. This forest consists of a tree layer, shrub layer field layer (grasses) and ground layer (mosses). In Missouri, these forests are characterized by oak and hickory trees. Farther north forests may be maple and beech or basswood. Threats to Missouri forests include conversion and fragmentation, invasive plants and insects as well as disease. Take a nature walk if the weather allows. Pay more attention to the trees, or the water or the grass. *Educate yourself on the forests and reach out to your government representatives.* Ez. 47:7- 12 Is. 24:4-6

**Creation Reflection: Fires in Australia.** The catastrophic bushfires of 2019 and 2020 in Australia led to the burning of 19 million hectares (29 million acres), 12.6 million hectares of which were primarily forests and woodlands. Estimates show that nearly 3 billion animals were in the path of the fire and 1.25 million may have been killed by the fires. Of the 3 billion animals in the path, this included: 143 million mammals, 2.46 billion reptiles, 181 million birds, and 51 million frogs. These numbers include: 5 million kangaroos and wallabies; 5 million bats; 1.1 million wombats; 114,000 echidnas; 61,000 koalas; 19,000 quolls and Tasmanian devils; and 5,000 dingoes. Thirty-three people were killed by the fires and 3,094 homes were lost. While climate change did not cause the fires, Australia had been experiencing intense heat waves (temperatures records were broken at 41.9oC or 107.4oF. The lack of rain created very dry conditions which turned the bush regions into a tinderbox.15

**Quote attributed to Martin Luther**: "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree."

13 Goodall, J., and D. Abrams, The Book of Hope, A survival for Trying Times. Celadon Books, 2021, p. 96.

14 Unity World Headquarters, (n.d.), Prayers for Earth, https://www.unity.org/article/prayers-earth, retrieved 6 Feb 2025.

15 World Wildlife Fund Australia, Dec 2020, In-depth: Australian Bushfires, https://wwf.org.au/what-we-do/australian-bushfires/in-depth-australian-bushfires/ retrieved 28 Dec 2024.

**How Great Thou Art, ELW, p 856**

v. 1 O Lord, my God, when I in Awesome wonder, consider all the works thy hand hath made, I see the star, I hear the might thunder, thy pow’r throughout the universe displayed; Refrain.

v.2 When through the woods and forest glades I wander, I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees; when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze; Refrain

v.3 But when I think, that God his Son no sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in, that on the cross my burden gladly bearing he bled and died to take away my sin; Refrain

v. 4 When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation, and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart! Then I shall bow in humble adoration and there proclaim, “My God, how great thou art!

Refrain: Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee, how great thou art! How great thou art! Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to thee, how great thou art! How Great thou art!

**Care for Creation 2025: May – Endangered Species**

**“Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God. Every creature is a word of God. If I spend enough time with the tiniest creature, even a caterpillar, I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature.” Meister Eckhart**

Scientists tell us we are in the Sixth Great Extinction. The Living Earth Report from World Wildlife Fund estimates the average size of wildlife populations has fallen by 73% since 1970. The current extinction rate is about 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than natural extinction rates (the rate of species extinctions that would occur if we humans were not around). While extinctions are a normal and expected part of the evolutionary process, the current rates of species population decline and species extinction are high enough to threaten important ecosystem functions that in turn support human life on Earth. This month we’ll examine the top 4 endangered species according to the World Wildlife Fund16.

**Prayer:** Refuge of creatures, you place all the living under the shadow of your wings. Lead us in ways that tend to the needs of wild and domestic animals, creatures threatened by extinction, and the environment we share. From Intercessory Prayers All Saints Lutheran Church 19 Jan 2025

**May 4 – Mountain Gorilla** (No. 4) Just over 1,000 mountain gorillas are left in two colonies found in Uganda and Congo. They suffer from habitat degradation and because humans are in closer contact with gorillas, they can also suffer from human diseases such as Ebola. *Help raise awareness of the plight of endangered species by joining conservation organizations such as World Wildlife Fund, Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, or National Wildlife Federation.* Job 40:1-14.

**May 11 –Sumatran Tiger** (No. 3) is the smallest of the tigers. These tigers are found only on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. The human population of Indonesia has doubled from 357 million in 1980 to 668 million in 2020. Human-tiger conflict, loss of habitat to palm oil plantations, poaching and illegal trade are the biggest threats. The Kansas City Zoo houses the 3-year-old Sumatran Tiger, Phoebe. *Use the Palm Oil shopping guide app from Cheyenne Mountain zoo.* Job 40:15-24.

**May 16 – Endangered Species Day.** *Advocate for wildlife conservation by visiting a zoo. Revenue from your ticket funds animal conservation efforts.* Job. 41:1-11.

**May 18** – **Amur Leopard** (No. 2) is found in the far east Russia and northeastern China. There are less than 100 leopards in the wild. Amur leopards suffer from habitat loss and fragmentation, prey scarcity and transportation infrastructure such as roads. To see an Amur leopard, you can visit Zeke, at the Kansas City Zoo. *Stay informed on legislation that affects wildlife and let your representatives know you care about nature.* Job. 41:12- 34.

16 World Wildlife Fund, 2022, 10 of the World’s Most Endangered Animals, https://www.wwf.org.uk/learn/wildlife/endangered-animals retrieved 6 Jan 2025.

**May 25 – Javan Rhino** (No 1). The last 75 wild Javan Rhinos exist only on the island, Java Indonesia. These animals suffer from the expansion of palm oil plantations and the loss of habitat. *Support Companies that are members of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, see www.rspo.org* Ecc. 3:19-20

**Creation Reflection:** The Bramble Cay melomys (*Melomys rubicola)* was reported as having gone extinct in 2016. This is a rodent species that was found only on the Bramble Cay island in the Great Barrier Reef. Its habitat has been destroyed by rising sea levels.17

Conservation programs can make a difference. Trumpeter swans – *Cygnus buccinator,* are the ambassadors for conservation as they were brought back from the brink of extinction. In the 1930s, a survey showed 69 trumpeter swans left in the United States. Their decline was due to overhunting for plumage for ladies’ hats. Through conservation efforts such as Trumpeter Swans Restoration Project, the number of Trumpeter Swans in North America in 2017 was 63,000 with 50 established nest pairs in Iowa alone. These animals are the heaviest waterfowl in North America and have a 7 ft wingspan. They are characterized by their deep, loud and lasting call. They are long-lived and form a pair bond for life. Their current threats are lead poisoning and low genetic diversity.

