

# THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

FEBRUARY 2026 | VOL. 3 ISSUE 1



## Keeping It Holy

This year, Ash Wednesday is on February 18<sup>th</sup>. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the holy season of Lent. The liturgy of the Church calls us to begin “a holy season of prayerful and penitential reflection,” when “our attention is especially directed to the holy sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The words used in the Ash Wednesday rite of the Lutheran Service Book Agenda also remind us that “from ancient times the season of Lent has been kept as a time of special devotion, self-denial, and humble repentance born of a faithful heart that dwells confidently on His Word and draws from it life and hope.”

Each of the seasons of the church year is observed and celebrated, but Lent, and only Lent, is “kept.” The holy season of Lent invites us to be “keepers” – the people of God who keep the fast, keep the silence, and keep the focus throughout this singular season. It is to these three areas of “keeping” that I will now write (albeit briefly).

### ‘Keeping the Fast’

The custom of keeping the fast during Lent has been part of the holy observance of the season from its very beginnings. The biblical precedent for this custom is reflected in the very first hymn in the “Lent” section of Lutheran Service Book (LSB). The hymn writer, Claudia Hernaman, starts with a reference to the time of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. She begins: “O Lord, throughout these forty days You prayed and kept the fast” (LSB 418). In the final stanza of the hymn, however, she makes a thoughtful transition; she writes: “Be with us through this season, Lord.” What Hernaman does so skillfully is link the 40 days of Lent with the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness in prayer and fasting, with the inference that for those who would follow Jesus, Lent is a parallel experience.

Fasting may be observed on one or more specific days of the week, often Tuesday and Friday, when food is limited to one meal each day. In the Middle Ages, the time of that one meal was set at None (sounds like known”), the ninth hour of the Roman day – three o’clock in the afternoon. Over the course of time, this single daily meal was moved to earlier in the day, but its “time name” remained – and became the word noon in our English usage.

### Other stories this month:

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#### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- JOURNEY INTO LENT
- DID YOU KNOW ABOUT...?
- SEE WHAT’S HAPPENING
- FEBRUARY CALENDAR





## Keeping It Holy (*Continued*)

In the early church, people fasted for different lengths of time and abstained from various foods. In a 604 letter to Bishop Augustine of Canterbury, St. Gregory the Great (commemorated on Sept. 3 in LSB) wrote: “We abstain from flesh meat and from all things that come from flesh, as milk, cheese, and eggs.”

In its observance, however, the style of fasting was never to eclipse the purpose of fasting: a spiritual discipline with a positive purpose. Already in 461, Leo, the bishop of Rome, had written: “What we forego by fasting is to be given as alms to the poor.” In the Small Catechism and elsewhere, Martin Luther commends the practice of fasting as “fine outward training.”

In our day and age, some popular health experts promote the medicinal value of occasional fasting. For Christians, however, to keep the fast is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus in the wilderness, finding blessing and spiritual benefit in purposeful self-denial during Lent.

### **‘Keeping the Silence’**

Another spiritual dynamic of Lent is that it is a time to keep the silence in reflection and devotion. The language of Lent is purposefully quieted. The word *alleluia* is not used as an expression of praise in Lent. Our vocal and instrumental music is reflective and subdued. Purple, the liturgical color customarily appointed for Lent, is the “quietest” of the colors used throughout the church year and is associated with penitence and sorrow.

In many churches, the crosses, crucifixes, and other religious artwork is “veiled” – covered with a transparent cloth throughout the 40 days to mute their brilliance and to add a solemn tone to the worship space. In some places, families also cover religious paintings and wall hangings in their homes.

Times of silence for personal reflection and prayer before individual or family devotions have special meaning in Lent. The words of one of the great Lutheran hymns of Lent serve as a call to an extra measure of devotion and prayer: “Jesus, I will ponder now / On Your holy Passion; / With Your Spirit me endow / For such meditation” (LSB 440).

