

FIRST Impressions

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A Publication of First Lutheran Church · Birmingham, AL

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First Lutheran Church

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Pastor's Pen Christmas Blessings

"Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."
- Luke 1:45

Elizabeth's greeting to Mary was a spontaneous expression of bursting joy and gratitude, for in her young cousin she saw the handiwork of God, and on her face she saw the unmistakable signs of trusting faith. Mary was God's favored one, a chosen instrument for his work of salvation. But Mary was also hardly more than a girl; one of countless Jewish girls whose simple lives were

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Local Events

Through 12/-17: *Holiday Spectacular 2023*, Red Mountain Theatre; www.redmountaintheatre.org

Through 12/24: *It's a Wonderful Life: Live!*, Virginia Samford Theatre; www.virginiasamfordtheatre.org

12/7-16: *Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Clause*, Virginia Samford Theatre; www.virginiasamfordtheatre.org

12/8-22: Holiday Film Series, Alabama Theatre; www.alabamatheatre.com

12/9-22: Magical Nights: Vulcan's Holiday Experience, Vulcan Park & Museum; www.visitvulcan.org

12/15-23: George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker*®, BJCC; www.alabamaballet.org

12/20: Jim Brickman: *A Joyful Christmas*, The Lyric Theatre; www.lyricbham.com

12/22-23: Handel's *Messiah*, Alys Stephens Center; www.alabamasymphony.org



(cont'd from p. 1)

lived in the homes and villages of Palestine. Nothing unique. Nothing profound. Really quite ordinary. Just the sort of “earthen vessel” through which God often works out his most astonishing miracles.

Among the other wonders of Christmas, we remember that God does not bypass even the weakness of human frailty in order to work out his purposes. In fact, the message of the Incarnation is that it is often precisely through finite and fragile human nature that God reveals the splendor of his eternal being. Christmas is a day to rejoice, for no person is despised by God, no person is useless in his hands; no person is too sinful and flawed to be the “blessed of God.”

Only one thing was required of Mary in order that she might bear the Son of God. Faith – the gift of faith in the love and power of God. No Super-human strength was necessary and no extraordinary level of belief. The angel Gabriel was sent to one who, in answer to God’s call, would believe and utter a simple “Fiat” (“Let it be”). This Christmas let us greet with our own burst of joy and gratitude the God who came directly into our midst to save us, and may our hearts be lifted by the remembrance that he used one just like us in order to do so. How “blessed of God” we are.

Why lies he in such mean estate, Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here, The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce him through, The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, The babe, the son of Mary!

In His Peace,
Pastor Schultz

Voter's Meeting

Sunday, December 10
Immediately Following Worship



WORSHIP

Worship with us Sundays at 10:15 a.m. in person
or online via Facebook or YouTube.

From the President

Advent and Christmas are coming – a very busy time of the year for the church. Midweek Advent services will take place December 6, 13, and 20. Each service will start at 6:00 p.m. and will be preceded by a light meal at 5:15 p.m. On December 9 beginning at 9:00 a.m., we will decorate the sanctuary and the church's Christmas tree. If you'd like to help with this, simply show up that morning and you'll be put to work.

On December 10, we'll hold a voter's meeting to review and approve a budget for 2024. The voters will be asked to consider possible capital improvement projects for 2024. The roof over the fellowship wing was replaced in September and October and we need to consider replacing the roof over the sanctuary. Also, the ceilings in the fellowship hall and the sanctuary need replacing. We are pursuing proposals for these projects and will ask the voters to consider them and approve priority ranking of the projects. The church is currently able to afford completing these repairs because we do not have a full-time pastor. Funds that would usually go to paying the pastor are being used to repair the church. Until God reveals the man he has chosen to be our next pastor, we will use our talents to sustain the ministry on Highland Avenue.