**Hymn All Creatures of Our God and King,** Lutheran Book of Worship **(**LBW) p. 527.

1. All creatures of our God and King / Lift up your voice and with us sing / Alleluia, alleluia! Thou burning sun with golden beam, / Thou silver moon with softer gleam, / O praise him, O praise him, Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

2. O rushing wind and breezes soft, you clouds that ride the wind aloft; O praise him, Alleluia! O rising morn, in praise rejoice, O lights of evening find a voice. Oh, Praise Him! O praise him! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

3. O flowing waters pure and clear, Make music for your Lord to hear. O Praise Him! Alleluia! O Fire so masterful and bright. Providing us with warmth and light, Oh Praise Him! Oh, Praise Him! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

4. Dear mother earth, who day by day Unfolds rich blessings on our way, Oh Praise Him! Alleluia! The fruits and flow’rs that verdant grow, Let them his praise abundant show.. Oh Praise Him! Oh, Praise Him! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

**Recommended Reading:** *Wild Hope, Stories for Lent from the Vanishing*, by Gayle Boss, Paraclete Press, 2020.

17 Fulton, G.R., 2017, The Bramble Cay melomys: the first mammalian extinction due to human-induced climate change. Pacific Conservation Biology, 23:103. http://dx.doi.org/10.1071/PCv23n1\_ED

**Care for Creation 2025: June – Ocean Month**

**“It is a curious situation that the sea, from which life first arose should now be threatened by the activities of one form of that life. But the sea, though changed in a sinister way, will continue to exist; the threat is rather to life itself.”** Rachel Carson, The Sea Around Us.

This is Ocean month. We will examine various Ecosystems found in the Ocean and examine how climate change is affecting them.

**Prayer:** O God of Creation, you have founded your world on Rivers and seas. we pray for courage as the oceans rise and people suffer. Let us care for one another and protect our precious home. Preserve freshwater and seawater sources and the creatures who call them home. Help us all work together to heal places of pollution and protect our fragile home.

**The Problem:** Seventy per cent of the planet is ocean and the ocean is warming. Ninety per cent of the excess heat in the atmosphere is absorbed by the ocean. What this means is that sea levels are rising, not just from melting land ice and glaciers but also water expands as it is warmed. Since scientists began taking measurements in 1992, sea levels have risen 4 inches. The consequences of this rise in temperature means that hurricanes intensify over the warmer temperatures which we observed with Hurricane Helene in Florida in Sep 2024. Not only does this mean stronger storms, but higher sea levels worsen the storm surge. Areas in the United States, such as Isle de Jean Charles has been affected by coastal erosion having lost 98% of its land due to rising salt water. The Individuals of this island are the first climate refugees in the US.

Carbon dioxide (CO2) absorbed by the oceans results in the acidification of sea water. As water becomes acidic, the carbonate needed to make shells in marine animals becomes bicarbonate which the organism cannot use to make shells18.

Sea ice is also thinning and shrinking which not only means more ice melting but also sea ice reflects sunlight back to space. Open ocean will absorb heat, compounding the problem. Finally, scientists are concerned that the circulation of the ocean current is changing. As Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets melt, the mixing of freshwater and salt water could alter ocean currents.

**Jun 1 – The Open Ocean** Garbage patches are large areas of debris found in the ocean. Ocean currents can act as a whirlpool that concentrate these objects in areas of open ocean. NOAA estimates there are 5 areas where these currents will collect marine garbage, one in the Indian Ocean, two in the Atlantic Ocean, and two in the Pacific Ocean. The largest of these garbage patches is in the Pacific Ocean. One individual sailing across the Pacific Ocean floated for two weeks through the garbage and described seeing floating plastic debris every 10 -30 sec. The debris can be fishing nets and lines to microplastics about 5 mm in size. The microplastics can end up in the stomach of animals and the fishing lines and nets can entangle animals causing a slow death. *Recycle plastic containers and bags and commit to using reusable bags and bottles.* Gen 7.

**Jun 8 Pentecost Sunday – Estuaries** – Areas where the river meets the sea, where freshwater rivers flow into the saltwater ocean. These areas provide important breeding sites for many species of birds, fish and amphibians are stopping off points for migratory birds. The Saltmarsh Sparrow

18 Smithsonian Institution, 2018, Ocean Acidification, https://ocean.si.edu/ocean-life/invertebrates/ocean-acidification, retrieved 31 Jan 2025.

which nests in these areas have declined drastically due to sea level rise. High tides and storm surges destroy nesting sites and result in high reproductive failure.19 Estuaries also act as a buffer to protect us from storm surges. *Conserve water, turn off water when brushing your teeth.*

**Jun 15 – Polar Seas** – The polar seas are characterized by frigid waters and represent the harshest environments on earth. Polar bears are the symbols for the Arctic region but life there depends upon microscopic phytoplankton and ice algae. Sea ice is needed by the polar bears as a platform on which to hunt seals. As sea ice melts, polar bears have to swim farther to find sufficient hunting grounds. These distances can be very far and several bears have drowned trying to reach feeding grounds. In the south sea, nutrient rich waters nurture Antarctic krill which serves as a food source for fish, penguins, seals and whales. At the South Pole as polar ice melts, colonies of penguins may be affected. A recent study of 5 Emperor penguin nesting sites in the Bellingshausen Sea during the 2022 breeding season, showed 4 of the 5 colonies experienced breeding failure due to the breakup of sea ice before the penguins fledged. Penguin chicks need to grow their waterproof feathers before they can be exposed to freezing cold waters. If the sea ice breaks up before they can grow these feathers, they are unlikely to be able to survive.20 *Conserve water, take a shorter shower.* Is. 43:2-3.

**June 20 – First day of Summer.** Go for a nature walk if the weather allows, and pay attention to budding on trees, sprouting seedlings, and listen to the bird songs you hear. Keep a journal to reflect on the sights and sounds of summer. *Give up plastic straws so they don’t contribute to pollution.* Ecc.1:4-7.

**Jun 22 – Kelp Forest** –are submarine forests of brown seaweed known as Kelp. Kelp can grow 10-12 inches per day and is a rich source of biodiversity. Turban snails, abalones, sea urchins and bat stars feed on the kelp plants. Seals, sea lions and gray whales use the kelp forest to hide their young from predators while sea otters wind themselves in the kelp forest so they don’t float away as they feast on the sea urchins and abalones. The Kansas City Zoo has two sea otters in their aquarium named Owin and Matti. *Cut down on your use of plastics and recycle plastic so it doesn’t contribute to the plastic island floating in the ocean.* Ps. 95:5.

**Jun 29 – Coral Reefs** - Coral reefs are made up of tiny organisms called polyps that secrete limestone skeletons. These polyps build on one another to form large reefs. The color observed with corals results from a symbiotic relationship with algae. The corals provide a protected environment and produce CO2 and H2O which is utilized by the algae for photosynthesis, which in turn provides sugars for the coral. As temperatures rise the corals face heat stress expelling the algae from the coral resulting in the mass bleaching that has been observed. Additionally, as temperatures rise ocean acidification results in depletion of calcium minerals. Become educated about sustainable fishing. *Buy only sustainably sourced seafood. Check out seafoodwatch.org* Ps. 65:5-10.