Today, establishing a proper setting for such reflection in our fast-paced and noisy world may take extra determination. Finding that place and observing that time, however, is another central component of the discipline of the holy season of Lent and is more than worth the effort.

### **‘Keeping the Focus’**

The days and weeks of Lent call us to keep the focus of our lives of faith on Jesus, our Lord, and to learn more of Him and His loving plan of salvation for us. One of the classic hymn stanzas of the Lutheran church portrays that proper focus in this petition to the Lord:



## Keeping It Holy (*Continued*)

*On my heart imprint Your image,  
Blessed Jesus, King of grace  
That life's riches, cares, and pleasures  
Never may Your work erase;  
Let the clear inscription be:  
Jesus, crucified for me,  
Is my life, my hope's foundation,  
And my glory and salvation!  
-- LSB 422*

Another way we keep the focus in Lent is through special mid-week services (held Wednesdays at noon and 7 p.m.). Our theme this year is: "Dying His Death – Living His Life." In our special services for Lent, we are reminded that we are buried with Christ in His death so that we might live with Him in His resurrection. The old is gone. The new has come. Each day affords us a chance to die to self and live for Him. In Word and song, we contemplate those things that were put to death on the cross so that we might receive the blessings of new life in Christ.

The observance of a holy Lent has a sacred purpose and can be of great benefit. As we keep the fast, keep the silence, and keep the focus of Lent, it becomes a fuller and more meaningful season. The LSB Ash Wednesday order shares an appropriate prayer for all of us:

Let us pray that our dear Father in heaven, for the sake of His beloved Son and in the power of His Holy Spirit, might richly bless this Lententide for us so that we may come to Easter with glad hearts and keep the feast in sincerity and truth.

*Pastor Dana Allen Brunes*



# Covered in Love

This is the month of love. Valentine's Day. Don't remind me. I'm not very good at taking the time to be lovey-dovey. I've gotten progressively worse over fifteen years of marriage – just ask my sweet, long-suffering bride!

But love is essential. Especially Biblical love. Especially in the Church. Love is the oil that allows the engine of daily Christian life to run smoothly. Peter puts it this way, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4:8) Now, this verse could be ripped out of its context and made to imply that we should never, under any circumstance, lovingly confront a brother or sister in Christ. Even one who is stuck in some troublesome and obvious sin. But that's certainly not the case and would be one way to misuse this verse. However, another way to misuse this verse would be to ignore it.

So, if we don't ignore it, how do we understand and apply this verse? Well, here I think St. Peter is getting at much the same thing that Luther did in his Small Catechism explanation to the commandment, "Do not give false testimony against your neighbor." Luther unpacked this by saying that when it comes to those around us, we should "explain everything in the kindest possible way." Another translation of Luther's explanation described it like this: we should put "the best construction on everything." And sometimes, the best or most charitable construction of something is, "Well, that person just messed up. They sinned or made a dumb decision – but I recognize that fallen people are constantly doing that. And in the grand scheme of things, my harping on them about it will only make things worse. So, for now, I might just let it go."

This doesn't excuse sin or stupidity, but it recognizes that sin and stupidity are the norm for us this side of eternity. So, out of love, we exercise discernment and use our speech (or lack of it!) to "cover" our neighbor's sin. Obviously, this also could be taken too far and abused. But it's an important point because without this treating of people "fairly" (the way we would want to be treated) our families would fall apart. As would our churches. We would be constantly at each other's throats because no one is as they should be.

Our Lutheran Confessions put it like this: Peter "means that in human relations love is not obstinate, harsh, or intractable; instead, it overlooks certain mistakes of its friends and puts the best construction on even the more offensive conduct of others. . . It is not without reason that the apostles speak so often about this responsibility of love, which the philosophers call 'fairness.' For this virtue is necessary for preserving public harmony, which cannot last long unless pastors and churches overlook and pardon many things among themselves." (Ap. IV. 243.)

