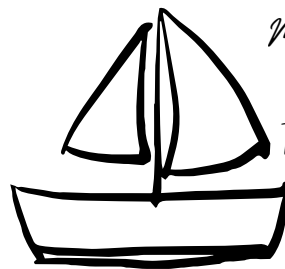


THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH

JULY & AUGUST 2026 | VOL. 3 ISSUE 6



*Mightier than the thunder of
the great waters, mightier
than the breakers of the sea
—the Lord on high is
mighty.*

We Are All One In Christ

There is a theory in the “church growth” movement which claims that for churches (congregations) to be successful (i.e., grow large), they must be homogeneous or, in other words, be made up of related kinds and sorts of people. To use an old cliché: “birds of a feather flock together.” I don’t fully agree with that theory.

What is a great deal more startling than the homogeneous unit principle of church growth is what bespeaks the power of the Christian church, (more accurately, its heart and soul -- Jesus Christ) is its ability to homogenize into compatible and considerate and loving groups of people from totally opposite backgrounds and cultures and ideas. It started with Christ’s birth and both Jews and Gentiles coming to worship Him. It continued with Jesus giving the water of life to a Samaritan woman. It even included a man who had been a haughty Pharisee (an elite Hebrew who thought he could live perfectly according to God’s law, and made sure everybody knew it), Saul of Tarsus, suddenly baring his heart to slaves and barbarians, calling them, “my brothers in the faith.” Ladies from the Roman court, with royal blood flowing through their veins, took the cup and shared it with some homeless wanderer from the streets. You get a glimpse of it today, too, sometimes at our own altar – babies, youth, and elderly alike, coming to be baptized, and others coming to receive a blessing. There are adults with tattoos and piercings coming to receive the Lord’s Supper. Asians, Latinos, Africans, Europeans, Filipinos, and Americans worshiping and praising God together. Mechanics, teachers, PhD’s, pilots, plumbers, electricians, young, old and everything in between, participating in worship and Bible study.

Other stories this month:

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- SPECIAL GOOD-BYE FROM MS. D
- SUMMER FUN AT BLC!
- WHAT’S HAPPENING AT BLC THIS SUMMER



We Are All One In Christ (Cont.)

When you put all of us together, we spell "Christian church." Less than forty-eight hours ago, four of us from Bethlehem (Val Gruhn, Justin Burgains, Susan Heimbach, and I) returned from a mission trip to South Africa. We gathered with the people of God in that place, too, and there we were "the church." We made food deliveries to the poorest of the poor. We had prayer in the homes of every family to whom we delivered food. We engaged with children (many of them!) and presented the gospel to them as we taught them English. We went to a special "home" for those with brain and/or traumatic injuries, and we did crafts with them. I preached in our Zulu Lutheran church in Ntsonweni. I communed Pastor Thwala, and he communed me. Together we celebrated Holy Communion with the entire congregation. This was a living picture of the Body of Christ – the church.

Of course, we have a commonality, one thing which binds us into a fellowship and overcomes everything that makes us different. That commonality is Christ. We all, each of us, can say, "I believe in Jesus Christ," and we can say it together. We can say it, not because we all come from the same background but because we are different and have found our unity in Jesus. *"But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another."* 1 John 1:7.

This doesn't just happen overseas, though. This unity happens (and is happening) right here at Bethlehem. Together we recognize our differences and celebrate our unity in Jesus because we are all one in Christ. May it continue and may our Lord continue to bless it to His glory.

God's peace,

Pastor Dana Allen Brown

Summer Inspiration

We are in full swing of it now. Summer. With vacations, church camp, family reunions, and altered schedules with new experiences, it can be a time of inspiration. You know – “inspiration,” that short jolt of motivation that spurs you into action. That moves you from the floor to your feet. This is usually what we mean by the word “inspiration.” And there’s a place for this sort of inspiration. Without it, a lot of personal trainers and lifestyle gurus would be out of a job!

But for Christians, there’s an even more important way of understanding the word “inspiration.” We often refer to this word when we speak of the origins of Holy Scripture. We talk about the Scriptures being inspired. But we don’t mean inspired like a sunset giving you goosebumps, or even like a great piece of literature touching your heart and moving you to action. No. We mean something very different.