19 US Fish and Wildlife Service, (n.d.), Saltmarsh Sparrow, https://www.fws.gov/species/saltmarsh-sparrow-ammodramus-caudacutus, retrieved 31 Jan 2025. 20 Fretwell, P.T., Boutet, A. & Ratcliffe, N. Record low 2022 Antarctic sea ice led to catastrophic breeding failure of emperor penguins. *Commun Earth Environ* **4**, 273 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-023-00927-x

**Creation Reflection: Heat Waves Northwest:** As we’ve seen in the last few years, heat waves have deadly effects on humans, but there is a cost to wildlife as well. Between 2014 and 2016, normal winter winds were dampened by a high-pressure ridge which resulted in a warming of sea surface water up to 7oF. This warming area, known as the blob, spread from Alaska to the Gulf of Mexico. The warmer water was more nutrient poor and held less CO2. Warmer oceans are less productive than colder oceans, therefore plankton and small forage fish needed by seabirds and marine mammals weren’t present. As a result, the effects were observed at the top of the food chain. Species that need colder water moved north leaving seabirds to scrounge for food and massive die off of seabirds was observed. In particular, the common murre die off (approximately 4 million) was the largest on record and recent research papers have shown that the numbers of murre have not recovered. The murre numbers plummeted 52 to 78% at 13 colony sites.21 Additionally, algae thrive in the warmer water and many marine mammals have been found dead with evidence of toxic exposure to algal blooms. As water warms, its ability to hold oxygen is lowered which affects crabs and other species. Whales moved closer to show to find prey and became entangled in fishing nets.

**Crashing Waters at Creation.** ELW p. 455

1. Crashing waters at creation, ordered by the Spirit’s breath, first to witness day’s beginning, from the brightness of night’s death. 2. Parting water stood and trembled as the captives passed on through, washing off the chains of bondage-channel to a life made new. 3. Cleansing water once at Jordan closed around the one foretold, opened to reveal the glory ever new and ever old. 4. Living water, never ending, quench the thirst and flood the soul. Well-spring, source of life eternal, drench our dryness, make us whole. **Recommended Reading:** *At Every Depth* by Tessa Hill and Eric Simons, Columbia University Press, 2024.

21 Renner, H.M., H J. F. Piatt, M. Renner, B. A. Drummond, J. S. Laufenberg, and J. K. Parrish, 2024, Catastrophic and persistent loss of common murres after a marine heatwave, Science 386 (6727): 1272-1276, DOI: 10.1126/science.adq433

**Care for Creation 2025: July – Pollinators**

**“If all mankind were to disappear, the world would regenerate back to the rich state of equilibrium that existed ten thousand years ago. If insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos.” Insects – “the little things that run the world.”** E.O. Wilson, naturalist

Pollinators are defined as animals that move pollen from plant to plant thus enabling the plants to reproduce. More than 80% of the 300,000 flowering plants require animal pollinators. One in three bites of the food we eat requires animal pollination. Pollinators increase the productivity of farmland and help maintain the health of our ecosystems. While bees are responsible for approximately 67% of pollinator services, other animals such as butterflies, beetles, hummingbirds, orioles and bats also serve as pollinators. All pollinators need food, water, shelter, and space to forage and breed, to thrive.

**Prayer:** God of the monarch butterfly, Cultivate within us a spirit of joy, As we set out to do our daily tasks. May each of our small actions send out ripples of your love.22

**July 6 – Bees** – are the unsung heroes of the pollinators as they are responsible for about 67% of pollination. In 2006, beekeepers began reporting on Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), a sudden loss of worker bees in a colony. While the queens remained, the hives cannot survive with the worker bees. The reports indicated that between 30-90% of worker bees were lost. Since 2016, the loss has stabilized a bit but is still concerning. Reasons

for CCD include parasites and disease, fragmentation and loss of foraging habitats and pesticides. Climate change has also changed the flowering season of many plants. Some bees are ground nesters and require uncompacted, pesticide-free, soil. Other bees nest in the stems of herbaceous plants such as black-eyed susans or sunflowers. *Not cutting these back in the fall provides a home for these bees to overwinter. You can also encourage bees by supplying bee condos. These are blocks of untreated wood with 1/4” to 3/8” holes drilled in. These can be placed in an area to so the tunnels are horizontal and protected from the elements. Bundling reeds, hollow sticks or paper straws (not plastic) and hanging them from a tree will also provide a home for bees*23. Ecc. 11:1-3.

**Jul 13 – Butterflies** – While butterflies’ contribution to pollination may be overblown, their larvae provide food for many animal species including birds. Carolina chickadees, for example, were observed delivering 350-570 caterpillars / day to their nests. Native plants are best at sustaining caterpillar numbers. Oak trees, for example, have been shown to support hundreds of caterpillar species nationwide. Check out the Native Plant Finder at National Wildlife Federation https://nativeplantfinder.nwf.org/ or the Plants for Birds website at the Audubon Society https://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds to find suitable plants for your area. While some butterflies and moths will pupate on plants as monarchs do, many species fall to the ground and burrow into the soil or spin cocoons in leaf litter. Providing ground cover near tree sites for moths and

22 Champlin, S., Mar 2024, Beyond the Edge of Knowledge: Ecological Hope for Lent, The Monarch Butterfly, Kenilworth Union Church, https://kuc.org/blog/beyond-the-edge-of knowledge-an-ecological-hope-for-lent-15/ retrieved, 23 Jan 2025.

23 United States Department of Agriculture, (n.d.) Homemade-Sweet-Home, USDA, United States Forest Service,

https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/kids/activities/beebox.shtml retrieved 14 Jan 2025.

butterflies to complete development is important. *Safe pupation sites such as 3 dimensional plantings under trees and not raking or mulching leaf litter may provide sites for overwintering.* Col 1:15-17.

**Jul 20 – Birds** – Birds also play a role in the pollination process. Hummingbirds with their long bills and tube-like tongues are specialized for getting nectar from brightly colored flowers. The only hummingbird common east of the Rockies is the Ruby-throated hummingbird. Attract hummingbirds by planting native flowering plants such as trumpet creeper, native honeysuckles, or columbine. Or consider putting up a hummingbird feeder, dissolving a 20-30% solution of white sugar in water. Two species of orioles, Bullock’s and Baltimore Orioles, are also important pollinators, mostly due to their messy nectar-feeding habits. These birds become covered with pollen which they then spread from tree to tree. While orioles are insect eaters in the summer months, they switch to dark colored fruits in the fall such as black cherry, blueberry, serviceberry, red mulberry, and raspberries. *Attract orioles to your yard with oranges, grape jelly or a sugar water solution (1 part white sugar to 4 parts water).* Pro. 6:6-8.

**Jul 27 – Bats** – Bats pollinate 500 different species of plants including mangos, bananas and agave. The majority of bat species feed on insects so they can reduce the need for pesticides. They also function in seed dispersal and reforestation. Many fruit-eating bats will drop seeds far away from the original tree*. Plant a native garden. Bats love moths so gardening for moths with fragrant flowers will encourage bats as well as light or white colored and night blooming flowers. Reduce lights at night will encourage bats.* Ps. 8:6-9.