I'll admit I stand to benefit from this call to love. (As do we all.) I've been your pastor here for 6+ years now. And you have shown me love. I know full well that over these six years I have sinned (and/or) been stupid in both small ways and great. Sometimes very great. There have been misplaced words and thoughtless deeds. Things I should have done or said but didn't – and things I said or did that I shouldn't have. But your love has covered a multitude of sins. One of the greatest blessings of serving here at Bethlehem is that I have experienced your love. So... thank you. Thank you for "overlooking and pardoning many things," from this less-than-perfect pastor. Thank you for being the people of God! May you continue to show this Christian love to everyone in Christ's Church.

Blessed to be your Shepherd,

*Pastor Nate McCarty*





# The Real Love of God

Love is in the air! Or maybe it feels that way with Valentine's Day right around the corner. Many people often associate or celebrate this day by showing love or romance to their partner, whether it be a spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend. As we reflect upon love and romance this Valentine's Day, I want to walk with you and take a deeper look at Biblical love. Love is, after all, the very first fruit of the Spirit. Somebody even told me one time, that if you really think about it, love is embedded within each and every fruit of the Spirit. Paul lists love first and foremost in the fruits of the Spirit, yet it flows smoothly into everything that follows. Whether it be joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self control, love is at the center of who we are in Christ and therefore at the center of all we do. Yet as we talk about love this Valentine's Day, it's important to note how love takes different forms. This Biblical love is not rooted in the romance of Valentine's Day, or the romance from an earthly relationship, it stems from God. 1 John 4:8, says, "God is love". John doesn't list it the other way around, saying "love is God", but rather, "God is love", illustrating God is the source of love, it's just his very nature and essence.

Within the past year I've come across different personality tests on social media. From all these different tests, I've found which Harry Potter house I'd fit into, which character on my favorite TV series I'd be, or what profession I should go into. Yet one of the personality tests I've come across in recent years is the love language test. As people show and receive love in different ways, this test aims to characterize how you personally show and receive love. In general, it has five different categories of love: words of affirmation, acts of service, gift giving, physical touch, and quality time. Now everybody reading this has a different love language or at least different levels of love languages, but each person shows and receives love in different ways. Yet I want to return to the root of all love, namely God as "God is love". I can't help but think of how God really speaks all of these love languages to us, so no matter how we show or receive love, we continue to be loved by God in every possible and physical way. Through his words of affirmation, God calls us his beloved children. Through acts of service, Jesus goes to the cross and dies the death we deserved. Through gift giving, he bestows upon you the free gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Through physical touch, he places his true body and blood upon your lips, embracing you in His love. Through quality time, he spends time with you in his promises, in His Word, in prayer, etc. His love abounds, overwhelms, and floods your life in every way, or as David ascribes in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, "my cup overflows".

God consistently pours out love to you and to me in any way imaginable. But it doesn't just stop there! He gives us this love in all these different ways for us to learn, to take, and to share with others. God, who is the very source of all love, flows through us to others in every way. We give love, just as we have received it.

