

And this month, this Epiphany, we visit with the Magi who have come from afar to worship the Newborn King, the Son of God, the Only Begotten Son the Light of the world become flesh—Jesus. And thanks be to God that he has come. And let us visit this Newborn King with the magi for a moment.

This visit was no small thing. It was centuries in the making, in fact, the star itself was fore-told by the Lord from back in the Exodus about 3,400 years ago, 1,400 years before the birth of Christ Jesus. Furthermore, in the time of the exile when Judah and the Southern Kingdom were taken to Babylon, and when Babylon was taken over by the Medes and the Persians, the prophet Daniel and others brought to that part of the world the knowledge of the coming Savior of the world.

There the men of God were used by the Lord to glorify himself for the eventual return of his people to Israel again, but not before they trained their fellow wisdom scholars in the far away lands, including the foretelling of the rise of the star signifying the Savior, the Messiah, the King of the Jews own birth.

And when this star arose, to signify the Lord's arrival was at hand, Magi who knew the Lord realized it was time to go and worship him. It was an arduous journey, a tough one. This journey of some 1,400 kilometers was not on a modern highway with rest stops and hospitals and places to buy fuel, or with any kind of protections such as hospitals or police, nor of course was there any form of communications.

Food, water, provisions for a caravan to be gone for several months in each direction, plus time at the birthplace, everything necessary for survival had to be planned out carefully. And care and provision had to be made for the needs of family members left behind. It would be months or even longer for anyone to hear from the travelers again.

And then on the journey there were dangers such as predators, thieves and robbers, rebel forces, enemy armies, and the like as potential threats to their survival. And there were also the potential dangers of impossible to foresee dangers such as disaster and cataclysms such as fierce and deadly storms when out in the desert wilderness without shelter, and earthquakes, too. And it cost money even then for travel. Provisions have to be purchased. And there was also, as always, the possibility of sickness, disease, plague, and injuries—even serious injuries such as from the fall from a beast of burden like a camel or horse.

1,400 kilometer trip on foot, and you would have no guarantee of any place along the journey form which you may by food or supplies, and that on this journey on foot, or riding an animal there was also the danger of bandits, dangerous criminals, and how about geopolitical driven forces and terrorists as we call them today. You Won't have a place to buy medicine, and if you are hurt, or injured, or sick, there is NO medical help. You will also be out of employ for a very long time. You will not be able to support your family when you are gone, and you will have to leave your family behind for many, many moths or longer, and there will be NO communication between you and your loved ones at all, none, not a drop, not even a letter, and none of you on the journey, nor you nor your family will know if you will stay alive and come back alive, or your family left behind will stay alive.

Would you go? Would, you, go? The devotion of their faith is incredible! All is unknown. They are courageous. They are daring. Today, some might call them crazy, or if you went—that you're crazy. Isn't that what some call Christians anyway? We go on journeys every day. We are on an exodus of faith in this fallen world, every single day.

Christians around the world are persecuted for their faith, even unto death in our times. And we find that in this country, too. Such is building, and worsening.

And yet one thing we see in our nation and other parts of the west is a decline in Christianity. People certainly are not being asked to make a 1,400 km trip through danger and even with the danger of death, or taking months and years from our life. Yet church attendance across the nation is lackluster, down terribly.

Fervency of faith is down in the US. There are estimates of 177,000 "small" churches in the US which worship under 60 a week, actually around 56. In the LCMS some 80% worship under 80. Some 47% of Americans say they go to church, but when actually tracked by researchers, of those 47% of Americans, only 20% of them really do worship. Gallup states that 20% of American Christians claim to worship with a congregation regularly. These estimates you can be sure vary tremendously depending on your community, and some neighborhoods of course have hardly anyone at all who goes to worship, and some much higher. But of the 20%, realize this:

If on the block where you live, there are 10 people living on your street, only 2 go to worship, and that is probably you and your spouse. On average, of your whole neighborhood. It is not all dire in the world though.

Some make the trip and risk their lives to worship the Newborn Baby King– Jesus- this Christmas! Think of Nigeria, think of Iran, Iraq, etc. But do you understand what is happening in this nation right now? While we do not accept mediocrity as a standard, it helps to explain what is going on in our neighborhood, our lives, our church and other LCMS churches, for instance, in our circuit. In fact, Scripture foretells such times.

