The Star of Bethlehem



January 2021

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Out on a hillside in Israel, confronted by a throng of hungry people who only had in mind to see a miracle or two, Jesus, for all the fact He solicited suggestions from his closest followers, had a plan and a solution in mind. The testimony of Scripture is clear: "He already had in mind what he was going to do" (John 6:6).

Recall the story. Jesus, acting baffled, asked, "Where will we buy bread for these people to eat?" He got at least two answers which have armed preachers with ammunition for lectures on faithlessness and sermons on irresponsibility for centuries. "Eight months wages wouldn't get the job done." That was one reply. "We've got access to five barley loaves and two small fish. Woefully inadequate." That was the other reply. But Jesus knew what he was going to do.

God knows the answer. Our minds may be befuddled, but there is a mind which is not. What a heartening thought that is for us in the face of some of the difficult things which threaten us today. Many in our midst are facing threats previously unknown in their lifetime. Covid-19 has affected all of us and infected some of us. Isolation has taken a huge toll on the elderly and shut-in population. The lonely are even more lonely than before. There has been financial devastation for small busines owners and their employees and many have been forced to shut down. The political scene has been unsettling. Wars and rumors of wars continue. The list goes on and on.

Well, I believe there is hope for A.D. 2021. After all, A.D. (Anno Domini) stands for "in the year of our Lord." Indeed, it is! To know that whatever our problem, whatever the challenge, God knows about it, and while we are still casting about for some solution, some way to gear ourselves up for whatever comes next, God has it figured out. He knows how it will be handled and solved and met, how we are going to come through. And we will!

There on that hillside the crowd would be fed. But the disciples had to grope around a little before it would get done. It is the same story for us. The solutions to our problems, whatever they may be, are already determined, and God is simply helping us to find the path out of our proverbial woods which have been placed there. The Evil One may have placed these menaces in our paths for the purposes of evil but our Lord can and does turn them into good.

I'm not sure how much will be resolved in A.D. 2021 but I do know that our Lord is with us. For one thing, He has given us a vaccine to help in the fight against Covid-19. Perhaps we can begin A.D. 2021 by thanking the Lord for that gift and then praising Him for His promise never to leave us. In that promise we rejoice in our hope for the future as we continue to live under the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ.



My prayer for you, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is that our heavenly King would guide us through the complex problems which beset us and that He would give us wisdom, strength, and courage for the rigors of our daily life. Above all, I pray God give us the confidence which comes from knowing that He walks with us and knows the path and guarantees that we will make it safely home.

In His service . . . and yours, Pastor Dana Allen Brones

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January Birthdays & Anniversaries

1-Jan 1-Jan 1-Jan 3-Jan 3-Jan 5-Jan 5-Jan 6-Jan 7-Jan 7-Jan 7-Jan 8-Jan	David & Barbara Jacobs Joe McHan Annie Moffitt Jeff Carr Gloria Gregg Stephen Huber Dorothy Loftin George Zikeli Kameryn Roberts Sobra Horn Aliya Smith Debra Smith Austin Duensing Leland Lammle	14-Jan 15-Jan 16-Jan 16-Jan 17-Jan 19-Jan 19-Jan 19-Jan 19-Jan 20-Jan 20-Jan	Melissa Starkey Vann Parrish Adelle Edwards Arielle Edwards Erroll Tom Mason Gray Al & Diana Clawson Kathy & Mike Lawler Holly Simpson Stacie Stanfield Jan Thackston Elizabeth Dellinger Melissa Estervig Janice Flock
9-Jan 10-Jan	Tyler Zarski Tripp Singleton	23-Jan 24-Jan	Ann Cirillo Mark Christ
11-Jan	Erik Hunter	24-Jan	
11-Jan		26-Jan	Larry Orr
11-Jan	Jamie Seim	27-Jan	AJ Alenduff
12-Jan		27-Jan	Mary Dorsett
12-Jan	Roger Roman	28-Jan	John Hill
13-Jan	Christopher Gregor	28-Jan	Nancy Russell
13-Jan	Courtney Ray	28-Jan	Gabriel Smith
14-Jan	Paula & Steve Garrett	29-Jan	Connie Machurick
14-Jan	Connie Machurick		

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

Altar Flowers

& Danny

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

<u>If you would like to volunteer:</u>

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

	Nov 2019	Nov 2020
Monthly Totals:	\$ 53,403.59	\$ 71,483.99
Restricted:	\$7,331.35	\$5,059.50
YTD Totals:	\$617,432.49 \$50,670.01	\$619,374.16
	\$59.670.91	\$56.441.27

Like us on Facebook and Instagram for the latest in news, photos and fun!

