



# The Star of Bethlehem

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February 2021

## WHAT'S GOD UP TO?

Jesus taught that not even a sparrow falls from its nest without the Father's knowledge (Matthew 10:29). This whole mess of pandemic and world turmoil is not some cosmic accident. Nor is God out to get us. He makes the sun rise on evil people and good people alike, Jesus says, and he sends rain for the unjust as well as the just (Matthew 5:45). The virus and the many other world events going on around us fall within the boundaries of his good and gracious will. Yet his will remains inscrutable to us mere mortals.

So, don't try and figure out God's attitude toward you by reading the tea leaves of the times. Yes, stay informed, but always remember that God already showed you his heart when he gave his Son to death for you and raised him up to life again. At the cross he revealed his will for all the world to see: God is love! *"Neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation (including Covid-19 and this world's political battles) will ever be able to separate us from his love in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:38-39).

Despite his love for us, God never promised us a rose garden. In fact, just the opposite. Jesus warned us: *"In the world you will have tribulation"* (John 16:33). Like Humpty Dumpty, the world has taken a bad fall from its initial perfection. Yet even in this fallen world all things work together for good for God's beloved children. Hardship, suffering, sickness, and even death serve to draw us ever closer to the God who is at his best when things are at their worst. In life's tight spots, we can learn dependence on our Father in heaven, who made us all and ransomed us with the blood of his dear Son. He gives daily bread to all creation, yet so easily we forget to give him thanks for everything we need to support this body and life. *"Even the hairs of your head are all numbered, and you are of far more value than many sparrows"* (Matthew 10:30-31).

How long this plague and political unrest will last, no one *really* knows. But we can be sure that God will use it, too, for our good. By hardships and perils God seeks to draw us ever closer to himself. As gold is purified through fire, he seeks to cleanse our faith of impurities so we can see him more clearly, love him more dearly, and follow him more nearly.

In these latter days, look for how the contaminates in your life are being laid bare and stripped away. Are you noticing yourself longing for closer ties with people near and dear to you? I sure am, including each of you my dear brothers and sisters at Bethlehem. Are you learning to prize once more the simple things you never made time for before? I am, including more time for prayer and more time listening to God. What important lessons are we learning as a church in this situation? As peripheral and secondary trappings have been stripped away, it is dawning on us that only one thing is actually needful? Sitting with Jesus, giving rapt attention to his Word and prayer, is far more important than the frenzied scurrying around we've come to expect in American church life.

*"In this [salvation] you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:6-7).

We are slow learners. But God has captured our attention during these difficult days. By his grace, may our households and churches alike emerge cleansed and refined for joyful service to Christ's glory and honor.

In His service . . . and yours,  
Pastor Dana Allen Brones  
Jude 24-25

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**Bethlehem Lutheran Church**  
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# February Birthdays & Anniversaries

1 David Thies	12 Julie Truax
2 Wyatt Briggs	13 Lori Bennett
Nitasha Mazzeo	Sven Helberg
Erica McCarty	Mark Starkey
3 Logan Hunter	15 Daniel & Janelle Heumann
Stephen Smith	Niles Jehn
5 Thomas Ford	Asher Randolph
6 Janelle Heumann	16 Deborah Donnelly
Madilyn Wert	Eleanor LoCricchio
7 Douglas Brauer	17 Deborah Addis
Christian Carr	Smith Mattila
Jake Clawson	Elliott Randolph
Christopher Johnson	19 Allan Werner
Doug Peacock	20 Nathanael Adams
Barbara Zikeli	Teri Kientz
8 Dale Mills	Chad Lee
Steven Pietrasiuk	Rebekah Romer
Mariah Thies-Johnson	23 Jim Pitts
9 Edward & Lorna Boyajian	Jeremy Randolph
Charlotte Cobb	Linda Tester
Stephen Corbitt	26 Allan & Lisa Werner
11 Larry Corbett	27 Carol Jehn
12 Ethan Barrett	Neil Robar
Robbie May	

If your birthday or anniversary has been missed, please contact the office at 249-5418.

