

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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www.firstlutheranbham.org

[View our Church Calendar](#)



Pastor's Pen In the Name of God

What does it mean to invoke the name of God? Perhaps Luther's explanation of the second commandment can give us some insight, "We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." The name of God, the name above all names, isn't meant to be used in nefarious ways or in some flippant manner. Instead, it is to be used in a reverent and holy manner befitting of who God is. Of course, I am sure you know this. But how often do we really consider the Lord's name and greatness that it bears?

Continued on page 2

Local Events

Through 1/15 (Wed.—Sun.): Glow Wild, Birmingham Zoo; www.birminghamzoo.com

12/1: Family Movie Night - showing *The Star*, First Lutheran Church; www.firstlutheranbham.org

12/5-22: *Holiday Spectacular 2024*, Red Mountain Theatre; www.redmountaintheatre.org

12/19-29: *It's a Wonderful Life: Live!*, Virginia Samford Theatre; www.virginiasamfordtheatre.org

12/5-15: *Little Women: The Broadway Musical*, Virginia Samford Theatre; www.virginiasamfordtheatre.org

12/13-22: Holiday Film Series, Alabama Theatre; www.alabamatheatre.com

12/13-23: George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker*®, BJCC; www.alabamaballet.org

12/20-21: Handel's *Messiah*, Alys Stephens Center; www.alabamasymphony.org



(cont'd from p. 1)

For to call on the Lord's name is to call upon the Lord Himself. Names do not exist in a vacuum but are attached to someone. Typically, when you call someone's name, they give you their attention. It is no different for the Lord.

That is why we start our service with the Invocation. We call upon the name of the Lord so that He comes to us and blesses us. We do not call upon God to simply be a spectator to what is happening Sunday morning but instead to be the one acting for us, forgiving our sins, teaching us His word, and strengthening us with His grace. The Lord promises us that when we call, He will answer. Praise be to God that He does! Brothers and sisters, we need not fear the presence of God because of His Son Jesus. Jesus has brought us from sinner to saint so that the Father make look upon us and bless us according to His grace. So, when we call upon the Lord, we are not visited by a wrathful judge but a wise and loving father. One who continues to uphold us to this day. So next time you hear the invocation know the Lord is with you and has come to bring blessings untold.

In Christ,

Pastor Tommy

CONTACT information



Need to reach Pastor Tommy?

Email t.presley@firstlutheranbham.org or call the church at 205.933.0380 and when prompted to "select from the following menu," press 5. This will connect you directly to him at any time.

Voter's Meeting

Sunday, December 8
Immediately Following Worship



From the President

On December 8, we will hold a Voter's Meeting to review, discuss, and approve a church budget for 2025. I encourage everyone to attend and participate in the meeting. As I prepared for the Church Council Meeting where we reviewed the proposed 2025 budget, I reviewed the approved budgets for the past 3 years. These budgets tended to reflect expenditures from the previous year with the expectation that we would call a pastor during each of the three years. Over the 3 years, 70% of our budget was allocated to the Board of Deacons which included salary and benefits costs, office administration, music services, and the Altar Guild; 25% to the Board of Trustees for utilities, insurance, and custodial services; 1% for missions; and 4% for education, stewardship, fellowship, and evangelism. While these percentages were our plans if we were able to call a full-time pastor each year, we actually spent the allocated funds for salary and benefits to pay for building improvements and maintenance (new heating and cooling system, a new roof for the fellowship hall and the education wing, and renovation of the fellowship hall). A lot of work has been done to improve the church and more needs to be done, such as, reglazing the Christ window over the sanctuary entrance, and replacing the fellowship hall stage curtain. These projects and others will be addressed as funds are available.

This year our focus is back on the pastor and making sure that we meet our promises made to him when we called him. We as a congregation pledged that we would follow the Southern District Salary Guidelines and would provide Concordia Health, Retirement, and Disability plans for him and his family. Concordia Health is a very good health insurance plan but is also costly. Pastor Presley and the Church Council have discussed ways to control this cost and I hope that we will have a plan to present to the voters at the meeting on December 8.