November Attendance

Date	8 am	9:30 am	11am	<u>Total</u>
Nov 3, 2019	79	81	79	239
Nov 1, 2020	44	51	63	158
Nov 10, 2019	63	76	82	221
Nov 8, 2020	44	52	60	156
Nov 17, 2019	52	90	86	228
Nov 15, 2020	38	57	37	132
Nov 24, 2019	79	72	96	250
Nov 22, 2020	31	49	52	132

SENIOR GAME DAY

Monday, January 3 *Hand and Foot*

Disciples Hall at 9:15 am Please wear your mask

Talk with MaryAnn Lawrence 708-9492

Schedule for January

		Screens	Alta	ar	Elders
<u>Jan. 3</u>	8 am	Pat	Tami	Val	Paul & Gordon
	9:30 am	Tami		Brenda	Bernie & David
	11 am	Gina		Kathy	Dan
<u>Jan. 10</u>	8 am	Sam	Jenn	Val	Paul & AJ
	9:30 am	Candice		Tami	Bernie & Al
	11 am	Carol		Diana	Dan & Al
<u>Jan. 17</u>	8 am	Val	Tami	Val	Paul & AJ
	9:30 am	Kristine		Val	Bernie & Paul
	11 am	Angela		Bonnie	Dan & Bruce
<u>Jan. 24</u>	8 am	Pat	Carol	Val	Gordon & AJ
	9:30 am	Avery		Tami	Bernie & David
	11 am	Toni		Carol	Alex & Al
<u>Jan. 31</u>	8 am	Val	Anna	Val	Paul & Gordon
	9:30 am	Landon		Barbara	Bernie & Dan
	11 am	Carol		Beth	Alex & Dan
Thank you for your service					

Restless No Longer

"The spirit of the age is restlessness."

I saw this remark on social media recently. I think it's true. Are you feeling restless? Restless means you are moving one from one thing to another – maybe then to yet another. Covid has made me restless. I want to move on from it. Partisan politics and putting the worst construal possible on other's motives and goals – that too, has made me restless. I wish we could get past that tendency. Our cultural trends – largely incompatible with Christianity – make me restless. I wish at times I lived in a different era. An easier one. Our media and technology are literally designed to make us restless - a world of 24/7 breaking news. You can't shut it off. Or you're not supposed to, anyway. So, binge the next episode. Buy the better phone. Try this new streaming service. This time, these things will satiate your longing. That's the promise. But we're still restless...

Misplaced priorities and time management challenges paint my restlessness in colors too bright to ignore. Why am I scrolling through this social media feed? What's the purpose? What do I have to show for it? What does it achieve? Why do I just... keep... scrolling? Why do we all spend so many hours a day on those devices anyway? WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?!?

Maybe rest? Maybe contentment? Maybe enoughness?

Words from Jesus' mouth: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

I pray these words will shape your new year, 2021. This new year, I pray we can learn together how to be yoked with Jesus. Stuck with Him. Where our rest is. Where we can be content. Where we are enough. This year, I pray we can learn to be. Not to do. Not to search. To just be. To be with Jesus.

Stop looking for the next big thing that will satisfy you. It won't. Stop trying to move past things. Stop trying to move to the next thing. Truly, it's ok to just stop. Forget about your church programs. How about just being with Jesus at His church? In His word? Truly, the Christian church doesn't need to learn how to do more. We need to learn how to do less. And how to just be. Be with Jesus. Be where He is at. May that be true for you and your family in the year of our Lord, 2021.

"Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." ~ Saint Augustine

May God bless your New Year. And may it be a year of resting - in Christ. ~ Pastor Nathan

Never Without Your Father

The gospel of Matthew closes with these words of Jesus: "surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

For many years, I was involved with the Boy Scouts of America. My favorite part of all the experiences was certainly the various camp. We would hike, swim, pitch tents, and do all sorts of other outdoor activities. And you could be sure of one thing: when evening came, we would gather around the campfire and tell stories.

My scoutmaster told our Boy Scout troop a story once as we were gathered around the fire on one of these nights. He spoke of a Native American tribe that had an interesting coming of age ceremony. All the people who went through this trial were sworn to secrecy as to what they experienced. A boy would be lead out into the wilderness where a blindfold was put on him. He would have to wait in solitude all night. He is not allowed to remove his blindfold until morning dawns. Can you imagine that? The sounds of the wildlife would surround the young lads all night. Maybe they'd hear a wolf howl in the distance. No doubt it was a long night for many boys, and many would feel terribly alone and even frightened. But when morning comes and each boy would remove his blindfold, what he discovers is that his father had been right there with him all night long, watching over him and keeping him safe.