This reality has impacted congregations se-

verely. Some estimates based on current lines that nearly 5,000 churches will close this next year, and 3,500 people leave the church every day, and estimates are that 1.2 million people will leave the Christian faith in 2024.

We face a difficult year, by all human prognostications of economics at our church, too, and our school. To be open and transparent, there are some difficult times ahead, shortly here, as with many others of our circuit and other denominations' congregations in our communities.

With what we estimate we are facing, we are taking important measures to hang on, and become more healthy, to structure ourselves along the lines of being better aligned stewardship wise, and to not just make it, but thrive in the year ahead, while taking into account other national economic indicators and forecasts in society. We have been in earnest, constant prayer for wisdom in this area, and will share more, soon.

For now, we have a renewed call to face of our pilgrimage. This is a new year we have entered. It parallels our Savior's birth being celebrated. And now with Epiphany and the Light to the gentiles and the glory of Israel being manifested, we have the call to follow the Magi, the Wise Men, in their pilgrimage.

Our sacrifice is nothing compared to theirs, as yet, nor is it that of what goes on in Christendom in the world where persecution threats are so dangerous that Christians have to worship in secret. But if you think about it, the call to worship Him, Jesus, this Epiphany and beyond, is actually an incredible gift of grace!

That is how the Magi looked at it! The Savior's birth was Good News, the Best News there ever was! For with the arrival of birth of the Son of God into the world came rescue from the dominion of sin, and death, and the devil itself!



This January, we are so blessed, I am at a loss for words over the blessings that await us. This past December we have worshipped in excess of 600 persons here at Good Shepherd. Through the blessing of our school participation, we worshipped one Sunday 222, and another one 107. We enjoyed a beautiful Christmas Eve Candlelight service together, a Christmas Day worship, and Midweek Advent services and soup suppers.

Including Chapel services, we had some 20 different sermons this past month, 100 different times hymns and songs were sung. We enjoyed Bible studies on our Sundays as we dove deeper into the Word of God, and we did the same on Wednesdays, and Thursdays. And if you take the number of children in worship on Wednesdays, there were 750 worshippers singing to the Lord and receiving the word this month from the school alone, and this excludes the daily (M, T, TH, F) worship gatherings every single week with a couple hundred children, too! And we enjoyed a School Christmas Program which had the blessing of approximately 350 worshippers present on the 17th!

And not only this, but behind the scenes through your designated gifts, we have been able to help those in true and desperate need economically. You who help through the pastor's fund help with critical medicines, food, medical needs, electrical bills, water and sewer, rent, and so much more.

Here, partnering with the state and federal government we feed hundreds of meals every day, breakfast and lunch to the children of Good Shepherd. We also partner with the school district and the FL/GA LCMS District with counseling help for children, and adults. The Lord makes an incredible impact in the lives of children, and grown men and women every single day here at Good Shepherd. And he does this working through you! This ministry of the Gospel here is desperately needed. It has to go on. Please help.

Who would have thought we would be so blessed? God did. And the Lord has more planned. For His church and our school. At the end of this month we have our Biannual Voters Assembly and our elections. With prayer, we will start with a new year Council in a few weeks, to begin to strategically plan the to meet the wonderful challenges in

the year ahead.

And while these challenges are significant, we know without a doubt that our God is able- our tender hearted, loving heavenly Father full of mercy and grace is able to do all things. And he wills to work through you, his newest magi.

The blessing's of our Lord are new every morning. As he helps you, please pray about how you can help us, serving on council, board, in the LWML, volunteering in the school, the church, we need ushers, greeters, readers. And pray for his guidance in how you can also if able share in return back to him your first fruits of love to the Lord for the work of the church, including offerings. Help make the difference in our budget with your gifts.

We have made significant cuts already, frozen spending, and are about to make some more cuts. But all of it is to be able to continue in Love to our Lord Jesus back by ensuring the continuation of the work of the Gospel here at Good Shepherd, by his grace, no matter what.