## Altar Flowers

You can remember or mark a special occasion with Altar Flowers? Each of the beautiful arrangements are \$30 per vase and a sign-up sheet for each Sunday of the year is in the Narthex. This is a great way to acknowledge a birthday, anniversary, and to remember a loved one who has gone before. You can choose to take them home with you after the 11 am service or mark for them to be delivered to a homebound congregant or someone in the hospital. Please put your donation in the offering plate and mark it for altar flowers or mail it to the church.

## If you would like to volunteer:

Screens—Romaine Moore @ 422-2881  
 Altar—Val Gruhn @ 536-2912  
 8 am greeters—Anna Arno @ 223-1766  
 9:30 greeters—Joan Richards @ 463-6703  
 11 am greeters—Jean Shimp @ 249-2040  
 BFF—Holly Dellinger @ 349-6059

# Stewardship

	<b>Dec 2019</b>	<b>Dec 2020</b>
<b>Monthly Totals:</b>	\$114,394.26	\$86,009.20
<i>Restricted:</i>	\$12,658.76	\$14,250.97
<b>YTD Totals:</b>	<b><u>\$731,826.75</u></b>	<b><u>\$705,383.36</u></b>
<i>Restricted:</i>	\$72,329.67	\$70,692.24
<b>Operating Totals:</b>	\$659,497.08	\$634,691.12

## December Attendance

<b>Date</b>	<b>8 am</b>	<b>9:30 am</b>	<b>11am</b>	<b>Total</b>
Dec 1, 2019	65	85	89	239
Dec 6, 2020	39	52	75	166
Dec 8, 2019	74	92	88	254
Dec 13, 2020	34	58	60	152
Dec 15, 2019	82	96	116	284
Dec 20, 2020	49	63	58	170
Dec 22, 2019	74	104	69	247
Dec 27, 2020	26	49	44	119
Dec 24, 2019	543			
Dec 24, 2020	182			
Dec 25, 2019	72			
Dec 25, 2020	46			
Dec 29, 2019	66	103	67	236
Jan 3, 2021	virtual only			

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for the latest in news,  
photos and fun!**

## Schedule for February

		<u>Screens</u>	<u>Altar</u>	<u>Video</u>
<u>Feb. 7</u>	8 am	Pat	Tami	Val
	9:30 am	Avery		Barb
	11 am	Gina		Bonnie
<u>Feb. 14</u>	8 am	Val	Jenn	Susan
	9:30 am	Tami		Val
	11 am	Toni		Beth
<u>Feb. 17</u>			Jenn	Susan
<u>Feb 21</u>	8 am	Sam	Anna	Val
	9:30 am	Landon		Tami
	11 am	Angela		Kathy
<u>Feb. 24</u>			Tami	Beth
<u>Feb 28</u>	8 am	Susan	Carol	Susan
	9:30 am	Candace		Carol
	11 am	Carol		Diana
				Dan

*Thank you for your service*

# Love One Another: What Does This Mean?

Words from Jesus: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

More words from Jesus: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:37-39)

Well, folks, February is here. The month of Valentines Day. The month of looove. Love is a big topic. Of course, there is romantic love. That's a gift from God for certain stages in life. But there's also a more universal love that all His people are called to all the time. And that's what He's talking about in these verses. It does make me wonder, though, how does this love play out in a time marked by Covid? Does Valentine's Day, does life in general, look different for the Christian who is trying to follow the word of Jesus during this unusual, viral situation? What can these verses teach us about the love our God would have us show? Well... a lot! (But I've only got room for four!)

#1 – Jesus is clear. Our first love, commitment, priority, (whatever you want to call it) is to be God. Not money, not family, not health, not safety. God. His words. His ways for our life. Above every other concern. (See Luther's catechisms on the first commandment for lots more on this!) This is always the hardest commandment to keep. According to my sinful nature, I am inclined to put... well... anything, at times, above my love for God. I do it daily. Thankfully, my Savior's love for me is greater than my love for Him! Thank you, kind Lord!