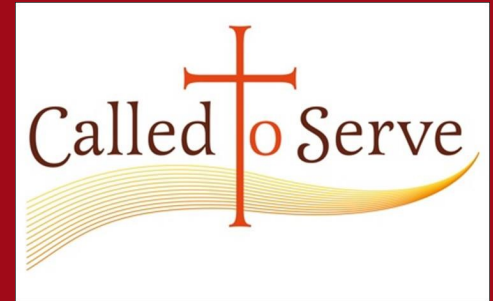
The Call Committee continues its journey to find a pastor. On October 16, we received a call list of seven pastors. When these men were contacted and asked if they would consider a call at this time, five said no. District President Eric Johnson then provided us with another call list of six pastors on October 31. Three of these pastors declined to consider a call. The Call Committee is in the process of reviewing the five candidates that we have from the two call lists and will interview the ones we believe are good matches to the congregation. We are also awaiting responses from the two seminaries to see if there are any available candidates. Either way, it will be January or February before a call recommendation can be made to the congregation and it would be spring or summer before we would install a new pastor. When I consider our journey in calling a pastor, I find comfort in Psalm 27:13-14: "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

In Christ's service,

Glen Thompson
Congregational President and Chairman of the Call Committee

Called to Serve and Celebrate Ministry The First Bite

A father finished giving his two-year-old son a bath and a snack to enjoy. The son came into the living room to watch television with his dad. He climbed up on the sofa and showed him his snack ... an absolutely perfect pear. He then said, “Daddy, would you like the first bite of my pear?” It was very nice of him to offer, but more importantly, he had hit on the heart of understanding of Christian stewardship.



Do we offer the first “bite” of our most precious fruit to God for all that he has given to us? Or do we offer the second, third, or sometimes the core back to God? It is important to ask ourselves these questions and to remember that stewardship is not just a “buzz word” but a new way of life for us all.

Will you make the time of Advent an opportunity to offer God the first bite of your time? Faithfully attending worship and Bible study is offering God the first bite of your time. When you do you will savor the sweetness of the remainder of time this Christmas. Your celebration will be full and you will always have enough time to enjoy your family, friends, and neighbors.

Lorenza Robinson
Called to Serve & Celebrate Ministry

Chrismon Workshop - CANCELLED

Please note! The Chrismon workshop originally scheduled for November 18, then moved to December 9, has been cancelled. We will plan to hold the workshop next fall in time for Advent 2024.

Christmas Poinsettias

If you would like to help with the purchase of poinsettias for the altar area, there is a sign-up sheet posted next to the church office. Prices are yet to be determined, but will be listed on the sheet once known.



Deacons' Corner

He Humbled Himself - Philippians 2:8

Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, tells us that we should have the same mind or attitude as that of Jesus Christ. That is to say that we should be imitators of Christ, which is having the same self-sacrificing humility and the love for others as He has for you and me. Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart..." He tells us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He is telling us, "I have set the example for you." But all too often it is our refusal, our forgetfulness, or our conceit to do what Jesus has told and taught us through His Word. At times we seem to forget the teachings of our Lord at the very first opportunity when confronted with a situation that doesn't please us. We forget about the truth, the humbleness and the love for our brothers and sisters that the Lord has taught us, thinking only of ourselves, our situations, or our circumstances, sometimes causing unfounded burdens and consequences for ourselves and others. Maybe, just maybe, the slogan "Have it your way" has been fixated in our minds and has caused us to forget others. Where is our humbleness? How can we be imitators of Christ our Lord? We need to forget about ourselves and concentrate on Jesus and His guidance for our hope and for our salvation.

Of course, humbleness doesn't have many buyers in our world today. We live in a culture that says, we are number one or I am number one. It is our culture that affects and infects our hearts to forget about the Word of our Lord and be imitators of Him and His love for us. It is a part of our nature to elevate ourselves above others, using God's gifts.

However, our Lord Jesus Christ emptied Himself making Himself nothing, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, He humbled Himself. He gave up the glories of heaven and humbled Himself and became obedient to death. But why human form? Hebrew 2:17 states, "... he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." Self-forgetfulness is the essence of humility.

In His Service,
Charles Craig
Chairman, Board of Deacons

Christ Care Ministry

The Gift that Keeps on Giving

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to preach to the captives release and to the blind recovery of sight, to send the broken ones away in release, to preach the year of the Lord’s favor.”