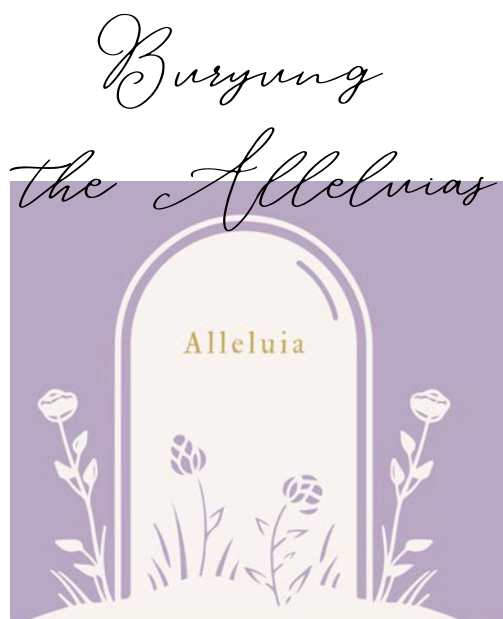


# The Real Love of God

## *(continued)*

God manifests his love to us through all these different love languages, and we learn and manifest this love to others. Yes you're right, it's not always in a romantic way, as many celebrate this Valentine's Day, but we care for other people's souls through speaking words of affirmation, doing acts of service for them, giving completely free gifts, embracing them with a hug when others may need it, or embracing them by just being there, that is being present with them. What an amazing thing it is, that "God is love", and works love through us to others!

Vicar Caleb Gustafson



**"Burying the Alleluia"** is a custom dating back to at least the fifth century of the church. Some churches would write the word alleluia on a parchment, place it in a coffin and then bury in the backyard of the church at the start of Lent. Tradition holds for us that we won't sing or say the word "alleluia" again until Easter Day. *(There is no scriptural command for this practice.)* Lent is designed to be a time of being remorseful as we acknowledge our sins and look with great anticipation to the message of forgiveness and eternal life in the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Easter. It's not that we stop praising God during Lent. (**Alleluia** means *God be praised!*) We praise Him for His suffering, His death and the grace given to us through taking our place on the cross. We just save this beautiful exclamation of joy of the Gospel for after Lent when we rejoice in His resurrection. God be praised that death is defeated and we will get to live in eternity singing Alleluias to our King. So yes, for now, the Alleluia is buried but just like our Savior it too will rise again!





\*Our preschool is full of life, laughter, and the light of Christ—and we're ready to share it with you! Each month, BLC Preschool Lights will shine a spotlight on the incredible things happening with our little ones, from classroom moments to ministry milestones. With our exciting new building project on the horizon, there's never been a better time to see how God is growing this vital part of our church family. Stay tuned... big things are coming from our smallest members!

# A BIG THANK YOU...

To all who donated and helped set-up our new playground equipment! The kids are having a blast and enjoying playing outside!



Some cute photos of our littlest BLC Preschool Scholars to warm your heart in February!

# Did you know...?

The office of Elder was established in the early church around the first century.



At Bethlehem Lutheran Church, elders serve as trusted lay leaders who assist the pastor in the spiritual care and oversight of the congregation. This office exists to support faithful ministry, good order, and loving care among God's people.

## Rooted in Scripture

The Bible speaks often of elders as those who help care for the church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). While Scripture teaches that the Office of the Holy Ministry—the pastoral office—is divinely instituted, congregations may establish additional offices to assist the pastor in shepherding the flock (1 Corinthians 14:40). The lay office of elder is one such office.

## What Do Elders Do?

Elders serve alongside the pastor as partners in care and encouragement. They:

- Assist with pastoral care, visitation, and support in times of need
- Help safeguard sound doctrine and faithful worship
- Support and uphold the pastor and the Office of the Holy Ministry
- Assist with the orderly conduct of worship, as authorized by the pastor
- Encourage unity, reconciliation, and peace within the congregation
- Serve as examples of Christian faith, humility, and service

Elders do not replace the pastor or act independently, but serve under his guidance and in accordance with the congregation's constitution and bylaws.

## Who Serves as an Elder?

Elders are confirmed, communicant members of the congregation who demonstrate mature Christian faith, love for the Church, and lives reflecting the biblical qualities described in **1 Timothy 3** and **Titus 1**, as appropriate for lay leadership.

## A Call to Prayer—and Service

We thank God for those who serve as elders at Bethlehem Lutheran Church. Please keep our pastor and elders in your prayers as they care for Christ's Church. If you would like to know who the elders are here at BLC, specifically your elder, we invite you to speak with the pastor or email the church office and we'd be happy to share that information with you!