#2 – Our love isn't *only* directed toward God, it's also directed toward our neighbor. But what does that look like? Often, we think of love in terms of a warm embrace or close, comforting contact. That's an important way love can be communicated. That's also why this pandemic has been so challenging for some many people, particularly those already prone to loneliness. Love is shown by presence. But at times, love to others can also be shown by keeping a little distance, sitting every other pew, washing our hands - yes, even wearing a mask can be done out of love... Which leads to another insight.

3# Love isn't pleasant. Love isn't about what you want to do, or what makes you happy. Forget the hallmark cards. Jesus tells us to love one another as He loved us. Folks, the way He loved us was by being tortured and killed. A Christian love is always a self-sacrificial love. Doing things you may not really want to do. I heard someone once say, "If it doesn't cost you anything, it probably isn't love." I think that's true...

#4 "By this all people will know you are my disciples." Our love for God above all other things and our self-sacrificial love for our neighbor are both acts of witness. It stands out to the world because this is not how the world loves. What a gift we have in Christian love! How we love is one way that God has chosen to make Himself know to the world. As we approach Lent, let's redouble our efforts to prioritize our God above all things, to love each other self-sacrificially, and to be the witness to the world that we were born again to be. One of the best ways we can do all that is by being present for the Word of the One we love – even if distanced a bit. May you have a blessed Valentine's Day and Lent!

Lord willing, I will see many of you on Wednesdays,

Pastor Nathan

## Dear friends in Christ at Bethlehem,

Greetings in this New Year to you through our Lord Jesus in whom we have new and eternal life!

Physical health and well-being often dominate our thinking, even in 'normal' times and certainly much more over these last 12 months. To many who are reading this, you may have suffered, or are suffering, in a physical way. Not just virus-induced concerns, but basic health matters are always before us. We live out our lives in these tents (2 Cor. 5) until we have our eternal bodies and souls in heaven with our Lord. In that we have hope, even in the midst of the real challenges of our earthly life. However this note may find you as a congregation of individuals, we pray God's blessings of grace, mercy, and peace.

Like most of the world, we look back at 2020 and see how our daily lives changed. In the midst of the adjustments, God provided opportunities for our family to remain active in the ministry to which we have been called here in East Asia. That is, though the Advent, Christmas, and holiday season felt slightly less frantic, we were grateful to share the message of Christ's coming into the world for our salvation.

Lily and Olivia (9th and 7th grade) have recently returned to school after the winter break and are now able to attend classes in a hybrid manner - some days virtually at home, some days physically at school. Dee Dee's work at the orphanages has continued, though principally through learning packets, video messages, and care packages. I haven't physically traveled to our other ministry sites for over 12 months now, but have had plenty of opportunity to utilize technology to support and encourage our teams there. In-person church-based ministry has been reduced, but other digital and recorded means have enabled us to share, in some instances, with even more people. At home, our regular practice of welcoming people to our table has certainly been affected by local restrictions and we look forward to a return to that aspect of our ministry.

As we get caught up with our end-of-the-year communications, we learned of a donation from Bethlehem. We are very grateful that you remembered us once again and have shown your concern and support in this extremely generous way. Such a gift encourages us mightily in our efforts to fundraise 100% of our support. As always, your prayers are also critically important. In sum, we are very thankful for your partnership in all the ways it takes shape. Thank you so much.

May our Lord guard and protect you all, in body and soul, through Jesus.

Matt, for the family (Dee Dee, Lily, and Olivia) - LCMS missionaries in East Asia

# The Hidden Power of Prayer

People often can't know what prayer can do. It is rare for God to verbally respond to our prayers, and we often don't get to see the fruit of our labors. This is especially the case when we are praying for people we don't even know. When an elderly lady prays for Muslims to be converted to Christ, she doesn't get to see the results God is working. No one from Iran calls her to say how many have come to Christ as the result of her prayers. When we don't get to see the fruit of our prayers, we can often be discouraged from praying.