God's presence is a very powerful thing. What Jesus's promise means for you here is that you will never walk alone. You may feel alone as you wait for dawn to break, but He will never leave you nor forsake you. In every heartache and in every tear, Jesus says "I am with you." When your task seems too great, Christ is with you. And so, be strong and courageous, just as God commands, and you may just find your greatest challenge is also your greatest opportunity. If you feel like you are in a period of darkness, I want to encourage you today with the lyrics of a hymn I came across recently by Abigail Miller:

2020 President's Report

Dear Bethlehem Congregation,

On behalf of the Executive Committee, we want to thank our incredible and generous congregation members, and our amazing church and preschool staff for making 2020 a year of blessings. Despite the unexpected and difficult challenges brought on by COVID 19, by the grace of God, we never fully closed, and we were able to "stay the course" with our church's mission statement:

Preach the crucified and risen Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior, make disciples in all the world, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, practice Christian fellowship with one another, help each other grow in the Word, and serve the needs of all people in Christian love.

Our local missions included many different volunteers working with the following programs: BEAM, Hunger Fight, Angel Tree, Gabriel House, Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets, Operation Barnabas, LWML Mites, Mission House, Trunk-or-Treat, Preschool outreach programs, Live-stream videoing, Baby Bottle Program, Senior's Cards, and no doubt some great programs I've inadvertently forgotten.

Globally, we sent five missionaries in January (pre-COVID) to Ntshongweni, South Africa. We also made financial contributions to Child Beyond Orphanage in Guatemala, The Ntshongweni Church and Orphanage, LCMS missionaries Wasmund and Kaster, Concordia New York Seminary, and LCMS Ga/FI Church Relief.

Our Board of Trustees, headed by Brian Kientz, was incredibly busy. Here are most of the improvements accomplished this year: new fencing around the Fred Lyons Building, sheetrock repair and repainting the sanctuary, parking lot lighting improvements, new cottage roof, replaced the LED projectors in the sanctuary, replaced the AC System for sanctuary, installed a new stove and ovens for the kitchen, the cottage was converted to a permanent vicarage, we bought an electrostatic cleaner for COVID, and Helen Gerbhardt's home (left to the church after she passed away and is still in probate) was emptied and cleaned. All that, plus many other activities our volunteers provided to keep our church operational and beautiful.

Despite the pandemic, this year, our congregation celebrated four new members, five baptisms, five confirmands, one wedding, and, nine celebrations of life.

Live streaming of our worship services has kept many members, and even many non-members, connected to God's word. I have had several members express how thankful they were to have this as an option during COVID. A special thanks to our newly formed "Video Team," headed by Dan and Jan Runko.

Our Director of Christian Music, Kathleen Olive, was rewarded eternal peace this summer. We miss her incredible talent and boundless energy and passion. Thanks to the Wordship team and their hard work, our services remained filled with the joy of music-just as Kathleen would have wanted it.

Vicar Andrew Simpson and his family arrived in August, and shortly afterward, Pastor Brones left for back surgery. Amid all these changes, our office staff (Tami, Jennifer and Dennis) and Pastor McCarty made these transitions seamless-even with all the 2020 distractions!

Anytime a Preschool has to close, it is very challenging to restart. Often, there is a loss of staff, and to rebuild enrollment can take years. But, thanks to Pat May's leadership and her loyal staff, the preschool worked through the COVID shutdown and today is back running full. Great Job!

Financially, our 2020 blessings continue. Our giving has exceeded our spending, so we are in solid financial standing-no small feat during a pandemic. Thank you for sharing your treasures!

I appreciate the confidence that you've shown in our Executive Council. They're a faithful, hard working group, and our church is blessed to have them serve again in 2021.

As we eagerly head into 2021-and a sense of "normal", let's remember to be thankful for 2020!

You are God's blessing to Bethlehem-and I thank him for you! Happy 2021!

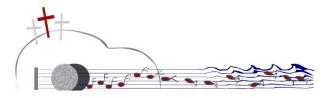
Bruce Dellinger Executive Council President



Ash Wednesday February 17, 2021

Thanks be to God

The Bethlehem staff would like to thank everyone for such a great year in 2020 despite the challenges. We have so many willing volunteers that take care of our church behind the scenes. Did you know a volunteer comes in once a week to sharpen the pencils in the pews? Volunteers come in to hang Christmas lights, plant flowers and pick weeds? A volunteer comes in and decorates our tables in the fellowship hall? A volunteer comes in and rearranges our kitchen storage room? I could keep going and going. You are all appreciated and God bless our 2021.



A while ago I wrote a song entitled, "Did You Think." The lyrics are at the end of this article. I posted it on YouTube and it received a number of comments, one of which struck me: "I like the song. It touched me, but I wonder: who is the one speaking?"