**Climate Reflection: The Miracle of the Monarch.** In the spring, adult monarchs that arrived in Mexico in the fall begin to leave the forests of oyamel trees and fly north. As these monarchs fly north, they will mate and the females begin laying eggs on milkweed plants before they die. As these eggs hatch and small, yellow, white, and black striped caterpillars emerge. These caterpillars have voracious appetites and begin eating the milkweed plants. These caterpillars will grow three thousand times their size in about 2 weeks. As the caterpillar reaches its full size, a remarkable transformation begins. Hanging in a J shape, it begins to discard its outer exoskeleton and forms a chrysalis, a hard outer coating. Inside this chrysalis, the caterpillar undergoes a miraculous makeover. A massive rearrangement and transformation of sacs of cells occurs as adult structures begin form. In 8-10 days the orange and black wings of the adult butterfly can be seen inside the chrysalis. At this time, the chrysalis will crack and the adult butterfly with crumpled wings will crawl out. In the next hour, the butterfly will pump fluid from its abdomen into its wings which expand and dry. These monarchs then continue their migration northward. The lives of these monarchs are short (about 2-6 weeks) and as they continue moving north they will lay eggs and die. This continues for 3 or 4 generations and as the summer wanes, something tells this generation of monarchs they need to begin flying south. Whether it is the position of the sun, or the waning sunlight, or something as yet unknown, the monarchs change their metabolic state and are focused more on flying back to Mexico to a place three thousand miles away, a place they have never seen and have never been before. These monarchs, three or four generations from the butterflies that left, begin this journey and will arrive back in Mexico about the Day of the Dead to overwinter in the same oyamel trees their great-great-great-grandparents did last year and for many generations before.

The Los Angeles Times reported today (Jan 31) that the western population of Monarch butterfly’s numbers have plummeted. The count for 2025 of less than 10,000 butterflies. This is the second lowest number since counting began. Reasons for this decline include a hot, dry fall which slowed

Monarch breeding and caterpillar development, as well as loss of tree groves used by monarchs to overwinter due to the California wildfires. This represents a 95% loss of butterflies since the 1980s when 4 million butterflies were estimated.

**All Things Bright and Beautiful,** Hymns for Primary Worship, p. 30.

1. All Things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small, All things Wise and wonderful, The Lord God Made them All 2. Each little flower that opens, Each little bird that sings, He made their glowing colors, He made their tiny wings. 3. He gave us eyes to see them, and Lips that we might tell. How great is God Almighty, Who has made all things well.

**Recommended Reading:** *Bicycling with Butterflies*, by Sarah Dykman, Timber Press, 2021 or *Wings Over the Meadow* by Jo Brewer, HMCo Publishing, 1967.

**Care of Creation 2025: August – Arguments against Climate Change**

“Earth’s temperature has risen by an average of 0.11° Fahrenheit (0.06° Celsius) per decade since 1850, or about 2° F in total. The rate of warming since 1982 is more than three times as fast: 0.36° F (0.20° C) per decade.24

This month we will examine some of the arguments against Climate Change that you might have heard.

**Prayer:** Deepen our gratitude for all you have made and awaken in us a renewed commitment to care for the earth and each other. Motivate all of us with openness to listen to information related to climate change, separate facts from fiction and to care for those most affected by climate change. Inspire us with the courage to act urgently and wisely, so that our common home may be healed and restored and all people, and future generations, may share in its beauty. (modified from the COP27 Climate Summit prayer from the EcoJesuits)

**Aug 3 – Climate change isn’t really happening**. Temperatures are measured at urban heat islands so they are naturally higher. Not True. Temperatures are measured at multiple sites around the globe. Temperatures are taken at weather stations across the globe and sea temperatures are also measured at buoys. Urban heat islands which might provide extreme temperature measurements in cities are removed before the averages are calculated.25 *Use cold water to wash your clothes for an 80% energy saving.* Rom 1:20-24.

**Aug 10 – Temperature changes are cyclical**. It’s a normal process. We’ve seen these temperatures changes before in the earth’s past. While heating and cooling do happen in natural cycles, those cycles occur in 10,000 to 100,000 year cycles. The rates of increases we are currently observing are happening over decades not thousands of years. *Airdry your laundry.* Jer. 33:25.

**Aug 17 – God’s got this.** The Creator of the universe must have made his creation resilient enough to handle any type of challenge. Humans were given the task of fill, subdue and have dominion over the earth and the creatures in Gen. 1:28. Additionally in Gen 2:15 God commanded humans to till and keep the Garden of Eden (NRSV). Although much discussion has occurred as to just what is meant by those instructions, it is doubtful that God wanted man to destroy his creative work. The universe is governed by the laws of physics and chemistry which God would have to abide by. Any change in physics or chemistry that governs the universe would have massive changes throughout the universe. Man’s responsibility is to listen to experts in the field and act. After all, we are to be God’s heart, hands and feet doing his work in the world. Why shouldn’t God expect humans to take a more active role in protecting it. *Turn off lights not actively in use.* Job 38:33

24 Rebecca Lindsey and LuAnn Dahlman Climate Change: Global Temperature**,** Jan 2024, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, https://www.climate.gov/news features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-temperature, retrieved 8 Jan 2025.

25National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2025, Global Temperature: This is How Scientists Measure Global Temperatures, NASA, https://science.nasa.gov/earth/measuring\_global\_temperature/ retrieved 20 Jan 2025.

**Aug 24 – Scientists disagree that humans are causing climate change.** Recent surveys show that 97% of scientists agree that climate change is happening and the main cause is human activity.26 There is not much disagreement among scientists. *Replace incandescent lights with CFL or LEDs*. Mt 16:1-3

**Aug 31 – CO2 is good for plants**. While it is true that plants use CO2 to produce sugar using photosynthesis, CO2 does increase the greenhouse effect raising the temperature of earth. Plants would have to be able to tolerate higher temperatures. These higher temperatures have deepen droughts in some areas, increasing the risk of wildfires and the increasing rise in seawater exposes plants to salt. *Move thermostat setting down 2o in winter and up 2oin summer.* Ps 147:4.

**Be skeptical – check sources.** Separate fact from fiction by using tools of discernment. Examine who is making these claims and do they have an agenda. And where are these claims coming from, social media or reliable scientific sources. Seek out multiple sources from reliable individuals before passing on information.

***Creation Reflection: Learning and Yearning*** I recall when the Hubble photograph appeared in the media hundreds of viewers claimed to see the face of Jesus in the billowing clouds. Which prompted these observations from “Skeptics and True Believers”: “In an article on the psychological basis of belief, the psychologist James Alcock proposed that two aspects of the human brain might be called the “yearning unit” and the “learning unit.” He probably didn’t mean these terms to be taken literally, as referring to separate compartments of the brain, but yearning and learning are certainly central to the way we interact with the world. It is hard to imagine how we can be fully human without a little of each. Finding the proper balance between the two is a task that can keep us occupied for most of our lives.

We yearn when we dream of fulfillment, of greater happiness, of knowing more. We yearn when we love, when we laugh, when we cry, when we pray. Yearning is wondering what is around the next bend, over the rainbow, beyond the horizon. Yearning is curiosity. Yearning is the driving force of science, philosophy, and religion.

Learning is listening to parents, wise men, shamans. Learning is reading, going to school, traveling, doing experiments, being skeptical. Learning is looking behind the curtain for the Wizard of Oz, touching the stove to see if it’s hot, not taking anyone’s word for it. In science, learning means trying as hard to prove that something is wrong as to prove it right, even if that something is a cherished belief.

Yearning without learning is seeing Elvis in a crowd, the fossilized footprints of humans and dinosaurs together in ancient rocks, weeping statues. Yearning without learning is buying tabloid newspapers with headlines announcing, “Newborn baby talks of Heaven” and the like. Yearning without learning is looking for UFOs in the sky and the meaning of life in horoscopes.