On an additional note – the Tuesday Women's Bible Study will begin again in January. Initially it will meet on the second and fourth Tuesdays at noon in the library. Pat Thompson has agreed to coordinate the study group and Pastor Presley will teach the class. If you have a particular topic or focus you would like to study, talk to Pat. She will gather ideas and talk to Pastor Presley about the various ideas for the study. Look for more information in the January newsletter.

In Christ's service,

Glen Thompson
Congregational President



Everyone is invited to view our
Advent Devotionals

Join us starting Dec. 1 on YouTube, Face Book, or Instagram as we share devotionals from Dr. Reed Lessing from his collection:
Wait Upon the Lord!

“...Journey to Bethlehem with this famous promise from Isaiah tucked deep in your heart: “Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall

**Advent
 Devotionals
 &
 Kids’ Advent
 Activity Kits**



SCAN ME



Order your Kids’ Advent Activity Kit Today!

Advent is the season of preparation for Christmas and the birth of Christ. Start a new tradition this December 1st with our Advent Kit for your family. Each kit contains family and kid’s devotional books, craft activities, puzzles and coloring pages. (For ages 5-12)



Point your camera at the code for the order form, or click [Order Form: Kids' Advent Activity Book](#), or email secretary@firstlutheranbham.org

WORSHIP

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

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.



The Poinsettia

For weeks now, we've been seeing them in garden shops and grocery stores. I'm talking about that classic floral symbol of the Christmas season - the Poinsettia. But where did Poinsettias come from and why do we associate them with this time of year?

Poinsettia is a commercially important flowering plant species of the diverse spurge family Euphorbiaceae. Indigenous to Mexico and Central America, the poinsettia was first described by Europeans in 1834. Ranging in height from 2 to 13 feet, it is particularly well known for its red and green foliage and is widely used in Christmas floral displays. It derives its common English name from Joel Roberts Poinsett, the first United States minister to Mexico, who is credited with introducing the plant to the United States in the 1820's. Every year in the US, approximately 70 million poinsettias are sold within a six-week period.

Poinsettias became associated with Christmas as early as the 17th century in Mexico when Franciscan friars began using them in their nativity processions due to their timely blooming season. The plant's red color and star-shaped leaves were thought to symbolize Jesus's blood and the Star of Bethlehem, respectively.

I want to share with you a poem I found entitled, "The Poinsettia". The author is unknown.

I will start today serenely *With a true and noble aim;*
I will give unselfish service *To enrich another's name.*
I will speak a word of courage *To a soul enslaved by fear;*
I will dissipate drab discord *With the sunshine of good cheer.*
I will be sincere and humble *In the work I do;*
I will praise instead of censure *And see the good in you.*

As we begin to prepare for Christmas, we will decorate our homes, offices, schools and our church – quite likely using Poinsettias. As we celebrate with family and friends, let's look at this holiday plant as a beautiful reminder of what the true meaning of this season is - the infant Jesus coming into the world to redeem us from our sins.

Lynn M. Phifer
Council Member at Large



THE STAR is Coming!

Advent begins on Sunday, December 1st and it's the season for preparation of Christ's birth. So let's get ready for Christmas! Join us for a special showing of *THE STAR* on Sunday, December 1st at 6 pm in the Church Fellowship Hall.

In Sony Pictures Animation's *THE STAR*, a small but brave donkey named Bo yearns for a life beyond his daily grind at the village mill. One day he finds the courage to break free, and finally goes on the adventure of his dreams. On his journey, he teams up with Ruth, a lovable sheep who has lost her flock and Dave, a dove with lofty aspirations. Along with three wisecracking camels and some eccentric stable animals, Bo and his new friends follow the Star and become accidental heroes in the greatest story ever told - the first Christmas.

No admission will be charged—but we're requesting donations for the storm survivors in western North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida (see food drive article on p. 9). Invite your neighbors, family and friends to attend this movie. It's a fun, new look at the first Christmas.



Join us Saturday December 7, 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!