For that, join me this month as we visit the Newborn King-Jesus, with the Magi, and the sacrifice of our hearts in worshipping him. They are bringing their gold, frankincense and myrrh. We get to bring our faith and love, and our gifts.

Jesus is so worth it! Look at who he is and why he came and what he did. There in the manger is, well, God! He is the Son of God. He has come down from paradise, lowly, gentle, humble, vulnerable, helpless, born as true man (though without sin of his own) and he is God the everlasting Son dwelling in this human baby body and soul.

And he has come down from paradise, and the glory, to one day bear our sins, suffering horribly at the hands of wicked men, laying down his life as the perfect sacrifice to God the Father, to pay for our sins, in shedding his blood unto death! And, yea, the third day he would take his life up again, and through him we also have new life and will rise to be forever to be with him! God bless you tis month, and the Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, and our School.

Amen.

Pastor. ILYCD

LWML November Meeting

LWML Meeting December 9, 2023

The meeting began at 1030am. We recited the League Pledge and Judy M led us in prayer and Devotion. We enjoyed a delicious Pot Luck meal.

Secretary's Report: Peggy read and it was approved.

Treasurer's Report: Teresa read. November Bake Sale \$56. There is \$1,188.77 in the Spending Balance. This is minus the Blessing Bag Account. This was approved.

Old Business: 1. The LWML provided the first Advent Wed. evening meal and it was a success.

2. The December sock donations have been coming in already. They will be collected and delivered to the FM Rescue Mission in time for Christmas.

New Business: 1. We need to bring ideas for Fundraising and monthly mission suggestions. We have the school for our January mission. Mrs. Collard will provide a list but some items are always needed. (#2 pencils, crayons, loose leaf paper, tissues, wipes)

- 2. The congregational dinner could be after our next combined service on Jan. 28 or Feb. 25 before the snowbirds go home. This could be a baseball themed simple meal. Tickets would need to be pre-sale and information will be sent home with the students.
- 3. The next Bake Sale will be Dec. 17. Please make an effort to bring a baked item. We will also sell small Christmas and other items.
- 4. The next Ladies Luncheon will be Dec. 16 at Joe's Crab Shack in Fort Myers.
- 5. We will meet here to assemble our Candy Cane Ornaments on Wed. Dec. 14. We want to make enough to hand out to people as they leave the Christmas Eve Service.
- 6. Judy W reminded us that we need to make or purchase Palm Crosses for Palm Sunday, March 24.
- 7. We owe \$25 for our annual dues to our District LWML.
- 8. Try to send a Christmas Card to Marilyn Williams, a long time LWML member here, who recently moved to Caloosa Harbor in Fort Myers.

The meeting ended at 1118am. Our next meeting is Jan. 8. Peggy will prepare the Devotion and Judy W will bring refreshments. We closed with The Lord's Prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Peggy Fjelsted

Kατα Mαθθαιον According to Matthew



"Matthew"

A study of the Holy Gospel According to Matthew, drawing from the original languages of the Holy Scriptures.



Wednesdays at 10:15 am, all are invited as we continue with a new series on the Gospel According to Matthew. This incredible Gospel account is full of the deepest and most wonderful of meaning for our faith and salvation and our lives as we follow Jesus. Join us! And on Sundays at 9:00 am, we continue with the Exodus and "God Heard Their Cry." Join us for this as well, and you will find Jesus

throughout! And Elder Russ is back with his Disciples series on Thursdays at 10:15 am!

Ladies of Good Shepherd - including Teachers and Staff,

You are invited to participate in our Ladies Luncheon that takes place every 3rd Saturday of each month, at a new location each time. Bring a dollar that will be collected, and a name will be drawn, from the group of ladies. The person's name that is drawn will receive the money that will go towards their meal and will choose the next location. A fun way to get to know each other.

If interested, please sign-up on the provided sign-up sheets in the back of the church, so we know how many will be going and we can reserve a table.

LADIES LUNCHEON December 16th at 12:00 PM

The Lodge
2278 First Street, Fort Myers 33901

239-433-2739

Please remember our Food Pantry if you know of someone with an emergency need. They may contact pastor or the church office by phone at 239-995-7711, or email pastor at pastordavis@goodshepofnfm.com. Also, if you have food to donate, please let us know.