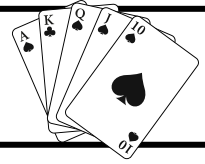
# WHAT'S HAPPENING AT BLC

MON  
FEB  
2

## BLC SENIOR SHUFFLERS

9:30 AM

Join the Senior Shufflers for our monthly game of Hand and Foot!



WEDS  
FEB  
4

## WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

9:30 AM

All women welcome to join us for digging deep into God's word together!

THURS  
FEB  
12

## YOUNG ADULT BIBLE STUDY

5:30 PM

Join us for our YA Bible Study in the Upper Room. See FB page for more details.



SAT  
FEB  
14

## SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY

WEDS  
FEB  
18

## ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICES AT NOON AND 7 PM



THURS  
FEB  
19

## MEN'S BIBLE STUDY AT 6 PM

Come and enjoy some food, fellowship and the Word of God with your brothers from BLC!

FRI  
FEB  
20



**Mission House**  
Compassion by the Sea

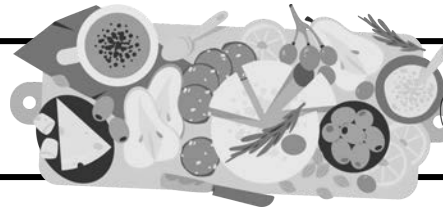
## MISSION HOUSE TEAM A AT 430 PM

SAT  
FEB  
21

## WINE, WOMEN & THE WORD

6:30 PM

More information to come!



JOIN YOUR SISTERS IN  
CHRIST FOR FELLOWSHIP  
& FOOD!

SUN  
FEB  
22

## LWML MEETING AFTER THE 11 AM SERVICE

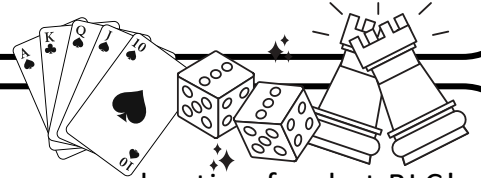
Women of BLC are invited to come to LWML and learn about this wonderful church ministry!

FRI  
FEB  
27

## FAMILY GAME NIGHT & POTLUCK

5:30 PM

Have a great time with friends and family playing games and eating food at BLC!



if you have anything you would like to add to What's Happening at BLC- please email the church office at [officeadmin@bethlehemlutheranjaxbeach.org](mailto:officeadmin@bethlehemlutheranjaxbeach.org)

# BLC VOLUNTEERS!

## COUNTING

**Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>**

Barbara/Terry

**Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Bob/Allan

**Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>**

Barbie/Diane

**Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>**

Paul/Gordon

## ELDERS

**Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>**

8 - EIC Paul & Jon

930 - EIC Joe &

John

11- EIC Alex &

Brandon

**Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>**

8 -Jamie &

Gordon

930 - Joe

11-EIC Al & Dan R.

**Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>**

8 -EIC Paul &

Gordon

930 - EIC Joe &

John

11- EIC Bruce &

Rob

**Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup>**

8 -EIC Paul & Jon

930 - Joe

11-EIC Dan H. &

Dennis

## ALTAR GUILD

**SAT. JAN. 31**

Set Up -Tami

**SUN. FEB. 1**

8 - Valerie

9:30 - Brenda

11 - Beth

**SAT. FEB. 7**

Set Up - Dee R.

**SUN. FEB. 8**

8 - Susan

9:30 - Barbara

11 - Diana

**SAT. FEB. 14**

Set Up - Dee R.