GRACE HOUSE
ministries, inc.
giving hope to girls in foster care

LWML Selects Grace House Ministries, Inc. as Local Charity

Each year our First Lutheran LWML selects three charities as their focus for service and donations. The international charity is Lutheran World Relief with emphasis on projects in Africa; St. Jude's Hospital for Children is the national charity, and the local one is Grace House Ministries, Inc. located in Fairfield.

While we usually exchange gifts with our prayer sisters at our Christmas party, this year we will donate gifts to the Grace House. The best way to meet the needs of each girl, is by making a \$20 donation to our LWML. Gifts will then be purchased (or funds donated to) Grace House. Look for the "Giving Tree" in the Fellowship Hall during the month of December or ask a member, "how can I help?"

For more than 32 years, Grace House Ministries has been providing stable, Christian homes for hundreds of Alabama girls in foster care on their residential campus in Fairfield, AL. All girls who come to Grace House have been removed from their homes due to abandonment, neglect, or abuse. Grace House exists as a safe haven for girls who have lost everything and need spiritual and developmental renewal. They use a compassionate and comprehensive approach to end the cycles of poverty and abuse prevalent in the lives of the girls who enter the foster care system. The girls work hard to recover their education credits and develop life skills for a positive future. There is much healing and hope that comes with the wrap-around services that Grace House provides.

Grace House provides care for up to 40 girls, 24/7. They currently have 5 homes, with plans to add 2 additional homes for older girls in 2025. Their intentions are to provide a family environment, safety and education. All girls share bedrooms and as there is turn-over during the year, 60-70 girls are served annually. Every new arrival receives a small piece of luggage and linens (Grace House needs these items now as they are in low supply). Girls usually arrive with all their belongings in a black plastic garbage bag - or they have nothing but the clothes on their backs. When a girl leaves, she receives a larger piece of luggage at a ceremony called the "packing suitcase ceremony."

When you support Grace House:

- You are making a direct impact on the lives of all girls who call Grace House home and who come to us after being removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect.
- You are helping Grace House finish the year strong and meet the many needs of the girls.

You are joining a legacy of 30 years of annual efforts engaging the Birmingham community in advocacy and volunteering to bring awareness & support to Alabama girls in foster care."

--Information from Grace House Ministries. Website <https://www.grace-house.org/>

Advent/Christmas Schedule of Events 2024

- December 1: First Sunday in Advent
- December 1: Advent Family Movie Night, *The Star* - 6:00 p.m.
- December 4, 11, 18: Advent Midweek Activities
Dinner - 5:15 p.m.; Worship - 6:00 p.m.
Theme: "The Silence of God"
- December 7: Tree & Sanctuary Decorating – 9:00 a.m.
- December 18: Neighborhood Caroling after Midweek Worship
- December 24: Christmas Eve Worship - Carols, Candlelight, and Communion - 6:00 p.m.



Everyone is invited to attend our
Midweek Advent Worship

December 4, 11 & 18

5:15pm Dinner

6:00pm Worship In Person & Online

Christmas Eve Worship

6:00pm Christmas Eve Carols,
 Communion and Candlelight



SCAN ME



GIVE THANKS! Community Food Drive & Free Movie Night!

Time to show thanks for all God's gifts to us. For the past month, we've been holding a community-wide food drive for western North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida families who survived Hurricanes Helene and Milton. Please continue to bring your gratitude to reality by bringing your bountiful

donations to First Lutheran Church anytime during December. Then enjoy movie night with free popcorn and bottled water on Sunday December 1st at 6 pm. Non-perishable food items maybe dropped off whenever the building is open. Look for the basket in the Fellowship Hall.

If you have a problem deciding what to bring, here is a list of requested items. His blessing abound!

FOOD DRIVE MOST-NEEDED ITEMS:

We encourage donations to be HEALTHY, LOW-FAT, LOW-SODIUM, AND LOW-SUGAR non-perishable products.