- Luke 4:18-19 [Isaiah 61:1-2a]

Some of the most beautiful words in scripture are used by Jesus in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus was given the scroll of Isaiah the Prophet to read on the very day He began His ministry. These words relate to the listener the very reason and purpose for the Messiah’s coming and the Messiah validated what His mission was and the fact that it is fulfilled in and through Him, *“Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears.”* **Jesus is the Christ!**

God’s gift is not a “Jelly of the Month Club” gift certificate at Christmas. It is God announcing that the Christ has come to God’s chosen people and to a broken world to release (forgiveness) them from the captivity of sin. Real freedom. The Word made Flesh walked among them and still does this very day by the power of the Holy Spirit in and through the means of grace. This is the best gift ever given, the true *Gift that keeps on Giving*. So beloved, let's “carry on “together in the mission ... keep on giving ‘em Jesus! **What a Gift!**

A Joyous Advent and Merry Christmas to you all,
Pastor Tom



Join us Saturday December 9, beginning at 9:00 a.m., to trim the tree and decorate the sanctuary for Christmas. The coffee will be hot and the holiday tunes will be cranking!

From the Treasurer

Please note that some offering envelope numbers may be changing for 2024 to allow us to better arrange the system. Be sure to throw away any unused offering envelopes after December 31, 2023. Thank you!

LWML News

Painting the Planet Purple with Servanthood

1942-2023 -- 81 YEARS of GOD



Make it all about JESUS ... (a short Christmas poem)

*I strung all the lights on my pre-lit fake tree
 Shopped Amazon Prime 'cause the shipping is free
 I checked in with Pinterest for tablescape trends
 Then hustled to mail cards to family and friends
 when lo, in my heart there arose a faint sound
 T'was a voice so distinct, with a truth so profound:*

“Make it all about JESUS.”

*I baked one more batch. (For I thought that I “should.”)
 Planned a holiday bash for the whole neighborhood.
 Made lists. Secret Santa’d. And found that at night,
 I was so stinkin’ weary, I lost my delight!
 My Christmas was fueled by, “Do, do, do, DO!”
 The voice came again: “Just BE, for it’s true:*

“This is all about JESUS.”

*And then one year, I gave up on “should.”
 I gave thanks for all that was right, true, and good.
 I gave up on hustle. Let strivings all cease.
 I lit a small candle, and felt a warm peace.
 For at last I had come to know in my heart,
 That Christmas can't fit in a Kohl's shopping cart.
 I heard it once more, that truth that is ageless:*

“This Christmas, dear child, make it all about JESUS.”

—Jennifer Dukes Lee

Today and always we are surrounded by HIS grace and mercy.
 Serve the LORD with gladness.

Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year

Sheree McGraw, President
 First Lutheran Church LWML

Advent/Christmas Schedule of Events 2024

December 3:	First Sunday in Advent
December 6, 13, 20:	Advent Midweek Activities Dinner-5:15 p.m.; Worship-6:00 p.m.
December 9:	Tree/Sanctuary Decorating – 9:00 a.m.
December 20:	Neighborhood Caroling after Midweek Worship
December 24:	Morning Worship – 10:15 a.m., followed by Christmas Fellowship
December 24:	Christmas Eve Worship - Carols, Candlelight, and Communion – 6:00 p.m.
December 31:	New Year's Eve Worship – 10:15 a.m.



Midweek Advent Series 2023

“The Light of Grace”

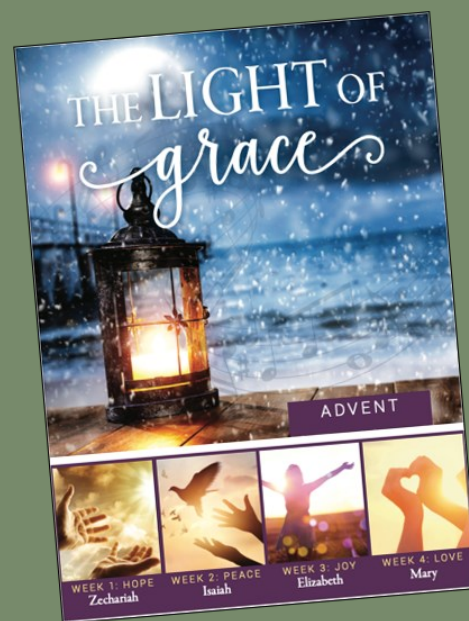
Our midweek Advent services this year celebrate that Jesus is the Light of the World who shines on us with his amazing grace. Through Scripture, song and reflections, we are reminded that Jesus makes his grace known through the undeserved gifts of hope, peace, joy and love—gifts revealed in special ways in the lives of Zechariah, Isaiah, Elizabeth and Mary.