In 2 Timothy 3:16 St. Paul says that “all Scripture is breathed out by God.” Here we have another way we can use the word “inspired.” We can use it in relation to the word “breath!” Our English word “inspire” comes to us from the Latin *inspirare*, which means “to breathe or blow into.” Hence, Scripture is, truly, inspired – it is breathed out by God.

What a comforting teaching the doctrine of inspiration is! When we are dealing with the very words of Scripture we are dealing with the very words of God. We don’t have to wonder or guess what God thinks. We don’t have to speculate about what He wants us to know. We have His very own words breathed out. Committed to paper for an enduring record and testimony. (And then very reliably transmitted to us – but that’s a whole other newsletter article!)

Besides inspiration, another thing that comes with summer is busyness. With all the different activities that we’d like to squeeze in, it’s usually not long before we are the ones who are “breathing out” – panting in exhaustion as the world reels around us.

Amid the summer activities (or summer doldrums, if that’s more your style) do not forget about God’s words! Take time for this activity that is more important and valuable than vacations or sunsets or good, sweaty workouts – or whatever other minor things may “inspire” you. God’s desire for your life is that you take time to breathe in the very words that God Himself has breathed out. They are life itself! Summer is the perfect time to renew your habit of worship attendance– where you are almost drenched with God’s words. It’s a great time to start exploring regular Bible Study participation – where you can savor His words like a gourmet meal. Maybe God is giving you this summer as a time to start up the habit of personal, daily Bible reading.

Summer Inspiration (Cont.)

However you do it, make sure to dig ever deeper into God's words this summer. Don't let the opportunity go to waste. The words of Scripture are breathed out by God – which makes them the most trustworthy thing on the planet. Let's breathe them in.

I hope I've inspired you,

Pastor Nate McCarty

VBS Thank-you

As VBS comes to an end, my heart is overflowing with thankfulness, gratitude, and joy. Watching these precious children sing, dance, and praise God with such pure hearts reminds me just how much GOD loves us. I am absolutely amazed by our VBS kids, and I can't stop smiling. I will always count my blessings and pray for VBS.

I was once that new kid who came to Bethlehem Lutheran Church in the summer of 1971. Invited by my Sunday School friends to attend VBS, I had no idea that invitation would begin a lifetime of wonderful VBS summers here in Jax Beach. Seeing generation after generation come through our doors and grow in faith has truly been a mountaintop experience.

Throughout the years, we've shared that God's love is greater than our worries and struggles. Watching our VBS kids embrace that truth has been one of the greatest blessings of my life.

VBS @ BLC is *my* GOD Sighting and I will treasure these memories forever. My prayer is that every child carries God's love, truth, and light as they journey through this wild and ever-changing world.

I want to Thank each and every one of our amazing Leaders and Volunteers, Our Shepherds – Pastor Dana, Pastor Nate, our Vicars, and everyone who has made VBS such a beautiful ministry.

To God be all the glory!
In HIS Grip,
Ms. D

Vicar Caleb's Good-bye

As I get ready to finish my vicarage year here at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, only one thing comes to mind. Especially as I'm the 15th vicar that Bethlehem has had, I constantly ponder the question that would set me apart from all the rest, "how do I want to be remembered?". I think, it's an important question to contemplate, after all, you might not ever see me again. In fact, there's a chance I won't ever be back to BLC, there's a chance I won't ever be back to Jacksonville Beach, and there's a chance I might not ever see any of you again. And I'll just be honest, this makes me deeply sad. Left with all these possibilities, it leaves me pondering that simple question, "how do I want to be remembered?". It's a loaded question, with virtually endless good answers. I came into vicarage not knowing anybody here, yet I leave vicarage sharing an integral and formative year of my life filled with many memorable moments with you all. After this unforgettable year of my life, how do I boil everything down into a single moment, a single sentence, or a single word to remember me? I'm not sure if I can shorten everything down to just one sentence, but let me try. I know it probably won't be unique or special about me or anything, but if there's anything I want you to remember from my one year on vicarage, it's the same thing you get from every vicar, every pastor, every Sunday. Jesus.