- Canned Meat (Chicken, Tuna, Salmon, etc.) - Canned Vegetables (Low/No Sodium Preferred) - Canned Fruit (or Applesauce) - Canned OR Boxed Meals (Chef Boyardee, Beef Stew, etc.) - Boxed Mac & Cheese - Potato Flakes - Peanut Butter (and Other Nut Butter) - Canned OR Dried Beans, Peas, Lentils, etc. - Pasta, Rice, Quinoa (or Other Healthy Carbs) - Breakfast Cereals, Oatmeal, Grits (and Other Breakfast Foods) - 100% Fruit Juice (Canned, Plastic Bottles, or Boxes) - Shelf-Stable Milk (Dairy or Non-Dairy Alternatives such as Oat, Almond, Coconut, etc.) - AND... other healthy non-perishable products!

PLEASE AVOID Sodas, candy, junk food, alcoholic beverages, homemade items, open/used items, items in a glass container, or perishable products. Expired products are not acceptable.

No time to shop? Donations of \$1 will provide 8 meals.

Do you have questions? Please contact June Weir at junerweir@gmail.com.

Joy of the Lord

Everyone
who calls on the
name
of the Lord
will be
saved.
Romans 10 vs. 13

PLEASE NOTE!

December's Evening Prayer service (December 8) will not be held.

We'll resume in the New Year on January 12.

Bible Study Opportunities

- Sunday Mornings (in person at First Lutheran) - 9:00 a.m.
- Wednesday Evenings (via Zoom) - 6:30 p.m.
- Saturday Mornings (via Zoom) - 9:00 a.m.

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



Man Up! Men's Ministry

Man Up continues its break through December due to the busy holiday season. Please join us when we reconvene in the new year on Saturday, January 25!





FIRST LUTHERAN STAFF

PASTOR

Rev. Tommy Presley

OFFICE ADMINISTRATION

Rev. Kurtis Schultz

MINISTRY COORDINATORS:

CHRIST CARE

Rev. Tom Lackey

SERVE & CELEBRATE

Lorenza Robinson

FACILITIES & PROPERTIES

Stan Weir

WORSHIP/DEACONS

Charles Craig

DIGITAL MEDIA

June Weir

FIRST IMPRESSIONS EDITOR

Heather Lackey

Birthdays & Anniversaries



12/3: Carol Lackey
12/8: Haelim Allen
12/13: Kimberly Washington
12/14: Lynn Phifer
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 2024

December 1

Pastor: Tommy Presley
 Worship Asst: Charles Craig
 Reader: Carol Lackey
 Live Stream Asst: Shane Harris & James McGraw
 Music: Larry Donaldson

December 22

Pastor: Tommy Presley
 Worship Asst: Mike Halbrooks
 Reader: Glen or Pat Thompson
 Live Stream Asst: Shane Harris & James McGraw
 Music: Larry Donaldson

December 8

Pastor: Tommy Presley
 Worship Asst: Henry Mosley
 Reader: Frances Foy
 Live Stream Asst: Shane Harris & James McGraw
 Music: Larry Donaldson

December 24

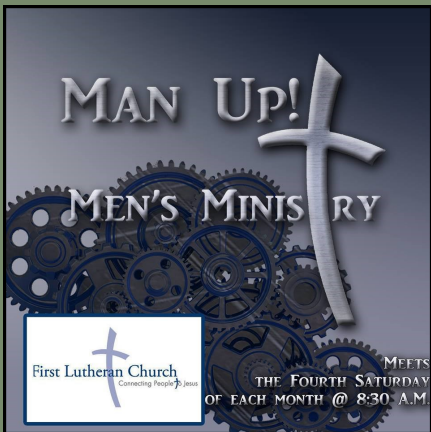
Pastor: Tommy Presley
 Worship Asst: Robert Regulus
 Live Stream Asst: Shane Harris & James McGraw
 Music: Becky Schultz

December 15

Pastor: Tommy Presley
 Worship Asst: Glen Thompson
 Reader: Heather Lackey
 Live Stream Asst: Shane Harris & James McGraw
 Music: Larry Donaldson

December 29

Pastor: Tommy Presley
 Worship Asst: Anthony McGraw
 Reader: Henry Mosley
 Live Stream Asst: Shane Harris & James McGraw
 Music: Larry Donaldson



Our men's ministry, ManUP!, meets the last Saturday of the month at 8:30 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

All men are welcome!