Week 1: Hope: Zechariah (Psalm 39:7): In his old age, after years of waiting and not giving up hope, Zechariah is blessed with a son, John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Light of Grace, Jesus.

Week 2: Peace: Isaiah (Isaiah 9:6): Isaiah announces to an unsettled people that relief is coming soon through the Prince of Peace, the Son of God, the Light of Grace.

Week 3: Joy: Elizabeth (Philippians 4:4): The boy in Elizabeth’s womb leaps for joy and so does she when Mary arrives, carrying the little Lord Jesus inside her. The Light of Grace is soon to come.

Week 4: Love: Mary (Isaiah 54:10): The mother of the Light of Grace sings a love song to the Lord for his undeserved favor toward her and toward all the world.



Joy of the Lord

"You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the Lord your God."

- Exodus 23:19



Bible Study Opportunities

- Sunday Mornings (in person at First Lutheran) - 9:00 a.m.
- Wednesday Evenings (via Zoom) - 5:30 p.m.
- Saturday Mornings (via Zoom) - 8:00 a.m.

If you are interested in participating in one of the Zoom studies, please email Pastor George Murdaugh at georgeearl@hotmail.com.



**Join us on the Second Sunday
of the month at 5:00PM for**

Evening Prayer

✝ ENTER IN SILENCE ✝

✝ WORSHIP PRAYERFULLY ✝

✝ DEPART IN PEACE ✝





FIRST LUTHERAN STAFF

INTERIM PASTOR

Rev. Kurtis Schultz

OFFICE ADMINISTRATION

Rev. Kurtis Schultz

MINISTRY COORDINATORS:

CHRIST CARE

Rev. Tom Lackey

SERVE & CELEBRATE

Lorenza Robinson

FACILITIES & PROPERTIES

Stan Weir

WORSHIP/DEACONS

Charles Craig

BROADCAST

June Weir

FIRST IMPRESSIONS EDITOR

Heather Lackey

Birthdays & Anniversaries



12/3: Carol Lackey
12/13: Kimberly Washington
12/17: Marcy Sharit
12/25: Wray Allen
12/26: Anja Mathru
12/29: Carol Melton

12/6: Wray & Anne Allen
12/14: Charles & Ernestine Craig
12/20: James & Carol Melton

Worship Team...December 2023

December 3

Pastor: Kurtis Schultz
 Worship Asst: Glen Thompson
 Reader: Henry Mosley
 Live Stream Asst: Shane Harris & James McGraw
 Music: Larry Donaldson

December 24

Pastor: Kurtis Schultz
 Worship Asst: Charles Craig
 Reader: Robert Regulus
 Live Stream Asst: Shane Harris & James McGraw
 Music: Becky Schultz

December 10

Pastor: Tom Noon
 Worship Asst: Mike Halbrooks
 Reader: Heather Lackey
 Live Stream Asst: Shane Harris & James McGraw
 Music: Larry Donaldson

December 31

Pastor: Kurtis Schultz
 Worship Asst: Glen Thompson
 Reader: Frances Robinson
 Live Stream Asst: Shane Harris & James McGraw
 Music: Larry Donaldson



MAN UP! Meets the 4th Saturday of the month at 8:30 a.m. All men are welcome to join us for a time of fellowship, prayer, and devotion.

Contact Lorenza Robinson for information on post-pandemic **MAN UP!** meetings.

December 17

Pastor: Tom Lackey
 Worship Asst: Anthony McGraw
 Reader: Mike Halbrooks
 Live Stream Asst: Shane Harris & James McGraw
 Music: Larry Donaldson