26 National Aeronautics and Space Administration. 2024, Do Scientists Agree on Climate Change? https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/faq/do-scientists-agree-on-climate change/ retrieved 25 Jan 2025.

Learning without yearning is pedantry, scientism, dogmatic belief. Learning without yearning is believing that we know it all, that what we see is what we get, that nothing exists except what can be presently weighed and measured. Learning without yearning is science without a heart, without a dream, without a hope of beauty.

Yearning without learning is seeing the face of Jesus in a gassy nebula. Learning without yearning is seeing only the gas.”27

**Hymn**: I Have No Hands But Yours By Carol Johnson28

1 I have no hands but yours to tend my sheep, No Handkerchief but yours to dry the eyes of those who weep.

I have no arms but yours with which to hold, The ones grown weary from the struggle and weak from growing old. I have no voice but yours with which to sing, To let my children know that I am love And love is everything.

I have no way to feed the hungry souls, No clothes to give the naked, the ragged and the cold.

So be my heart, my hands, my tongue. Through you all will be done.

2 Fingers have I none to help untie, The tangled knots and twisted chains that strangle fearful minds

I have no one but you to clean the mess, When war and greed destroy the land that I’ve so richly blessed.

I have no legs but yours with which to dance, No way to show my faithfulness, Unless you take a chance.

I have no way to open people’s eyes, Except that you will show them how to trust the inner light.

So be my heart, my hands, my tongue. Through you all will be done.

I have no higher call for you than this: To love and serve your neighbor in joy and selflessness.

**Recommended Reading:** *The Road to Wisdom, On Truth, Science, Faith and Trust*, By Francis Collins, Little, Brown and Company, 2024.

27 Raymo, C., Learning and Yearning by Chet Raymo: https://img.beforeitsnews.com/opinion-liberal/2016/12/chet-raymo-learning-and-yearning-3-2543518.html retrieved, 20 Jan 2025.

28 Songs for teaching 2012, I Have No Hands But Yours, https://www.songsforteaching.com/caroljohnson/IHaveNoHandsButYours.htm, retrieved 6 Feb 2025

**Care of Creation 2025: September – Cosmos**

**“Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand. It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.” Carl Sagan in Pale Blue Dot on viewing a picture of Earth from Voyager I, 4 billion miles from home.**

This month we will examine the characteristics of Earth’s nearest neighbors in the solar system to better understand the beauty and fragility of our own planet.

**Prayer:** You reveal yourself in creation. In seedlings and planets, microorganisms and galaxies, awaken us to the cry of the earth. As you nourish your people like a watered garden, empower us to nourish our creaturely companions.29

**Sept 7 – Milky Way Galaxy** – is a collection of stars, dust and gas that is bound together by gravity and oriented in spiral arms. A six-year study by PlaNET (Probing Lensing Anomalies NETwork) estimates there can be 10 billion terrestrial planets across the Milky Way Galaxy. Our solar system is found in the Orion Spur of the Milky Way Galaxy. Scientists believe the formation of our Solar System occurred 4.6 billion years ago when a dense

cloud of interstellar gas began to collapse. Gravity was so great at the center that Hydrogen atoms began to combine with each other and formed helium and our sun was born. Dust and gases farther away from the center began to clump together like dust bunnies. The clumped material continued to grow and would eventually form the planets. Nearest to the sun was rocky material which could withstand the heat from the sun clumped together to form the rocky planets. In the outer regions the ice and gas combined to form the gas and the ice giants.30 *Go outside on a clear night and look up into the stars. Use a map of the sky or an app that can identify stars and planets for you.* Mt 2:1-2

**Sept 14 – Venus** – Venus is the second planet from the sun at 67 million miles. After the sun and the moon, Venus is the brightest object in the night sky. Venus is our closest neighbor at about 24 million miles and is similar in size and structure to the Earth. Venus has only a 3o tilt which means there are no seasons on Venus. And a day on Venus is longer than a year on Venus. One day on Venus is equivalent to 243 earth days while one year is equal to 223 earth days. Its rotation is backwards to the earth so the sun rises in the west and sets in the east. And Venus has no moons but a satellite named Zoozve. Venus’ atmosphere is very thick as it is composed mostly of CO2, (96%) giving it a runaway greenhouse effect. It also contains gases such as sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide. This thick atmosphere provides a runaway greenhouse effect. Temperatures on Venus

29Intercessory Prayers, All Saints Lutheran Church, 5 Jan 2025.

30 National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2012, The Milky Way’s 100 Billion Planets. https://www.nasa.gov/image-article/milky-ways-100-billion-planets/ retrieved 28 Jan 2025

have been recorded at 700oF due to its thick atmosphere that traps heat. Venus is considered inhospitable to life.31 *Go outside in the morning and look for Venus. It will be visible as a morning star.* Is. 40:26.

**Sept 19 – Earth Night** – event which encourages people to turn off or reduce outdoor lights starting at 10 PM. Ps 19:1-4

**Sept 21 – Mars** – Mars is the fourth planet from the sun at 142 million miles and has been described as dry, rocky and bitter cold. It is half the size of Earth with two potato-shaped moons, Phobos and Deimos. It is about 96 million miles from Earth. Like earth, Mars axis is tilted 25oso Mars also experiences seasons. Mars may at one time have had a magnetic field which protected its atmosphere but today Mars’ atmosphere has been eroded by solar wind and radiation. Due to the thin atmosphere Mars average temperatures range from 70oF to -225oF. 32 While no life has been found on Mars, it does appear to have had a watery past as ancient riverbeds are being explored by Land rovers and observed seasonal streaking on the Horowitz Crater which may be melting water flowing down the crater.33 *Mars will be visible in the west-southwest twilight, about 20 minutes after sunset. Saturn reaches its best visibility of the year tonight.* Job 9:9-10.

**Sept 22 – First Day of Fall** Go outside and take a walk if the weather permits. Note if the trees are starting to turn. Watch for migrating birds. Keep a journal to reflect on the sights and sounds of fall.

**Sept 28 – Earth** – Earth is 91 million miles from the sun and is in the Goldilocks zone an area in the solar system where liquid water, a requirement for life is found. Earth axis is tilted 23o which results in the seasons depending on the hemisphere tilted toward the sun. Earth’s atmosphere consists of 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, and 1% other gases such as argon, carbon dioxide, and neon. Earth’s magnetic field protects our atmosphere from eroding away. Earth’s oceans cover about 70% of the earth’s surface and contain 97% of the earth’s water.34 Ps 8:3-4

**Creation Reflection:** As the ELCA document on Earth’s Climate Crisis describes the, “Viewed from space, Earth’s atmosphere appears as a very thin and iridescent blue line around the circumference of the planet. Over billions of years, this miraculous shield has fostered a wondrous explosion of life on the land, in the sea, and in the air while also protecting life from dangerous forms of solar radiation.”35 Astronaut Jim Lovell on Apollo 8 described Earth as “The vast loneliness up here of the Moon is awe inspiring, and it makes you realize just what you have back there on Earth. The Earth from here is a grand oasis to the big vastness of space.” So in our solar system, the earth is unique and looking at our nearest neighbors in the solar system should give us pause about destroying our own home.

