

February, 2025

**MARK: MY WORDS**

 It can seem stagnant. While we are in the midst of one of the seasons of the church year, it may feel as though we are stuck in a loop, one week after another. That is particularly the case during the longest season of the year, the Time after Pentecost, when there may be as many as 26 or 27 weeks after the Day of Pentecost.

 Within each season, there is a discernable *movement* toward the season’s goal and the preparation for the one following. In the first season of each church year, Advent, we prepare ourselves to welcome the birth of Jesus into our hearts and lives again. The Twelve Days of Christmas point us toward The Epiphany of Our Lord, when Jesus is revealed now, not just to the shepherds, but to all the world, represented by the magi, as the True Light coming into our darkness.

 Epiphany, in turn, moves us toward Ash Wednesday and Lent, when we confess, repent, and reflect upon the Gospel of John’s assertion that we “loved darkness more than the Light” (3:19). Those forty days segue into the Three Great Days: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Vigil of Easter as the culmination of the battle to the death between the forces of darkness and Jesus the Light.

 The celebration of the Resurrection during the Easter season has in its sights the day of Pentecost, when Jesus fulfills His promise to pour out His Spirit upon the Church and the world as the way in which He is present to move creation toward its promised Fulfillment when suffering and death are defeated not only for Him but for the entire cosmos.

 The season of Pentecost drives us toward the celebration of Christ the King, when we boldly proclaim that both our and the world’s future rests in His good and gracious hands. The month of February. leads us toward the beginning of Lent, starting later this year with Ash Wednesday falling on March 5.

 How does this year of St. Luke’s Gospel prepare us for those solemn and renewing days of Lent? A portion of an essay from our ELCA worship resource, *Sundays and Seasons,* teaches us well:

No season of the church year invites our assemblies into a *journey* more than the forty-day season of Lent…. What is the Lenten journey? One compelling description comes from the text of the Ash Wednesday Invitation to Lent. It beautifully sets out the goal of the journey that God has established from the beginning: “We are created to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another, and to live in harmony with creation.” On our journey to this renewed Edenic promised land, we travel in a way that “contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor.” Lent is “our journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus’ death and resurrection.”

Of course, our journey into Jesus’ death and resurrection is also the journey of baptism into Christ. One way of understanding the origins of Lent is as the young church’s most extensive new-member program: a forty-day journey to the waters of baptism at Easter, with the seven weeks of the Easter season being a time to explore and dwell in the garden of resurrection, and Pentecost sealing the journey with the fiery celebration of the Spirit dancing above the head of each of the newly baptized….”

…What is unique about this year?... In (this year of St. Luke) the unique Lukan pericopes can be seen as celebrating the persistence of God’s mercy despite stubborn obstacles: in the face of threats from Herod and the religious authorities (Lent 2); surrounded by the disorienting rubble of catastrophes (Lent 3); and in the wake of estrangement, sin, and jealousy (Lent 4).

In the fifth week of Lent, Jesus himself receives the gift of anointing through the persistence of Mary of Bethany, who perseveres in her gift-giving despite Judas’s attempt to shame her. The persistence of God’s mercy comes to its most profound expression in the passion reading from Luke on Palm/Passion Sunday, in which Jesus’ final utterance to another person before he dies is a word of mercy and promise spoken to a convicted criminal.”

 With trusted Luke as our guide, may God grant us a holy, renewing, and refreshing Lenten journey.



 We will offer two liturgies on Ash Wednesday, **March 5:** at **10:00 a.m. and at 7:00 p.m.** Our good friend John Carington will play the organ for the morning service, and Maggie will accompany us in the evening. This officially begins the Forty Days of Lent leading toward the Three Great Days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Vigil of Easter.

As we have noted in the past, the word “Lent” is drawn from an Olde English word meaning, ‘springtime.’ Lent is the time to do a “spring cleaning” of those words, actions, motivations, and intentions that are harmful and draw us away from God and our neighbor. It is a solemn time, to be sure, but it is also the season in which we especially focus on the promises of our Baptism that enable us to confess those sins and be found by the mercy of God that, as we sing each week, “creates a clean heart” in us.