David Garrison is a scholar of Islam and works to send missionaries to Muslim people groups around the world. He's also studied extensively movements where large numbers of Muslims converted to Christ. One day, Garrison was approached by a friend of his who said he was interested in finding statistics from the last 24 years. Could Garrison find any statistical data about Muslims becoming Christians in that time period. Garrison went to work, analyzing all the data he could find. What he found was that, in the 14 centuries since Islam came into existence, 84% of documentable movements of Muslims converting to Christ have happened in the last 24 years.

Eighty four percent is quite a sizable percentage, but Garrison wondered about why his friend had chosen 24 years as the amount of time needed to study. Why not the last 25 years? Or 50? Or even 100? Turns out, his friend started a ministry called 30 Days of Prayer for the Muslim World 24 years prior in 1993, which as its name suggests, is a ministry which equips and encourages Christians to spend intentional time in prayer for the Muslim world. Many churches joined on to spend time in prayer, but they never knew what results their prayers were making, if any.

Let this be an encouragement to you. The little old ladies of Alabama may have never seen fruit of their prayers for Muslims, but God was working in and through their prayers. God is also working through your prayers in ways you cannot see. It's nice when we get to see the fruit of our prayers, but you and I both know that it doesn't always work out like that. I wonder how much God uses our prayers, and the answer will only be found in eternity.

Jesus urges us to always pray and never give up (Luke 18:1). The reason for this is our heavenly Father loves us abundantly. We may not see the results, but God is working. Things may not work out like we expect, but God is working. And when we pray, God is also shaping our own hearts as well, so that we may show the love of Jesus in us. This month, I'd like to ask you to pray intentionally for others, those close to you as well as those you'll never meet.

God bless you,  
Vicar Andrew Simpson



"There are two ways to live: you can live as if nothing is a miracle; you can live as if everything is a miracle. The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed." -- Albert Einstein

If you feel you might have lost your sense of wonder, go to [enchroma.com](http://enchroma.com) and check out their "reaction videos". They make special eyeglasses for colorblind people. They don't always work, but when they do...wow. "You see this every day? This is what you see **all the time**?" That was the reaction of one young man who, between leaping and hopping as though he had just won the lottery, whooping for joy, and standing stock-still just staring at things, saw vivid colors for the first time in his life. It was there all along. He had just never really seen it before.

A 65 year old former professional wrestler who vowed he would not get emotional – "I've seen those videos of people getting emotional. I've been beat up by some of the biggest guys in the world. I'm not going to get emotional." – wept almost instantly as he stood gawking at trees and grass and a child's pool filled with balloons and then melted into humble gratitude. There all the while, really seen for the first time. That seems to be the most common reaction to seeing full color for the first time: instant weeping, emotional overload, a blast of glorious wonderment, and hugs all around, no matter how tough you thought you were.

Of the eight or so videos I watched, none of the recipients bought their own glasses. Those babies are \$300 or so a pop. Each one was gifted by friends or family who knew what their loved one was missing. The joy of wonderment is best shared, it seems. And maybe sometimes we need somebody who knows what we're missing to show us what we don't know we're missing.

Creation has no problem maintaining and producing constant wonderment. Her stewards, on the other hand, seem bent toward closing their eyes to it, as AI reminded us above. We seem prone to forgetting that we are also part and parcel of Creation ourselves. Epiphany opens our eyes again to the wonder of God joining His creation personally and pitching his tent in our midst - and sleeping in it, even. Lent calls us to consider again God's faithful march to the cross to become enthroned as the one true King of all creation, who brings re-creation in the form of grace, mercy and peace.

So sure, give up something for Lent. Give up something to be more mindful of the splendor and wonder of our Savior and his costly love abundantly given to restore what was lost. There is so much we all have already given up this past year, and I know we would all appreciate a hug from a friend, a meal in a real restaurant loud with conversation, a face free to smile and shake hands all around. How about the joy of hearing the laughter of loved ones in person or touching a beloved face? How about the color everywhere we look? Giving something up but maybe also taking something up. Go outside, look around. What wonders to behold. It's hard to look at things, at people, as if you're seeing them for the first time. But it can be given. It's a gift, from someone who knows what we've been missing. Lord, please show us what we have been missing, but has been right in front of us all along.