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

(Matthew 25:40)

Hope to see you there!

SCHOOL NEWS



This page and next: The Christmas program back on December 17th was a wonderful blessing! We had standing room only with about 350 people in attendance. Above is pictured some of the children who sang to the Lord. On the next page you can see some of the parents joining in prayer together during the program, and on the page to the right the same. And at the bottom of the next page is a picture of one of the Midweek Advent Soup Suppers. The meals were so yummy, and fellowship was wonderful.







Left:
From our
Staff to
You and
All: Merry Christmas and
a Blessed
New Year
to you!

Below:

A picture of the Christ-mas

School Chapel, and they have a new Little Disciple named Scotty, who has special needs, teaching that Jesus loves the little children., all the children of the world.



DECEMBER STATS

			6			No.	
12/03/2023	Sunday/Advent	107	0	107	\$2,492.00	\$0.00	\$2,492.00
12/6/23	Wednesday	20	0	20	\$514.00	\$0.00	\$514.00
12/10/23	Sunday	53	16	69	\$2,563.20	\$320.00	\$2,883.20
12/13/23	Wednesday	21	0	21	\$317.00	\$0.00	\$317.00
12/17/23	Sunday	210	12	222	\$3,547.25	\$55.00	\$3,602.25
12/20/23	Wednesday	1111	0				
12/24/23	Sunday AM	35	11	46	\$625.00	\$100.00	\$725.00
12/24/23	Sunday PM	90	0	90	\$1,673.00	\$0.00	\$1,673.00
12/25/23	Monday AM	26	0	26	\$800.00	\$0.00	\$800.00
12/31/23	Sunday			3 8		68 3	

Please note that the above stats does not include December 31st, as it takes place after publishing time for the newsletter. Stats above indicate a Sunday average of 104 persons per Sunday. Regular Sunday high was 222, low was 46. Christmas Eve was 90, Christmas Day was 26. The Advent Midweek average was 21 (one Wednesday is not listed). Also not listed is the Christmas Program of the school which was 350 in attendance.

Below left: The high school students from Good Shepherd visited a nursing home this past December and blessed the residents with "gifts, smiles and cheer!"





Above: Our basketball team is doing an incredible job again this year! Pictured in light blue, out team is seen playing Mid Cape Global. It is amazing- the life and breath of this Christian, Lutheran ministry! We are blessed to be a blessing.

CHURCH NEWS

The following officers/chairs will be elected at the January 28, 2024, Voters' Meeting.

A summary of the duties for each officer/chair position appears below. Let Pastor Davis (pastordavis@goodshepofnfm.com) or Carol Bledsoe (cbledsoe67@gmail.com) know if you would like to run for or nominate a member of Good Shepherd for any of these positions. We will be happy to provide transportation to Council meetings for those who do not drive or those who prefer to not drive at night.

President: Presides at all meetings of the Voters' Assembly, Church Council, and special meetings; conducts all meetings in an orderly and Christian manner; assists the Pastor in conducting the work of the Congregation; prepares and submits monthly activities reports to the Church Council.

Treasurer: Oversees the dispersing of all funds and pays all bills for the Congregation and the School; updates Church accounts; ensures that statements of financial status of the Congregation and the School are prepared for each Church Council and Voters' Assembly meeting.

School Board Chair: Sets and implements policy and School standards in agreement with scriptural principles and Missouri Synod Guidelines, with approval of Church Council; promotes and institutes excellence in growth, academics, and religion; submits a yearly budget to the Treasurer and Church Council; works to involve and encourage parent and community support in promotion of school activities; prepares and submits a monthly activities report to the Church Council.

Outreach Chair: Plans, promotes and implements an outreach/evangelism program in the Congregation and in the community; works to assimilate new members into the life and work of the Church; prepares and submits a monthly activities report to the Church Council.

Financial Secretary: Receives, records, and deposits all Congregational monies, including tuition, special collections, and loans subsidies; makes timely deposits to the designated depository; submits a report of all receipts to the Church Council monthly; submits contribution statements to each member annually.