As I get ready to leave vicarage I leave that question for you too. When you meet somebody for the first time, what do you hope they remember about you? There's many people in our own lives we pass by, we encounter, where even sometimes this one time we see them might be the only time. If we were to only meet somebody for one time in our lives, what is it that we as Christians hope they remember about us? Believe it or not, this is an opportunity we get every day of our lives, to meet people for the first time, to leave them with one word, a good word, Jesus. The beloved disciple of Jesus, John, lived out this witness. He wrote a whole Gospel, and near the ending of his Gospel, he gives his readers the main purpose for which he is writing to them. He describes the numerous miracles Jesus did throughout his life, and how he did even more as he rose from the dead, but in two verses in John 20, he gives the real reason for writing his Gospel. "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31). As John concludes his Gospel, he sums up his message in one word, Jesus. And it's still the message for you and for me, even today.

I've truly had the most amazing time this past year over my vicarage! It's been so much more than I ever could have imagined! It's truly been my pleasure and blessing to be serving my vicarage here! You, the people, and all the memories I've made here this last year on vicarage have all touched my heart! As I contemplate this question and get ready to leave vicarage, I hope with every other vicar and every other pastor, you remember me, and us, not for who we are or what we do, but the one who gave his life for all of us. Thank you for the blessing you've been to me this past year, and always remember, Jesus!

Vicar Caleb Gustafson

Did you know...?

The Baptismal Font at Bethlehem Lutheran Church is a real shell.



Because Bethlehem Lutheran Church is in the beach area of Jacksonville, it was thought appropriate that the Baptismal Font be in the shape of a seashell. The base is a triangular shape to symbolize the Trinity.

The common name of the shell is a “Man-Killer Clam.” This feels significant as it is in Baptism that the Old Adam is killed and we are made new. The shell’s scientific name is *Gigas Tridacna*. Its native habitat is the South Pacific, most commonly the Fiji Islands and the Philippines. It normally lives in 14-to-16-foot waters. This particular shell is 32 ½ x 22 ½ in span and weighs 155 lbs. These shells became popular as baptismal fonts for coastal churches in the 50's and 60's. They have become rare today-both as baptismal fonts and the clams have become an endangered species. We value this special part of Bethlehem’s church history.

Scripture: Romans 6:3-4

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

This Summer @ BLC...



BLC welcomes our New Member Class 2026



BLC serving in Africa!





BLC High School Youth serving at Camp Linn Haven & North Carolina!



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT BLC JULY & AUGUST

SAT
JULY
4

Happy Fourth of July!

SUN
JULY
5



BLC YOUTH LEAVE FOR CAMPFIRMATION

Arrive at 730 AM and leave after the beginning of 8 AM service.

SAT
JULY
6

BLC SENIOR SHUFFLERS

9:30 AM

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



THURS
JULY
16

MEN'S BIBLE STUDY

6 PM

Join us as we meditate on God's Word with our brothers in Christ!

SUN
JULY
26

Vicar Caleb's Last SUNDAY!

MON
AUG
3

Vicar Micah & Family arrive!

Come and help us Vicar Micah and his family move into the Vicarage house. Pizza and Lutheran beverages provided.



SUN
AUG
9

Installation and Welcome Luncheon of Vicar Micah

MON
AUG
10

Happy First Day of School!

Prayers to all our BLC students for safety and a great first day!



SAT
AUG
22



Tanner Olson & Josh Wilson Concert

7 PM: Free entry & Iced Coffee Bar with Free Will Donation

If you have anything you would like to add to What's Happening at BLC- please email the church office at officeadmin@bethlehemlutheranjaxbeach.org

ELDERS

SUN: 7/5

8: Jamie-EIC
& Jon W.
930: John H.-EIC
11: Rob H.-EIC
& Bruce

SUN: 7/12

8: Gordon
& Jon W.
930: Joe-EIC
11: Alex-EIC
& Allan

SUN: 7/19

8: Paul-EIC
& Jamie
930: Joe-EIC
& John
11: Dennis-EIC
& Brandon

SUN: 7/26

8: Paul-EIC
& Jon W.
930: Joe-EIC
11: Dan H.-EIC
& Dan R.

