



Worship Notes

Thursday, December 24, 2020

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

116 S. B Street, Monmouth, IL 61462; (309)734-2106

www.flcmonmouth.org; email: office@flcmonmouth.org

Pastor Jamie Gallagher
prjamie@flcmonmouth.org
Cell: 630-200-3550

Office: Angela Bradley-Volz, secretary
Custodian: Chris Algren

Musicians:
Janice Algren
Jamie Reynolds

Dear Friends and Family,

National events are the backdrop of our gathering in worship. As our nation recovers from the violence in Washington DC on Wednesday, we pause and give praise to God. God is not a politician or a political party or any human political ideology. God is love. And while the world does not know how to love, we faithfully celebrate the God who teaches us love. And this love gives us hope through the chaos of our world.

Rejoice as you enter worship, for God is love, and God's promise of love in your life may never be broken.

Thank you for your generous support of our ministry

Your continued giving makes an impact in our community as our church continues to be a beacon of hope.

Mailing your donations to the church office and maintaining your automatic giving helps support ministries across the nation and around the world.



Please keep in prayer the following:



Bradley Anderson, Josie Blake, Bev Coulter, Nancy Dowell, John Ellison, Linda Ellison, Dave Erlandson, Jim Erlandson, Brad and Jodie Haist, Cassie Jern & Family, Delores Johnson, Graham Johnson, Bob Kerschke, Ila Roseberry, Norman Worthington, Evelyn Volz, Darrell Thirtyacre, Donna Larson, Beckie Bean, Joy Johnson, Pat Root, Diane Bradley, Anna Lovdahl, Kim Anderson, Matthew Council, Rose Youngquist, Kathi Cruce

Please let the church office know any updates that are needed to our prayer list.

Online Worship

As we maintain our online worship for the time being, you will notice some familiar elements returning in our worship services. The Kyrie is our familiar words. The hymn of praise is a praise hymn which Pastor leads us in singing. The creed is spoken as well as the Lord's Prayer. And we have three hymns to sing, with words included as subtitles in the video.

There is a lot about pre-recording worship that has become easier since we first began in March 2020. But that doesn't mean we don't have a shared missing and a continued lament that we cannot be in-person. One day, we will resume in-person worship. And when we do, we will continue to provide recorded worship services as a ministry for those who cannot join us in-person.

Worship is a ministry provided by the church for all who choose to gather online, one day again in-person, and in spirit.

This week in worship



We celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord. God hovers over the water at creation and brings order to chaos. God hovers over the waters of the Jordan and brings purpose and meaning to life.

In worship, we will remember our own baptism with a prayer moment which you can follow along with at home by placing an empty bowl and having a small pitcher of water or a cup of water ready to pour into the bowl as Pastor Jamie pours water into the font in the sanctuary.

Thank you to Janice for the music provided this week, as well as to Pastor Katie and Heide Gallagher who sang.

Epiphany

The season of Epiphany began on Wednesday, January 6th, 2021. This is 12 days after Christmas. The Day of Epiphany is the day we celebrate the arrival of the magi, three foreign travelers who came to worship a new king in Israel.

The first Sunday of Epiphany is the day we celebrate Jesus' baptism. The final Sunday is the day we celebrate Jesus' transfiguration. The season is bookended with the voice of God declaring "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased, listen to him."

Between these bookends, we experience Jesus opening his ministry with acts of healing, exorcism and teaching. The disciples are called together, and crowds are amazed by all Jesus says and does.

Do we still have the wonder of traveling wise men? Do we still find ourselves amazed by the deeds and words of the traveling teacher? This is at the heart of Epiphany. Now that we have adored a baby, do we really recognize who this baby grows up to be?

Blessings

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

Acts 19:3-4

It is difficult to sit here on Friday and ponder how to separate the events in Washington, DC on Wednesday from what our faith proclaims. It is difficult because for so long there has been a sense that to be a true Christian means you have to take a political side. Various preachers mix political ideology with Gospel declaration. I, myself, find delineating clearly the distinction too often to be murky. I have even had members come up and assume my position when it comes to politicians being elected or policies being debated in our national and state legislative branches. Maybe that is a good thing, maybe it isn't. The Gospel, though, is not about partisan politics. It is about what God has done in Jesus Christ. And certainly that does intersect the political realities of our world. But it should never take partisan sides.

Last night, I attended a zoom meeting with a diverse group of colleagues as we processed how to use our prophetic voice at times of national crisis. Sometimes national crises are easier because we had a common enemy that came from outside our national borders. Wednesday's events have us looking inwardly. Two very differing understandings of reality clashed from within our nation. There is no clear enemy. There is strong opinions and deeply held convictions. There are 'facts' being established by pundits and politicians. There are Americans wondering why other Americans don't agree with them and are so wildly off base with their opinions.

And yes, in the middle of all this we are supposed to be able to find God. We are supposed to hear the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are supposed to be able to say, this is how God clearly loves us and the whole world. Yet, I know if I type these words: "The Gospel calls us to condemn the actions of the insurrectionists on Wednesday," some will think I am alienating them. If I don't speak out, others will think the Gospel has no power in this world and is just an empty vessel of platitudes and family sentiment. It is in this context that I need to bring a blessing today.

Let's make today's blessing be about common ground. God chose you: before the foundation of the world, before you were born, before you chose a political party, before there was a United States of America, before there were different pigments dividing peoples, before language was first uttered by mortal mouths. That means: you were not chosen because you vote red or blue, are for or against any national policy, because you love the right person or said the right prayer. You were chosen because God simply loves all of God's creation. If that is our foundation, then the rest is a journey of learning and discovering. It is a blessing to be on this journey together, of sitting at the intersection of this Good News with the realities of our daily life.

In peace, Pastor Jamie

Baptism and Church Membership

As a spiritual event, Baptism welcomes one into God's family and bestows God's promises that can never be broken. As a matter of church governance, baptism makes one a member of the church.

Membership in a church comes with certain benefits and certain responsibilities. Some benefits cannot legally be experienced until one is old enough, for instance to vote at congregation meetings. Some benefits are unspoken, such as the ability to use the facility per guidelines established by the congregation council. Responsibilities are equally unspoken, but no less important. We share in the work of the ministry, the doing of committees and events, caring for one another, reaching out a helping hand to other members in need.

Ultimately, baptism makes us family. Families are not always perfect, and the church is no different. But we are family. And the bonds of this family, just as God's promise, can never be broken.