Dave Horn

# SENIOR GAME DAY

Monday, February 1

*Hand and Foot*

Disciples Hall at 9:15 am

Please wear your mask

Talk with MaryAnn Lawrence 708-9492



*Happy  
Valentine's  
Day*

## Bethlehem Lutheran Preschool Mission Statement

We exist to proclaim Christ's love and forgiveness to children and their families. To that end, our experienced, loving teachers provide the highest quality care and education for infants and children in a safe Christian Preschool

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### Philosophy

We believe that a Christian home is the most important factor in a child's development. We complement the Christian family in order to promote the child's healthy development. We believe children deserve a nurturing, safe, and happy Christian environment which promotes their natural curiosity, play and desire to learn. We believe in the promise found in Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is older he will not leave it."

We believe that teaching and living Christ's love, trust, respect, and forgiveness makes children capable of loving, trusting, respecting, and forgiving others. By teaching and modeling Christian ideals, we want children to develop spiritually as well as physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually. We integrate the faith in all curriculums as we want them to grow and develop as Jesus did: "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" Luke 2:52. The curriculum provides our children with a quality Christian education that will help them develop to the fullest of their capabilities and help them to realize that they are children of God.

We hire Christian teachers who are capable and caring, and whose Christian values and lifestyle enable them to fulfill this Christian vocation. They help lead their class in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior and it is through him that we have eternal life. All activities are centered on this premise.

## Who Can Help You at BLC

Altar Guild	Val Gruhn	904-536-2912
Baptism	Church Office	904-249-5418
Bible Study	Rev. Keith Bicknase	904-249-5418
	Alex Limbaugh	904-219-5044
	Carol Pietrasiuk	904-536-2871
Coffee Fellowship	Carol Pietrasiuk	904-536-2871
Columbarium	Val Gruhn	904-536-2912
Constant Contact	Carol Pietrasiuk	904-536-2871
Elders	Gordon Gruhn	904-838-6585
Facebook	Office	904-249-5418
Fellowship	Brenda Murray	904-220-0447
Funerals	Church Office	904-249-5418
8:00 Greeters	Anna Arno	904-223-1766
9:30 Greeters	Joan Richards	904-463-6703
11:00 Greeters	Jean Shimp	904-249-2040
Hand bells	Kristine Perryman	904-536-0826
Kitchen cleanup	Carol Pietrasiuk	904-536-2871
Mail Ministry	Office	904-249-5418
Mission House	Brenda Murray	904-220-0447
Newsletter Articles	Church Office	904-249-5418
Outreach	Holly Dellinger	904-349-6059
Prayer Ministry	Church Office	904-249-5418
Preschool	Pat May	904-249-1204
Property	Brian Kientz	904-616-3361
Screen Operators	Romaine Moore	904-422-2881
Senior Card Day	MaryAnn Lawrence	904-246-3279
Sunday School	Deb Donnelly	904-241-4062
8:00 Ushers	Susan Heimbach	904-307-1917
9:30 Ushers	Donny Barley	904-955-3838
11:00 Ushers	Allan Werner	904-223-0939
VBS	Darlene Maxwell	904-307-9078
Weddings	Church Office	904-249-5418

## Online Worship-Live Stream

We are live streaming our traditional Worship Service at 11 am every Sunday on the BLC Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/BethlehemLutheranChurchandPreschool](http://www.facebook.com/BethlehemLutheranChurchandPreschool)) and our 9:30 Family Service on the BLC Periscope site <https://www.periscope.tv>

Sunday services will still be available later on YouTube [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com) Search for; Bethlehem Lutheran Church Jax Beach