ALTAR GUILD

SAT SET-UP: 7/4

Tami
SUN: 7/5
8: Nancy
930: Barbara
11: Diana

SAT SET-UP: 7/11

Carol
SUN: 7/12
8: Susan
930: Nina
11:

SAT SET-UP: 7/18

Anna
SUN: 7/19
8: Valerie
930: Tami
11: Diana

SAT SET-UP: 7/25

Dee R.
SUN: 7/26
8: Carol
930: Valerie
11: Beth

SAT SET-UP: 8/1

Tami
SUN: 8/2
8: Nancy
930: Brenda
11: Diana

SAT SET-UP: 8/8

Dee R.
SUN: 8/9
8: Valerie
930: Barbara
11: Diana

SAT SET-UP: 8/15

Carol
SUN: 8/16
8: Susan
930: Nina
11: Beth

SAT SET-UP: 8/22

Anna
SUN: 8/26
8: Carol
930: Tami
11: Beth

SAT SET-UP: 8/29

Dee R.
SUN: 8/30
8: Nancy
930:
11:

SCREENS

7/5:

8: Patrick
930: Kristine
11: Gina

7/12:

8: Val
930: Brenda
11: Roy

7/19:

8: Victoria
930: Romaine
11: Lloyd

7/26:

8: Carol
930: Chris
11: Toni

8/2:

8: Patrick
930: Kristine
11: Gina

8/9:

8: Val
930: Tami
11: Toni

8/16:

8: Carol
930: Brenda
11: Lloyd

8/23:

8: Susan
930: Chris
11: Roy

8/30:

8: Carol
930: Romaine
11: Lloyd

COUNTING

7/5:

Diane/Barbie

7/12:

Bob/Allan

7/19:

Paul/Gordon

7/26:

Terry/Barbara

8/2:

Diane/Barbie

8/9:

Holly/Bob

8/16:

Gordon/Allan

8/23:

Bob/Terry

8/30:

Paul/Holly

STREAMING

6/7:

Jerry

6/14:

Brandon

6/21:

Jeannie

6/28:

Bob



Birthdays

JULY BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES

Carole	Barry	7/1	Gordon	Gruhn	7/17
Ivy	Richards	7/1	Dan	Tostovarsnik	7/17
Oliver	Stanfield	7/2	Sam	Florey	7/18
Koh	Zapata	7/2	Richard	Raddant	7/18
Jean	Christ	7/4	Susan	Findell	7/19
Renee	Hornsby	7/4	Rachel	Leaptrott	7/19
Brian	Kientz	7/4	William	Magill	7/20
Otto	Gruhn	7/5	Olivia	Harrison	7/21
Marvin	Ley	7/5	Tammy	Barley	7/22
Kristine	Perryman	7/5	Matt	Reichard	7/22
Emily	Will	7/5	Lily	Wuggazer	7/22
Paul	Gundian	7/6	Samantha	Maloney	7/23
Elijah	Addison	7/7	GINNY	Collins	7/26
Renee	Boone	7/7	Janet	Wiegmann	7/26
Bruce	Dellinger	7/7	Amy	Case	7/27
Catalina	Carr	7/8	Jon	Wuggazer	7/27
Summer	Dellinger	7/8	Jim	Schrader	7/28
Morgan	OConnor	7/8	Barbara	Larson	7/30
David	Thiemann	7/8	Luke	Huber	7/31
Paul	Huber	7/9			
Amanda	Beaty	7/10			
Larry	Hosley	7/10			
Zachary	Harms	7/11			
Jan	Dablow	7/12			
Paul	Briggs	7/13			
Andrew	Sherrill	7/13			
Susan	Albrecht	7/15			
Diane	Brones	7/15			
Jessica	Skorusa	7/15			
Freya	Helberg	7/16			
Ace	Lee	7/16			
Angela	Orzeske	7/16			