Stewardship Chair: Implements a survey of the talents and time of the membership; assists other boards with information and develops programs to assimilate new members into the ministry of the Congregation; implements an annual program that instructs the Congregation in grace of proportionate giving for God's work in our Congregation, Community, and the World; prepares and submits a monthly activities report to the Church Council.

Parish Education Chair: Prepares and oversees a program of Christian education for all age levels; brings to the attention of the Church Council the needs in facilities, equipment and other necessary items; submits and works within an appropriate budget for each year; prepares and submits a monthly activities report to Church Council.

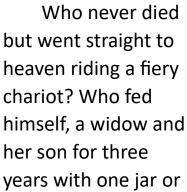
This Voters Assembly will take place after the 10:00 am Combined Worship Service on Sunday, January 28, 2024. A Potluck will precede the Voters.

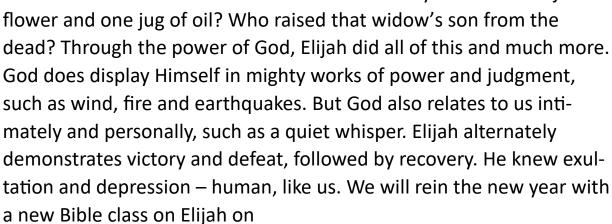
CHURCH NEWS CONTINUED

The following officers/chairs will be elected at the January 2024 Voters' Meeting. Please let Carol Bledsoe or Pastor Davis know if you would like to run for or nominate a member of Good Shepherd for any of these positions.

President (Corporation Officer)
Treasurer (Corporation Officer
Financial Secretary (Corporation Officer)
Parochial School Board (BOE) Chair
Evangelism (Outreach) Chair
Stewardship Chair
Parish Education (Church) Chair

BIBLE STUDY NEWS





Thursday, Jan. 4 at 10:15 a.m. in the back of the church. **Elder Russ Brown** will be the discussion leader. All are invited.

LOOKING BACK THIS PAST YEAR TOGETHER

A great deal of things have come to pass over the last year, 2023, together. We have seen monumental events, joyous events, trying events, some worrisome even. We are bringing some of those up in this section of the newsletter, to re-

member our Lord being with us. through it all.

This last January, while still rebuilding from our hurricane troubles with the rest of the area, we installed our first ever Called Commissioned Minister of the Gospel for our Principal, Mrs. Ann Marie Collard.

After many years out of print, pastor's book went to reprint. Our website received a brand new and complete rebuilding. We also rebuilt and put in a brand new sign on Hancock through generous special gifts. And we began the remodel

of the church sanctuary. We saw the process over timwe slowly take shape, beginning with the removal of the old pews and carpet throughout, and the installation of new carpet. And eventually after a patient wait, we saw new chairs arrive.

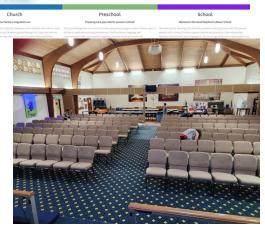
> And the events on this page alone are historic!

But there is an incredible amount more which took place.

We also had the grand

celebration of our post-hurricane reopening of our entire facilities again. At this event, we were joined by the LC-MS national head of Disaster Services, and the FL/GA District president, and the Head of Lutheran Schools, and the head of our LCEF. This also was a historic moment! And this was made possible through Historic financial aid from the Synod and District!





Welcome to

LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL



We also saw another Historical First. We enjoyed the presen-

tation of the Revelation of Jesus Christ for Our Times. At this event, the Apostle John spoke to the audience which had just disembarked on the prison island of Patmos.



We also saw Israel fall under attach, ramping up international worries, touching

even our nation as people continue to protest, and strife continues over there, the Middle East, and the war in the Ukraine, and drum beats of fear for the Far East.

About the same time, pastor and Mrs. pastor were sent on

a Synod conference to Germany. He sent back real time reports on this important conference for the work of the Church and the Mercy of God through Christ and the Cross. It was



Soldiers detail atrocities in

UNSPEAKABLE HORRORS

and remains very timely and important. This also was an historic first here. While over there, there was a bombing just a mile away in Berlin, and numerous protests. And while this is all going on, a nation sees its armed forces in harms way again.