31 National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2025, Venus Facts, https://science.nasa.gov/venus/venus-facts/ retrieved 6 Jan 2025. 32 National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2024, Mars Facts, https://science.nasa.gov/mars/facts/ retrieved 6 Jan 2025.

33 Astronomy Picture of the Day, 2015, Seasonal Streaks Point to Recent Flowing Water on Mars https://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap150930.html, retrieved 28 Jan 2025 34 National Aeronautics and Space Administration,2025, Earth Facts, https://science.nasa.gov/earth/facts/, retrieved 28 Jan 2025

35Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, 2023. ELCA Social Statement on Climate Crisis. https://www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-messages/climate, retrieved 28 Jan 2025.

**Hymn: Earth and All Stars,** ELW p. 731

1. Earth and all stars, loud rushing planets, sing to the Lord a new song! O victory, loud shouting army, sing to the Lord a new song! He has done marvelous things. I, too, will praise him with a new song!

2. Hail, wind, and rain, loud blowing snowstorms, sing to the Lord a new song! Flowers and trees, loud rustling dry leaves, sing to the Lord a new song! He has done marvelous things. I, too, will praise him with a new song!

**Care for Creation 2025: October – Environmental Justice**

**“I used to think that top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation. And we scientists don’t know how to do that.” James Gustave Speth,** founder of National Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

Environmental Justice – According to the EPA, environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.

**Prayer:** By your merciful might you sustain all creation. Stir us from complacency with the harm we inflict on the earth and urge us to adopt sustainable ways of life that protect and restore our planet and the vulnerable people most harmed by climate change. From Intercessory Prayer, All Saints Lutheran Church, 17 Nov 2024.

**Oct. 5 – Exposure to lead** – Lead exposure results in developmental and neurological problems in children between the ages of 1 and 5. Recent studies have found that people of color or low-income families face greater exposure to industrial pollution and exposure to lead due to the proximity of their homes and schools to pollution and lead sources. A society concerned with shalom will care for the most marginalized among them. How can you and your church community practice shalom? *Look into ELCA Good Gifts: For $125 you can provide a microloan for a woman to start business.* Mic 6:8

**Oct 12 – Extreme heat** – As heat waves have intensified over the last few decades more deaths will be expected from heat related problems. Due to the lack of air-conditioning poor and minority urban communities are disproportionately affected by the extreme heat. *Look into ELCA Good Gifts: For $50 you can feed a refuge family for a week.* Amos 5:24.

**Oct 19 – Food** - “African farmers are suffering from the prolonged droughts. In addition, as human habitation near the rising oceans is no longer possible, increasing numbers of individuals are being forced to move inland. For example, the Central Sahel, consisting of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger has been heavily impacted by climate change. The temperatures in this area are rising 1.5 times faster than the rest of the world. Temperatures are expected to increase 35.6 to 39.7 degrees Fahrenheit by 2080. In this area where 78% of the population relies upon agriculture for work, arable land is being lost to soil erosion and desertification. Niger alone loses between 100,000 to 120,000 hectares of land. These patterns foster increased starvation and food insecurity.36 It also places women and girls in a more vulnerable position as they have to travel farther for water which increases the risk of exploitation. *Look into ELCA Good Gifts: For $25 you can provide nutrition for a child for one month.* Isa 1:17.

36 International Rescue Committee, 2025, 10 Countries at Risk of Climate Disaster, https://www.rescue.org/article/10-countries-risk-climate-disaster retrieved 25 Jan 2025.

**Oct 26 – Hazardous Waste and Cancer** – There is an 85 mile stretch of land between Baton Rouge and New Orleans where 150 petrochemical, plastics factories and refineries are located. The residents (disproportionately African American) in the area face elevated rates of cancer earning this area the name Cancer Alley. *Look into ELCA Good Gifts: For $75 you can stock a health clinic for a week.* Jer. 22:3

“We can’t save the planet without uplifting the voices of its people, especially those most often unheard.” Leah Thomas

**Creation Care Reflection:** So how does Carbon dioxide create the greenhouse effect? Sunlight reaches the earth surface and reradiates back as infrared waves which we feel as heat. The Carbon dioxide (CO2) molecule, as well as methane (CH4) and ozone (O3) have a complex geometry that allows them to absorb the infrared waves essentially trapping it in the atmosphere. Simpler molecules like oxygen and nitrogen have a simpler geometry that doesn’t absorb the infrared rays. The absorption of the infrared waves then creates a blanket around the earth like we observe in a greenhouse as the panes of glass trap the infrared waves. As a lab assistant in my college days, my job at the beginning of the semester was to catch roly poly bugs for the first General Biology 1 lab. Crawling under the benches in the greenhouse, I had caught a good number of these bugs but left the aquarium covered with a piece of glass in the greenhouse. It was like having a double greenhouse effect and upon my return, the aquarium was hot and I had lost every roly poly bug I had caught. This also happened to be the day we discussed the greenhouse effect in Ecology class so the professor had a great example of the greenhouse effect, probably for the rest of his teaching career.

With respect to carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions, China, the United States and India are the top 3 countries producing the most CO2 emissions at 32.88%, 12.6% and 6.9% respectively. And while these countries do suffer from the effects of climate with extreme weather, heat waves and fires, they do have the resources to cope with these challenges. Countries that are most affected by climate change, are countries that produce far less CO2 emissions and do not have the resources to cope. For example, Bangladesh is a low-lying country that faces serious consequences. As sea levels rise, Bangladesh fields are becoming inundated with saltwater forcing migration away from the coastal areas which means land that can be used for agriculture. While less developed countries contribute little to the changing climate, they are suffering from the drought conditions created by climate change resulting in the inability for that country to feed its own people.37

**Let Justice Flow Like Streams,** ELW p. 717

1. Let justice flow like streams of sparkling water, pure, enabling growth, refreshing life, abundant cleansing sure. 2. Let righteousness roll on as others’ care we heed, an ever-flowing stream of faith translated into deed.

3. So may God’s plumb line, straight, define our measure true, and justice right and peace pervade this world our whole life through. 37 Francis Collins: The Road to Wisdom, On Truth, Science, Faith and Trust, 2024, Little Brown and Company, kindle version, p 124.

**Care for Creation 2025: November – Indigenous Peoples Month**

**May the sun bring you new energy by day, may the moon softly restore you by night, may the rain wash away your worries, may the breeze blow new strength into your being, may you walk gently through the world and know it's beauty all the days of your life. - Apache Blessing38**

This month we will learn about the indigenous people who lived on our land first and some of the practices. What is the name of that nation? To learn more about the indigenous people in your area, there is a searchable map at https://native-land.ca/ According to this map, All Saints Lutheran Church is located on land that used to belong to the Kickapoo, Osage and Otoe-Missouria nations. All these tribes at one time or another called this land home. Each of these tribes was displaced from their homes and relocated to lands in Oklahoma and Kansas as white settlers moved into the area. Their children were taken away and “educated” in boarding schools to abolish any connection to their native language and culture and to assimilate them into our white, Christian culture. This month we will examine some of the indigenous stories and practices that were almost lost. These practices are now being rediscovered and appreciated as the “original people of North America did not survive purely by the richness of the environments they were situated in or by foraging in a bountiful wilderness but by using their knowledge to manage the environment and create conditions for their own success.”39 Bible quotations this month come from the First Nations Version, An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove IL.