Anniversaries

Dee & Terry Parker	July 1 st
Erica & Pas. Nate McCarty	July 3 rd
Linda & Stephen Reed	July 11 th
Danielle & Nick Huckaba	July 13 th
Zhendy & Ayden Zarski	July 19 th
Nancy & Bernie Brewer	July 25 th
Jan & Dan Dablow	July 25 th
Tammy & Ron Zarski	July 25 th

AUGUST BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES



Birthdays

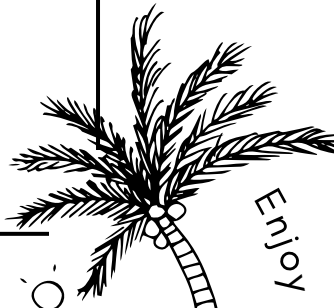
Remington	Heilig	8/4	Henry	Huckaba	8/25
Addison	Siebenaler	8/5	Brenda	Johnson	8/25
Kyle	Wilhelm	8/5	Shirley	Kirkman	8/25
Harry	Baum	8/6	Steve	Florey	8/28
Dennis	Reese	8/6	Wes	Kuehlthau	8/28
Edward	Boyajian	8/8	Ryott	De Los Santos	8/29
Monica	Cook	8/8	Mary Ann	Lawrence	8/29
Barbara	Cooper	8/8	Lynn	McGiveron	8/29
Erika	Gajdos	8/8	Rob	Wortelboer	8/29
Marianne	Johnson	8/8	Kimberly	Cotea	8/30
John	Potratz	8/8	Diana	Clawson	8/31
Lynda	Potratz	8/9			
Patricia	Burgains	8/10			
Saralyn	Crafton	8/10			
Dennis	LaForty	8/11			
Brock	Blaine	8/12			
Shelly	Sly	8/12			
Matthew	Smith	8/14			
Isaiah	Harrison	8/15			
Al	Clawson	8/16			
Sandy	Parker	8/16			
Judie	Knudtson	8/18			
Logan	Skorusa	8/18			
Karen	Wilhelm	8/19			
Kathy	Lawler	8/21			
Stephen	Reed	8/21			
Anna-lise	DeLos Santos	8/22			
Julio	Gundian	8/22			
Kristine	Gundian	8/22			
Darlene	Maxwell	8/22			
Tom	Barry	8/23			
Laurie	Brauer	8/23			



Anniversaries

Janine & David Thiemann	August 1 st
Stephanie & Christopher Stubbs	August 3 rd
Vicki & Paul Green	August 6 th
Amanda & Braden Radtke	August 8 th
Alanna & Dan Tostovarsnik	August 8 th
Darlene & Billy Maxwell	August 12 th
Kathy & John Poe	August 12 th
Barbara & Ronald Benedick	August 23 rd
Beverly & Russ Furtick	August 24 th
Erika & Joshua Gajdos	August 25 th
Brenda & Robert Murray	August 26 th
Polly & Robert Navarro	August 27 th
Judiane & Larry Hosley	August 29 th
Teri & Brian Kientz	August 30 th
Joan & Jeff Carr	August 31 st
Karen & John Woodsmall	August 31 st

JULY 2026

			1	2 930 AM Vicar's Bible Study 630 PM BLC YA Bible Study	3	4  4TH OF July
5  Camp Linn Haven Campfirmation Leaves at 8 AM	6 930 AM Senior Cards 	7	8	9 930 AM Vicar's Last Bible Study	10	11  Enjoy your summer!
12 8/ 930/ 11 AM Service 930 Sunday School- Adults	13	14	15	16 6 PM- Men's Bible Study	17 	
19 8/ 930/ 11 AM Service 930 Sunday School- Adults	20	21	22	23	24  BLC YA Tye-Dye 6 PM Upper Room	25
26 Vicar Caleb's Last Sunday	27	28 630 PM- Exec. Council	29	30	31	

We will miss you!

AUGUST 2026

						1
2	} 930 AM Senior Cards Vicar Micah & fam move-in & BLC welcome!		5	6	7	8
9	10 First Day of School! 	11 630 PM- Elders' Meeting	12	13	14	15
16 8/ 930/ 11 AM Service 930 Sunday School	17	18				
23	24	25 630 PM- Exec. Council	26	27	28	29
30	31					