The song is the voice of Jesus speaking tenderly to someone who is broken and sees only a god who is ready and eager to finish the job and crush them. "Did you think I was that guy?" No. I

am not. I too have been broken, and just as my Father did not leave me in that condition, neither will I abandon you to it. I have come not to condemn, but to save."

Jesus probably didn't say those very words, mind you. Recalling that John said the whole world would not hold all the books that would be written if all His words and deeds were recorded. I reserve the right to say He certainly could have. Say it some other way if you like, write another song about him, but whatever you do, put him on the ground, in the dirt, sitting in the same ashes as that broken one who wonders how they will ever stand on their feet again. From there He speaks with words of comfort for our failure, lifting up and walking with us in the midst of our sin and out of it, instead of waiting for us to get it together and look good enough before reaching out to take our hand.

It might also be a good time to remember His flat refusal to be the power king in whose name His followers could take over the government and put it in the hands of the 'right people'. The power and dominance thinking is what gets you broken in the first place, not what lifts you up, and it tends to break other people as well, especially coming through a megaphone. That's just not Him, then or now.

We chuckle about the preschooler who draws a nativity scene that includes Round John Virgin, or when a little one prays "Our Father, who art in Heaven, Howard be Thy name". That's worth a timely chuckle and easily remedied. Less so when He is willfully misrepresented for the sake of worldly power. Truly tragic when the one in ashes longs to be released but sees only a wrathful avenger. Recall the key question in the middle of Mark: "Who is this?" Indeed. People are still asking. "The song touched me, but I wonder: who is the one speaking?" (Consult the pagan foreign soldier at the end of Mark. He knows, as do you.)

It is truly the greatest gift to really know the one who takes our hand and leads us on, because the knowing comes to us in being known, in being touched in our uncleanness and healed and restored. If you are in ashes, take heart, He is giving His to you. If you see someone in ashes, be His hands and feet. He will be with you and them both. What else did you think He would do? Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Dave and Sobra

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) 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 Search for; Bethlehem Lutheran Church Jax Beach

To reach new BLC Services on Periscope; Download the app or go on desktop to https:// www.periscope.tv Select Sign Up to create a free account, Search for Bethlehem Lutheran Church Jax Beach. Join us!

Women's Bible Study

If you are interested in meeting with other women for a short Bible Study, please sign up in the Narthex.

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		904-249-2040
	Jean Shimp	
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
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Bethehem Lutheran, Bible Study, Children and Families, Ministry Meetings, Music Ministry, Official Acts, Outside Groups, Pastor/Staff, Preschool, Special Events, Youth and Young Adults, Christian Holidays Sun

Jan 2021 (Eastern Time - New York)

10am - Praise Team Rehearsal @ 8am - Gideon's prayer meeting 4:30pm - O Gruhn wedding 9am - Church Office Closed 6pm - BLC supports Mission 7am - Preschool Closed Fri NEW YEAR'S DAY 14 21 28 7pm - New Year's Fve Worship 9am - Church Office Closed 9am - Circuit Pastor's 20 27 5:30pm - 7th Grade Confirmation 9:30am - Preschool Chapel @ 7pm - Adult Bible Study @ 11am - Staff Meeting @ Epiphany 29 26 7pm - Executive Council Meeting 7pm - Elder's Meeting @ 28 9:30am - Senior Game Day @ 9:30am - Senior Game Day @ 9am - Church Office Closed 9am - Church Office Closed 7am - Preschool Closed Dennis on Vacation The Purification of Mary and The 8am - Donut Sunday @ Disciples' 9:30am - Contemporary Worship The Baptism of Our Lord / First 9:30am - "Misfit" Bible Study @ 9:30am - Contemporary Worship 9:30am - Contemporary Worship 9:30am - "Misfit" Bible Study @ 9:30am - "Misfit" Bible Study @ 8am - Donut Sunday @ Disciples' 9:30am - Contemporary Worship 9:30am - Contemporary Worship 9:30am - "Misfit" Bible Study @ 9:30am - "Misfit" Bible Study @ 9:30am - "Misfit" Bible Study @ 9:30am - Adult Bible Study @ 9:30am - Adult Bible Study @ 9:30am - Adult Bible Study @ 11am - Liturgical Worship w/ 9:30am - Adult Bible Study @ 9:30am - Adult Bible Study @ 9:30am - Adult Bible Study @ 8am - Liturgical Worship @ 11am - Liturgical Worship w/ 11am - Liturgical Worship w/ 8am - Liturgical Worship @ Second S. a. the Epiphany Feed My Sheep Sunday @ Third S. a. the Epiphany 8am - Bugbee baptism Epiphany (Observed) First S. a. Christmas 12:30pm - 8th grade Mites Sunday Mites Sunday