And while the world experiences danger, controversy continues in the visible church, such as the picture on the right indicates, but so much more. For

instance, we just saw about a week ago 5,000 churches leaving the United Methodist Church due to such doctrinal issues many are faced with. And our Synod just had its national convention.





Vatican says bishops allowed to withhold same-sex blessings sanctioned by recent document

Yet in it all, our Lord continues to be faithful to his people. And here we are, beginning 2024 A.D.. And looking back, we can look forward, knowing Jesus is true to his Word, "I am with you always, even to the end of the ages." (ctd next page







Looking back the past year together- and beyond, and forward

Above you can see on the upper right the picture of the Baptismal Font in Wittenberg where Luther's own children were baptized. This font, the church as well, and more, survive from the 1500s, and multiple wars, and plague, and suffering we have not endured in our land in our lifetimes. The picture though shows powerfully the reminder of holy Baptism, and how the promises of Christ Jesus and his Means of Grace, and the Church itself has continued from the time of the first advent of Christ to this day.

As we remember our Lord and the theology of the cross, we see how the Church and we the members of the Body of Christ share in our Lord's sufferings, picking up our cross as well in life. The middle picture shows a statue of Luther and in the market center in Wittenberg. All three of the above pictures were taken this past fall. We remember likewise how Luther, whom God used to rescue his Church at the Reformation, how he suffered so much, but his firm faith was founded upon the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. The beautiful and majestic hymn come to mind, a Mighty Fortress is Our God.

The last picture is of one of the stain glass widows at the church in Leipzig, also taken this past fall. The life of the people of God then, as now, by nature had to and still must center on the promises of Christ Jesus, and he has guided us to memorialize his grace which he continuously pours out on us.

Today, we are no different. We have been through many things as a people of God. The devil does not want to let the work of the Gospel through the church to continue. But great is Christ who is in us, than the one in the world. The Lord is true. We can look back throughout the history of the Church and our congregation and we can see God's faithfulness. That is no different now, thank ever.

In the month and years ahead until we see our Lord face to face, our Lord is with us, as he has been all throughout history. Our confidence is in him. He is our Victorious Savior. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Amen.

The Lord bless and keep Good Shepherd.



Reaching out to tell everyone that on January 20th Good Shepherd for Outreach will have a Car Show! If you are interested, please reach out. We will be gathering together for a great time. Cars, Trucks, Bikes and Air boats are invited from the community. If you have a business with goods we all like to buy, contact us. We are looking forward to another great get together.

CARS, TRUCKS, ALL RIDES WELCOME! SATURDAY, JANUARY 20 FROM 8:00 AM TO 2:00 PM AT GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHRUCH AND SCHOOL.

Come show your rides, swap meet, good times /music and food. \$20 a spot and sign up with Melissa (school cafeteria), Dez or call the school. One of the school ladies will get you a spot.



P.s.— Pastor's race car (left) will be entered!

Contact Ms. Melissa (school cafeteria), or Ms. Dez, or Pastor is you are interested in entering a vehicle.

VROOM!

CALENDAR: JANUARY 2024

* SUNDAYS, 1/7, 1/14, 1/21 WORSHIP

9:00 am	BIBLE STUDY/SUNDAY SCHOOL
10:00 am	FIRST SERVICE OF WORSHIP
11:30 PM	SECOND SERVICE OF WORSHIP

**SUNDAY, 1/28 WITH BIBLE STUDY AT 9:00 AM, AND ONE COMBINED WOR-SHIP AT 10:00 AM, FOLLOWED BY POTLUCK AND THEN VOTERS ASSEMBLY AND ELECTIONS

*WEDNESDAYS MATTHEW BIBLE STUDY at 10:15 am, on 1/3, 1/10, 1/17, 1/24, 1/31

1//10 at 5:30 pm RAMP!

*THURSDAYS

- 1/18 Church Council at 5:30 pm
- Russ' Bible Study on ELIJAH at 10:15 am on 1/4, 1/11, 1/18, 1/25

*SATURDAY

- 1/13 LWML 10 AM
- 1/20 8:00 AM TO 2:00 PM CAR SHOW
- 1/20 LADIES LUNCHEON AT 12:00 PM

^{*}TUESDAY, 1/4 AT 5:30 PM ELDERS