By scheduling two services that day, we hope to provide the best opportunities to begin this yearly journey together. Make plans to be with us so that we may encourage and strengthen one another for the Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting, and helping the poor.



 As has been our tradition, we will offer five midweek Lenten services of Evening Prayer following Ash Wednesday and leading into Holy Week. We will again use the beloved musical setting of Marty Haugen’s “Holden Evening Prayer” as the musical basis of our weekly worship services complemented by some Scripture readings, a brief homily, and some hymns.

 This year, we will utilize a series from our worship resource, *Sundays and Seasons,* based upon part of the Rite of the Affirmation of Baptism. Since the Sacrament is at the heart of our Lenten observance, it seems good to revisit the promises we make to *do* something in response to God’s gracious gift of naming and claiming us as His own and drawing us into His mission to the world through water and the Spirit.

 The theme is, “Continuing in the Covenant of Baptism,” and deals with five aspects of to what Baptism calls us as members of the Body of Christ. The schedule is:

**Wednesday, March 12** “To Live Among God’s Faithful People”

**Wednesday, March 19** “To Hear the Word of God and Share in the Lord’s Supper”

**Wednesday, March 26** “To Proclaim the Good News of God in Christ through

 Word and Deed”

**Wednesday, April 2** “To Serve All People, Following the Example of Jesus ”

**Wednesday, April 9** “To Strive for Justice and Peace in All the Earth”

 **All services will begin at 6:00 p.m.** and will conclude by 6:30 p.m. We hope you will attend these liturgies as part of your Lenten discipline and preparation for Holy Week and Easter.



**CHURCH OFFICE CLOSURE**

 The church office will be closed on Monday, February 19, in honor of Presidents’ Day. It will re-open on Tuesday, the 20th, at 8:00 a.m.



**THE COMMEMORATION OF MARTIN LUTHER**

February 10 is the Commemoration of Martin Luther on the church calendar. This article has appeared in the last several years’ February newsletter, but it is always good to renew our understanding of the person for whom our denomination is named. Many Lutherans are unaware of details of Luther’s life and since we as a church body take our name from him it is always good to re-acquaint ourselves with that knowledge.

Throughout the church year, we remember and give thanks for the lives, witness, and examples of many of the heroines and heroes of the faith. February brings us an especially important one for us who share a Lutheran heritage and history.

 On February 18, 1546, Martin Luther died at the age of 62 in his hometown of Eisleben, Germany. He had long suffered from poor health due to a variety of illnesses and conditions: [Ménière's disease](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%A9ni%C3%A8re%27s_disease), [vertigo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vertigo), fainting, [tinnitus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tinnitus), a [cataract](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cataract) in one eye, [kidney and bladder stones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kidney_stone_disease), [arthritis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthritis), an ear infection that ruptured an ear drum, and [angina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angina).

 As one would expect, as his condition worsened, so did his mood, his writings, and sermons. It was during this time that he wrote some of his most hateful and incendiary comments about the Jewish people of Germany and Europe. Those are some of the most shameful aspects of his legacy; and over the last several decades, Lutherans worldwide have recognized the harm that they brought and repented of his vitriol to those against whom his writings were used as justification for oppression and violence.

 Like all of us, Luther was a complex person. He is regularly included in the group of those who had some of the greatest influence on historical developments of his time but also one whose failings, shortcomings, and sins are as great as his accomplishments. In his own words, he, with the rest of us, are “saints and sinners” at the same time, and always in need of the gracious and merciful compassion and forgiveness God grants in Christ that he so powerfully articulated and championed throughout his life and ministry.

 His famous last words are: “We are all beggars. It is true.” Perhaps that better sums up his theology and teaching better than the dozens of volumes of his sermons and teachings that we possess. That belief fits particularly well in the Lenten season in which this commemoration usually falls. May God grant us, with Luther, the humility, the will, the faith and hope to “beg” God for His mercy and receive it always with joy, trust, and thanksgiving.