**SUN. FEB. 15**

8 - Carol

9:30 - Nina

11 - Kathy

**SAT. FEB. 21**

Set Up - Anna

**SUN. FEB. 22**

8 - Valerie

9:30 - Tami

11 - Erica

**MIDWEEK**

**SERVICES:**

**TUES. FEB. 17**

Set Up-Valerie

**WEDS. FEB. 18**

Set Up -Tami

7 PM -Valerie

**TUES. FEB. 24**

Set Up-Carol/Valerie

**WEDS. FEB. 28**

Set Up -Carol

7 PM - Brenda

## SCREENS

**FEB. 1<sup>st</sup>**

8 -Patrick

9:30 - Brenda

11 - Gina

**FEB. 22<sup>nd</sup>**

8 -Victoria

9:30 - Chris

11 - Toni

**FEB. 8<sup>th</sup>**

8 - Nancy

9:30 - Romaine

11 -Roy

**FEB. 15<sup>th</sup>**

8 - Greg

9:30 - Kristine

11 - Lloyd

## STREAMING

**Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>**

Jerry

**Feb. 8<sup>th</sup>**

Brandon

**Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>**

Jeannie

**Feb. 18<sup>th</sup>**

Bob

**Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup>**

Bob

**Feb. 25<sup>th</sup>**

Bob

BLC APPRECIATES YOU!

# FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

*Birthdays*



Tiffany	Freeborn	2/1
David	Thies	2/1
Wyatt	Briggs	2/2
Sharon	Connell	2/2
Nitasha	Mazzeo	2/2
Tom	Potratz	2/3
Stephen	Smith	2/3
Janelle	Heumann	2/6
Douglas	Brauer	2/7
Christian	Carr	2/7
Paul	Green	2/7
Christopher	Johnson	2/7
Barbara	Zikeli	2/7
Nina	Gordish	2/8
Steven	Pietrasiuk	2/8
Mariah	Thies	2/8
Charlotte	Cobb	2/9
Ethan	Barrett	2/12
Laurie	Leker	2/12
Robbie	May	2/12
Julie	Truax	2/12
Sven	Helberg	2/13
Mark	Starkey	2/13
Asher	Randolph	2/15
Deborah	Donnelly	2/16
Deborah	Addis	2/17
Smith	Mattila	2/17
Elliott	Randolph	2/17
Allan	Werner	2/19
Teri	Kientz	2/20
Rebekah	Romer	2/20
Penny	Perryman	2/22



Jim  
Jeremy  
Linda  
Iris

Pitts 2/23  
Randolph 2/23  
Tester 2/23  
Noakes 2/24

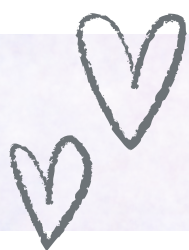


*Anniversaries*

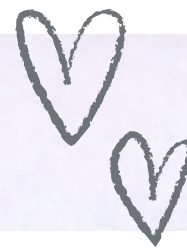
Edward and Lorna Boyajian Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>  
James and Peggy Holz Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>  
Daniel and Janelle Heumann Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>  
Allan and Lisa Werner Feb. 26<sup>th</sup>








# FEBRUARY 2026



1	2 930 AM Senior Cards	3	4 930 AM Women's Bible Study 530 PM Confirmation & Youth Group	5	6	7 930 AM AA
8 8/ 930/ 11 AM Service  930 Sunday School	9	10	11 530 PM Confirmation & Youth Group	12 630 PM Young Adult Bible Study	13	14 930 AM AA
15 <b>Transfiguration Sunday</b> 8/ 930/ 11 AM Service 930 Sunday School	16	17	18 <b>ASH WEDS.</b> Noon & 7 PM- Lenten Services 530 PM Confirmation	19 6 PM Men's Bible Study	20 430 PM Mission House	21 930 AM AA
22 8/ 930/ 11 AM Service  930 Sunday School	23	24 7 PM Executive Council	25 Noon & 7 PM- Lenten Services 530 PM Confirmation	26	27 5 PM- Family Game Night	28
<div data-bbox="82 1785 576 1917"><b>BETHLEHEM</b> LUTHERAN CHURCH &amp; PRESCHOOL</div>			<div data-bbox="998 1745 1555 2047"><b>Bible Studies Every Week:</b>  Mon: ECHO Bible Study 7 PM Weds: Limbaugh Bible Study 7 PM Thurs: Vicar's Bible Study 930 AM</div>			