**Prayer:** Creator God, We look at your world and praise you for the diversity all around us. Thank you for the gift of relationships, and our connection with people, animals, and the land. Help us, Lord, to see differences and diversity as strengths. Help us to listen and understand; to meet one another with wonder and anticipation. Help us to love as you love, without expectation.40

**Nov. 2 – Skywoman Falling Native American Creation Story.** She fell like a maple seed, pirouetting on an autumn breeze. A column of light streamed from a hole in the Skyworld, marking her path where only darkness had been before. It took her a long time to fall. In fear, or maybe hope, she clutched a bundle tightly in her hand.

Hurtling downward, she saw only dark water below. But in that emptiness there were many eyes gazing up at the sudden shaft of light. They saw there a small object, a mere dust mote in the beam. As it grew closer, they could see that it was a woman, arms outstretched, long black hair billowing behind as she spiraled toward them.

The geese nodded at one another and rose together from the water in a wave of goose music. She felt the beat of their wings as they flew beneath to break her fall. Far from the only home she’d ever known, she caught her breath at the warm embrace of soft feathers as they gently carried her downward. And so it began. The geese could not hold the woman above the water for much longer, so they called a council to decide what to do. Resting on their wings, she saw them all gather: loons, otters, swans, beavers, fish of all kinds. A great turtle floated in their midst and offered his back for her to rest upon. Gratefully, she stepped from the goose wings onto the dome of his shell. The others understood that she needed land for

38 World Healing Prayers http://worldhealingprayers.com/2.html updated 22 Apr 2020, retrieved 25 Jan 2025.

39 Hill, T., and E. Simons, At Every Depth: Our Growing Knowledge of the Changing Oceans, Columbia University Press, 2024, p. 109

40 Paper, Stacy, Prayer for Indigenous Peoples Day. 9 Oct 2023, https://holyinfantchurch.org/news/a-prayer-for-indigenous-peoples-day retrieved 25 Jan 2025.

her home and discussed how they might serve her need. The deep divers among them had heard of mud at the bottom of the water and agreed to go find some.

Loon dove first, but the distance was too far and after a long while he surfaced with nothing to show for his efforts. One by one, the other animals offered to help—Otter, Beaver, Sturgeon—but the depth, the darkness, and the pressures were too great for even the strongest of swimmers. They returned gasping for air with their heads ringing. Some did not return at all. Soon only little Muskrat was left, the weakest diver of all. He volunteered to go while the others looked on doubtfully. His small legs flailed as he worked his way downward and he was gone a very long time.

They waited and waited for him to return, fearing the worst for their relative, and, before long, a stream of bubbles rose with the small, limp body of the muskrat. He had given his life to aid this helpless human. But then the others noticed that his paw was tightly clenched and, when they opened it, there was a small handful of mud. Turtle said, “Here, put it on my back and I will hold it.”

Skywoman bent and spread the mud with her hands across the shell of the turtle. Moved by the extraordinary gifts of the animals, she sang in thanksgiving and then began to dance, her feet caressing the earth. The land grew and grew as she danced her thanks, from the dab of mud on Turtle’s back until the whole earth was made. Not by Skywoman alone, but from the alchemy of all the animals’ gifts coupled with her deep gratitude. Together they formed what we know today as Turtle Island, our home.

Like any good guest, Skywoman had not come empty-handed. The bundle was still clutched in her hand. When she toppled from the hole in the Skyworld she had reached out to grab onto the Tree of Life that grew there. In her grasp were branches—fruits and seeds of all kinds of plants. These she scattered onto the new ground and carefully tended each one until the world turned from brown to green. Sunlight streamed through the hole from the Skyworld, allowing the seeds to flourish. Wild grasses, flowers, trees, and medicines spread everywhere. And now that the animals, too, had plenty to eat, many came to live with her on Turtle Island.” 41 Braiding Sweetgrass. *Compare Skywoman Falling with our creation stories.* Gen 1:1-3:24.

**Nov. 9 – Native tradition is rooted in gratitude and reciprocity.** Gratitude and reciprocity means we must recognize what we have been given, to offer our thanks in return and to return the gift in kind as we are bound to all beings in a reciprocal relationship.42 Robin Kimmerer in *Braiding Sweetgrass* describes indigenous people waiting for the salmon run. As the salmon begin to pass by the camp, the tribesmen stand along the river and sing a welcome. Only after the fish have passed by for 4 days is the first salmon taken by the most honored fisher and prepared with ritual care. A celebration then ensues. “Only then the nets are set out, the weirs are put in place and the harvest begins…. An Elder counsels that young with a spear, ‘Take only what you need and let the rest go by and the fish will last forever.’”43 *Mt 7:12 Here is the meaning of what I have been saying: whatever good you want others to do for you is what you should do for them. This is the whole purpose of the instructions given by Drawn from the Water (Moses) and the words spoken by the prophets*. *Learn more about indigenous cultures in your area.*

41 Kimmerer, Robin Wall, Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants. Milkweed Editions, Minneapolis, MN 2013 kindle edition, pp. 3-5.

42 Ibid, p. 115.

43 Ibid, p. 241-244.

**Nov. 16 – Native teachings require that only half is taken.** Another story told in *Braiding Sweetgrass* is of an engineering student who went ricing with an Ojibwe family in Minnesota. They began at dawn knocking the rice seed into the canoe but the student was frustrated by the inefficiency of the process. “At least half of the rice just falls in the water and they didn’t seem to care.” He offered to design a better grain capture system that wasn’t so wasteful but his hosts declined the proposal saying, “Yes, we could get more that way. But it’s got to seed itself for next year. And what we leave behind is not wasted. You know, we’re not the only ones who like rice. Do you think the ducks would stop here if we took it all?” Native teachings say to only take half.44 Gal 6:7-8, “Let no one mislead you. You cannot make a fool of the Great Spirit. Whatever you plant is what you will harvest. If you plant the seeds of your own broken humanity, you will harvest only death and decay. But if you plant the seeds of the Spirit, then from the Spirit you will harvest the life of the world to come that never fades away, full of beauty and harmony. Lk 6:38. The amount you measure out to others is the amount that comes back, like a basket that has been filled to the top, shaken down and packed together, until it overflows. What you give you give out will come back to you—full circle.” *Acknowledge the human cost of colonization.*

Nov 23 – **Honorable Harvest.** “Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them. Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life. Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer. Never take the first. Never take the last. Take only what you need Take only what is given. Never take more than half. Leave some for others. Harvest in a way that minimizes harm. Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken. Share. Give thanks for what you have been given. Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken. Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever.”32 Mt 6:33 “If you will make Creator’s good road your first aim, representing his right ways, he will make sure you have all you need for each day. So do not worry about tomorrow’s troubles. It is enough to trust Creator to give you the strength you need to face today.” *Recognize and celebrate different cultures.*

Nov 30 – **Celebrate the Covenant of Reciprocity.** Robin Kimmerer concludes in her book, “We are all bound by a covenant of reciprocity: plant breath for animal breath, winter and summer, predator and prey, grass and fire, night and day, living and dying.” Native elders claim that ceremony is a way to remember to remember. If we forget, the dance will be for mourning, mourning the passing of the polar bears, and the silence of the cranes.45 2 Cor 9:6 “Remember this saying: The one who plants only a few seeds will harvest a small crop. The one who plants many seeds will harvest a large crop.” *Celebrate the achievements of indigenous cultures.*

**Native American Prayer**

O Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me.