**WORSHIP CLOSURE INFORMATION**

 This is a reminder about how to find information about whether worship has been canceled due to extreme weather conditions:

* An email will be sent to those on the church email list
* You may tune to WEFM 95.9 for an announcement during their broadcast
* The church Facebook page (www.facebook.com/stpaulmichigancity)
* You may dial the church office number (219-874-7293); and when the automated menu begins, press the # button for a recorded announcement

Perhaps the quickest and easiest way to get that announcement is the last option of calling the church number. I will post the information there no later than noon on Saturday. We will make every effort to ensure that everyone is informed as quickly as possible should such an action be taken by the Church Council.



**MONTHLY MISSION**

 February's monthly mission will be Lutheran Disaster Response for the Los Angeles wildfires. The fires have killed more than 24 people, destroyed over 12,000 structures, and burnt more than 60 square miles. Checks can be made out to St. Paul and placed in the offering plate marked for Lutheran Disaster Response. The noisy coin offering will also be used for the mission of the month.

 December's noisy coin offering was used to purchase food for our little food pantry. The pantry will be stocked with $130 worth of food for people in need. Thank you for donating to this cause and helping to feed people in our neighborhood!



**SHARING GOD’S BLESSINGS**

The Church Council is happy to report that the half of the school sale money designated for giving has been distributed, the checks cashed, and many thank you’s received. Each group receiving money was a 503(c) group suggested by a congregation member. In most cases, the checks were delivered by the member who submitted the request. The organizations receiving money were:

 Nest Community $100,000

 Tannehill Soup Kitchen $75,000

 Citizens Concerned for the Homeless $25,000

 Arise and Shine Food Ministry $25,000

 Junior Achievement $15,000

 Service League $15,000

 Jane Bernard Small Animal Shelter $15,000

 School of America Music $15,000

 Dunebrook $15,000

 Meals on Wheels $10,000

 Salvation Army $10,000

 Soul Steppers $5,000

 Samaritan Fund $6,000

 Katie’s Purse $6,000

 Gruenke Memorial Playground $38,000



**JANUARY COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS**

The new Church Council met on January 23. Minutes will be available in the narthex in the next week or two.



**IN MEMORY OF KENNETH HANFT, SR.**

**General Fund** from Suzanne, Don & Nathan Dahlstrom



 **February Birthdays February Anniversaries**

 2 Heather Hazel 20 Tim & Laura Mellen

 5 Richard Cains 21 Charles & Sherry Payne

 7 Susan Koziel

 Martha Schroeder

 10 Janet Priebe-Protas

 Emma Haring

 12 Susan Green

 14 Wayne Dolson

 16 Barbara Bass

 19 Kimberly Summers

 22 Kelly Neulieb

 Aaron Petri

 24 Molly Robbins

 26 Karen Schacht

 27 Chip Claussen

 Suzann Dolson



**Long-Term Prayer List**

Laura Dovey Russ Fischer Jess Kalvaitis

Christine Kiser Bethany Manning Shirley McCarty

Jan Paholski Grace Romine Danielle Schnell

Martha Schroeder Jeanie Boatman Shepple Joyce Stark

Kathy Stein Mark Tannehill Kathy Thielman

Venia Wendt Brian Wiseman



 Monday 8:00 a.m. – 5 p.m.

 Tuesday 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon

 Wednesday 8:00 a.m. – 5 p.m.

 Thursday 9:00 a.m. – 12 noon

 Friday 8:00 a.m. – 12 noon

**St. Paul Lutheran Church Staff**

 Pastor Rev. Mark Reshan

 Secretary Libby Pollock

 Accompanists Jary Tannehill, Mark Tannehill, Jacob Tannehill

 Custodian Mark Kloess

Thank$ for $haring

Our recent giveback outings brought the church $131 from Hacienda and $235 from Holly’s. Thank you for your participation.

This month, we will see you at Swingbelly’s on Thursday, February 6.  Here are two coupons—one for you and one for a friend.

**Swingbelly’s**

**Giveback**

**for St. Paul Lutheran Church**

**Thursday, February 6, 2025**

**11 a.m. – close**

**Dine In our Carry Out**

You must present this coupon when paying

For the church to benefit.

**Swingbelly’s**

**Giveback**

**for St. Paul Lutheran Church**

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**11 a.m. – close**

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