Ash  
Wednesday

February 17, 2021

*Wed. noon & 7 pm*

Feb. 24th, March 3, 10, 17, 24th

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<p>31</p> <p><b>The Purification of Mary and the</b>                      8am - Liturgical Worship-                      9:30am - "Misfit" Bible Study-                      9:30am - Adult Bible Study-                      9:30am - Contemporary                      11am - Liturgical Worship w/                      12:30pm - 8th grade</p>	<p>1</p> <p>9:30am - Senior Game Day @</p>	<p>2</p> <p>9:30am - Preschool Chapel @                      11am - Staff Meeting @                      5:30pm - 7th Grade Confirmation                      7pm - Adult Bible Study @</p>	<p>3</p> <p>9:30am - Preschool Chapel @                      11am - Staff Meeting @                      5:30pm - 7th Grade Confirmation                      7pm - Adult Bible Study @</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>6</p> <p>8am - Gideon's prayer meeting                      10am - Praise Team Rehearsal @                      11am - Gens Tonn Columbarium</p>
<p>7</p> <p><b>Fifth S. a. the Epiphany</b>                      8am - Liturgical Worship @                      9:30am - "Misfit" Bible Study @                      9:30am - Adult Bible Study @                      9:30am - Contemporary Worship                      11am - Liturgical Worship w/                      12:30pm - 8th grade</p>	<p>8</p> <p>7pm - Elder's Meeting @</p>	<p>9</p> <p>9:30am - Preschool Chapel @                      11am - Staff Meeting @                      5:30pm - 7th Grade Confirmation                      7pm - Adult Bible Study @</p>	<p>10</p> <p>9:30am - Preschool Chapel @                      11am - Staff Meeting @                      5:30pm - 7th Grade Confirmation                      7pm - Adult Bible Study @</p>	<p>11</p>	<p>12</p>	<p>13</p> <p>8am - Gideon's prayer meeting                      10am - Praise Team Rehearsal @</p>
<p>14</p> <p><b>Transfiguration of our Lord</b>                      Valentine's Day                      8am - Liturgical Worship @                      9:30am - "Misfit" Bible Study @                      9:30am - Adult Bible Study @                      9:30am - Contemporary Worship                      11am - Liturgical Worship w/                      12:30pm - 8th grade</p>	<p>15</p> <p>President's Day-Preschool</p>	<p>16</p> <p>Shrove Tuesday/Mardi Gras</p>	<p>17</p> <p>Ash Wednesday                      9:30am - Preschool Chapel @                      12pm - Worship                      1pm - Staff Meeting @ Disciples'                      5:30pm - 7th Grade Confirmation                      7pm - Worship</p>	<p>18</p> <p>9am - Circuit Pastor's</p>	<p>19</p> <p>6pm - BLC supports Mission</p>	<p>20</p> <p>8am - Gideon's prayer meeting                      10am - Praise Team Rehearsal @</p>
<p>21</p> <p><b>Feed My Sheep Sunday @</b>                      First Sunday in Lent                      8am - Liturgical Worship @                      9:30am - "Misfit" Bible Study @                      9:30am - Adult Bible Study @                      9:30am - Contemporary Worship                      11am - Liturgical Worship w/                      12:30pm - 8th grade</p>	<p>22</p>	<p>23</p> <p>7pm - Executive Council Meeting</p>	<p>24</p> <p>9:30am - Preschool Chapel @                      12pm - Worship                      1pm - Staff Meeting @ Disciples'                      5:30pm - 7th Grade Confirmation                      7pm - Worship</p>	<p>25</p>	<p>26</p>	<p>27</p> <p>8am - Gideon's prayer meeting                      10am - Praise Team Rehearsal @</p>
<p>28</p> <p><b>Mites Sunday</b>                      Second Sunday in Lent                      8am - Liturgical Worship @                      9:30am - "Misfit" Bible Study @                      9:30am - Adult Bible Study @                      9:30am - Contemporary Worship                      11am - Liturgical Worship w/                      12:30pm - 8th grade</p>	<p>1</p> <p>St. David's Day                      9:30am - Senior Game Day @</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3</p> <p>9:30am - Preschool Chapel @                      1pm - Staff Meeting @ Disciples'                      5:30pm - 7th Grade Confirmation                      7pm - Adult Bible Study @</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Men's Retreat @ Luther Springs Camp and Conference Center, 264</p>	<p>6</p> <p>8am - Gideon's prayer meeting                      10am - Praise Team Rehearsal @</p>