I come before you, one of your children. I am small and weak. I need your strength and wisdom.

Let me walk in beauty and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset.

Make my hands respect the things you have made, my ears sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise, so that I may know the things you have taught my people, the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock. I seek strength, not to be superior to my brothers, but to be able to fight my greatest enemy: myself.

44 Ibid, p. 182-183.

45 Ibid, p. 383.

Make me ever ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes, so that when life fades as a fading sunset, my spirit may come to you without shame. – Chief Yellow Hawk (Native American chief who was a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe).

**Hymn: Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow,** ELW p. 884.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise him all creatures here below, Praise Him above ye heavenly host, Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost, Note: Generative AI translated the first line as *"Diyin baa haʼniih, éí tʼáá ałtsʼíísí bikʼijidí tʼéiyá biiʼ yilnííh" in Navajo.*

**Recommended Reading:** *Braiding Sweetgrass, Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, By Robin Wall Kammerer, Milkweed Editions, 2013.

**December – Advent**

**One day in the forest, a fire broke out. All the animals ran for their lives. They stood at the edge of the blaze, looking at the flames in terror and sadness. Up above their heads, a hummingbird was flying back and forth to the fire, over and over again. The bigger animals asked the hummingbird what she was doing. “I am flying to the lake to get water to help put out the fire.” The animals laughed at her and said, “You can’t put out this fire!” The hummingbird replied, “I’m doing what I can.46** Source: UN Water: Be the change. The story of the hummingbird originated with the Quechua people in Peru.

Many people become discouraged when we hear that 2024 was the warmest year on record. In the last 10 years, we’ve broken that record 5 times. Storms are getting stronger and oceans are warming faster than predicted. The key is not to become so overwhelmed by the news items that you become apathetic which might result in inaction, which will not help solve the problem. Environmental journalist Mary Anaise Hegler describes a conversation she has had many times. When she identifies herself as an environmentalist, the person she is talking with becomes defensive, and begins discussing a litany of their eco-sins, and believe that it doesn’t matter anymore. While we do need systemic change, we also need to align our faith values with our actions to push for change.47 The key is to be like the hummingbird we need to do our part.

Advent is a season of preparation and anticipation of Christ’s birth. Many themes of Advent include Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. In keeping with our creation care calendar, we will use this Advent season to consider and reflect on the challenges we face in our warming world due to climate change and to study what we can do to prepare and hope for a better future.

**Prayer:** God of the wilderness, the earth cries out for restoration and preservation. May we be mindful of ecosystems of the earth, deserts, oceans prairies and forests and the species that inhabit those ecosystems. Empower us to do what it takes to restore the habitats you have given us so we all will survive and prosper and live in abundance peace with all our neighbors.

**Dec. 7 – Journey** In some traditions, the candle for the second Sunday of Advent is the Bethlehem Candle which represents Mary and Joseph’s journey to from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Jesus was born in a stable, surrounded by animals demonstrating a deep connection between God and all of creation. As we journeyed through this year of creation care, reflect upon some of the things you learned about creation. Was there a particular area or idea that struck you as particularly meaningful or called to you in a particular way? Like Mary and Joseph, who answered God’s call to care for Jesus, how can you answer your call to care for creation. Katherine Hayhoe writes “Change begins with individuals but thrives in communities.”48 Lk 2:1-7.

**Dec 14 – Rejoice.** In some traditions the candle for the third Sunday of Advent is the Shepherd candle. The angels appeared before shepherds tending their sheep and were told the good news of Jesus’ birth. When they went into Bethlehem to see the Christ child and returned rejoicing.

46 UN Water: Be the Change, (n.d.) https://www.unwater.org/bethechange/ retrieved 1 Feb 2025

47 Email, Katherine Hayhoe, Melting Ice and frozen grants, Talking Climate with Katherine Hayhoe. 1 Feb 2025.

48 Email. Katherine Hayhoe, No person can halt global climate progress. Talking Climate with Katherine Hayhoe. Jan 25, 2025.

Reflect this week on what you are thankful for. Perhaps you can express gratitude for how the earth takes care of you. And how you return that care to the earth. Lk 2:8-20.

**Dec. 21 – Love.** In some traditions the candle for the fourth Sunday of Advent is the Angel candle and signifies the love of God proclaimed by the birth of Jesus this is the core of the Christmas story. Reflect this week on how you can mirror this love of God in your daily life and make it visible to other people in need. This is also the first day of winter. Take a walk outside and keep a journal to reflect on the sights and sounds of winter. Lk 2:8-14.

**Dec. 28 – Write a prayer for creation.** This could be a prayer of gratitude for a specific species of area, a prayer of lament for the loss of a species or for the protection of an area or species. It could be a prayer to address a specific environmental justice or climate change issues.

**Creation Reflection:** We may be seeing a change in people’s attitudes. In Francis Collins’ book *The Road to Wisdom*, he relates that three-fourths of Americans want the United States to take a larger role in global efforts to address climate change, while two-thirds of Americans place a high priority on the development of alternative forms of energy such as wind and solar. He suggests that we are not “helpless nor hopeless”. We can take reasonable and achievable goals that will help address climate change. Tessa Hill recently wrote “Do we know everything that it is possible to know about the world and our place in it? Obviously not. Do we know enough to know we need to change our behavior? Obviously we do.”49 I recently saw a cross-stitch pattern “snowflakes are one of Nature’s most fragile things… but just look what they can do when they all stick together.” If we let guilt and apathy prevent us from doing something, we lose. The key point is we all need to stick together and begin taking action.

**All Earth is Hopeful,** ELW p. 266

v. 1 All earth is hopeful the Savior comes at last! Furrows like open for God’s creative task; this, the labor of the people, who struggle to see how God’s truth and justice set ev’ry body free.

v. 2 People of Israel, you have heard the prophet tell; “A virgin mother will bear Emmanuel; she conceived him, “God with us,” our brother whose birth restores hope and courage to children of this earth.

v. 3 Mountains and valleys will have to be prepared; new highways opened, new protocols declared, Almost here! God is nearing, in beauty and grace! All clear ev’ry gateway, in haste come out in haste!

v. 4 We first saw Jesus, a baby in a crib; This same Lord Jesus today has come to live in our world; he is present, in neighbors we see our Jesus is with us and ever sets us free.

49 Hill, T., and E. Simons. At Every Depth Our Growing Knowledge of the Changing Oceans, Columbia University Press, New York, 2024. p.282