

CHRISTMAS JOY



One of my personal highlights this season leading up to Christmas has been listening to our kids sing Advent and Christmas songs. The other day, Levi, our five-year-old son, was singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty..." Only he sang it this way, "Holy Moly Holy, Lord God Almighty."

Holy Moly. Christmas! The child of Mary. Son of God. God-in-the-flesh appearing. Emmanuel. I think it's for joy God takes on human flesh and becomes one of us. Yes, Jesus carried many, many sorrows, too. Jesus touches the wound, feels the ache, and receives the lost. But it's hard to imagine Jesus' ministry – especially in contrast to the fire and brimstone ministry of John the Baptist – as being anything less than joyful and full of freedom. All those dinner parties Jesus was a part of during his three-year earthly ministry? Holy Moly – there could only have been lots of joy and laughter around the table!

One of the deepest marks on the lives of followers of Jesus is a joy that never bottoms out. It's a joy that's never exhausted or far from us. There's no denying that there is so much suffering and woundedness in the world. It can come close and nearly overpower us at times. But there's something even deeper yet than the pain or exhaustion we might feel, something that holds gently the grief we might carry or the sadness that is present. Christmas takes us there to this reality! We're made to participate in unending and limitless joy! God inspires us with a hope and confidence even in the deepest, darkest valley! God comes to us! God is with us! God delights in us!

Holy Moly – Emmanuel, born and alive within us and among us – it can only mean that you, and all around you, are forever deeply loved by God.

May there be a holy joy for you this Christmas,

Pastor Matt Wheeler

Building Restoration Project Updates

Let's make a holy snowball for Christ...

For a little over a year now, our leadership has been in prayerful conversation with one another regarding the need for a building restoration project. During our semi-annual congregational meeting November 21st, the congregation decided to go forward with hiring a capital appeal consultant, hiring Jennie Wolf Smith from GSB Fundraising who lives in Toledo, to not only help us in our effort to raise funds for the project (about \$400,000), but to deepen a culture of gratitude and generosity in our life together, celebrating God's work and presence among us. A kind and very respectful "hats off" to all of our leaders who have been so involved in the ongoing effort to pursue this project and ones who have been so generous already in giving toward this project. We've been blessed with such good and faithful leadership and generous givers so far.

It's been a lot of work so far. But we're only beginning! As we journey together approaching the end of the year, and especially into the new year, more holy momentum and enthusiasm will begin to 'snowball' in this project and effort. Keep praying with us!

WORSHIP SCHEDULE OVER THE HOLIDAYS

Here's the plan for gathering for worship at St. John's during Christmastide:

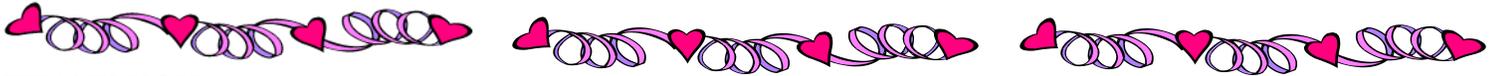
- + Thursday, December 23rd: **No Thursday night worship service**
- + Friday December 24th, Christmas Eve: **4:00pm** Family-Style Christmas Eve Worship
10:30pm-Candlelight Worship Service w/ special music beginning at 10:00pm (Facebook Live)
- + Sunday, December 26th: **One worship service, 10:00am**, Lessons and Carols- **No Sunday School**
- + Thursday, December 30th: **No Thursday night worship service**
- + Sunday, January 2nd: **One worship service, 10:00am**, more carols with several worshipful songs at Christmastide being shared by bell players. **No Sunday School.**
- + Thursday, January 6th, Epiphany: **LIFT Drive-In Worship Service**, 7:00pm, 88.5FM, pull on up in the parking lot east of the sanctuary, between St. John's and St. Paul's. All are welcome!



In our Prayers...

- + The family and friends of Betsy Funderburk, finished her baptismal journey, November 9th

+ The family and friends of Bob Parman, finished his baptismal journey, November 10th
+ The family and friends of Ben Geldin, finished his baptismal journey, November 10th
+ The family and friends of Brent Smith, finished his baptismal journey, November 11th
+ The family and friends of Jeanne Sutton, finished her baptismal journey, November 14th
+ The family and friends of Carol Kessler, finished her baptismal journey, November 29th
We give thanks to God for these travelers on the journey with us, remembering them, holding them in our hearts, and anticipating with their families and loved ones the promise of resurrection life and joy ahead.



THANK YOU

From the Smith Family- We would like to thank Pastor Matt for the meaningful service for Brent, and the funeral luncheon committee for providing the meal following the service. Many thanks for all the thoughts and prayers from our church family during this difficult time.

From the Funeral Luncheon Committee- Thank you to the families of Bob Parman, Brent Smith and Ben Geldin for their donations.

From Penny Walther- Many thanks to many members, friends, and family for the love shown during my fall, surgery and rehab. We hear "Do not only hear the Word but do it" They have been doing it daily. Mary Lou, Jane, Becky, Nancy and Jim, Diana, Judy, Bette and Lisa chose a night weekly to help me at my home. Nancy W., Ken and Marlene took me to appointments. Pastor Matt called for prayer and conversation. Lois came and brought flowers. Nearly 50 sent cards with encouraging words. It has been a lesson in LOVE to me.

THANK YOU.

January Birthdays- Sue Seils, Evelyn Floriana, Jack HineLine, Becky Humbert, Dave Kidd, Morgan Harris, Ann Weickert, Hannah Wheeler, Levi Wheeler, Becky Wise, Vernon Nitschke, Sam Havens, Eric Hottinger, Nancy Goodman, Avery Hirt, Oakley Riggs, Channing Stevenson, Callen Tooman, Jim Mauk, Case Stevenson, Harper Kuehne, Ella Banda, Terry Fought, Jami HineLine, Luke Lawrence, Phil Willis, Diane Fritz, Cole Bowers, Keisa Schwochow, Joy Marsh, Betty Kusmer, Wayne Wensinger, Brenda Russell.

December Anniversaries- Kevin & Jodi Stevenson; Norm & Jane Kraak.



Hot Chocolate and Cookies

Sunday, January 30th

Between the services and after the 2nd service...

The Jr & Sr High Youth would like to invite you to come enjoy!!!

Donations accepted...

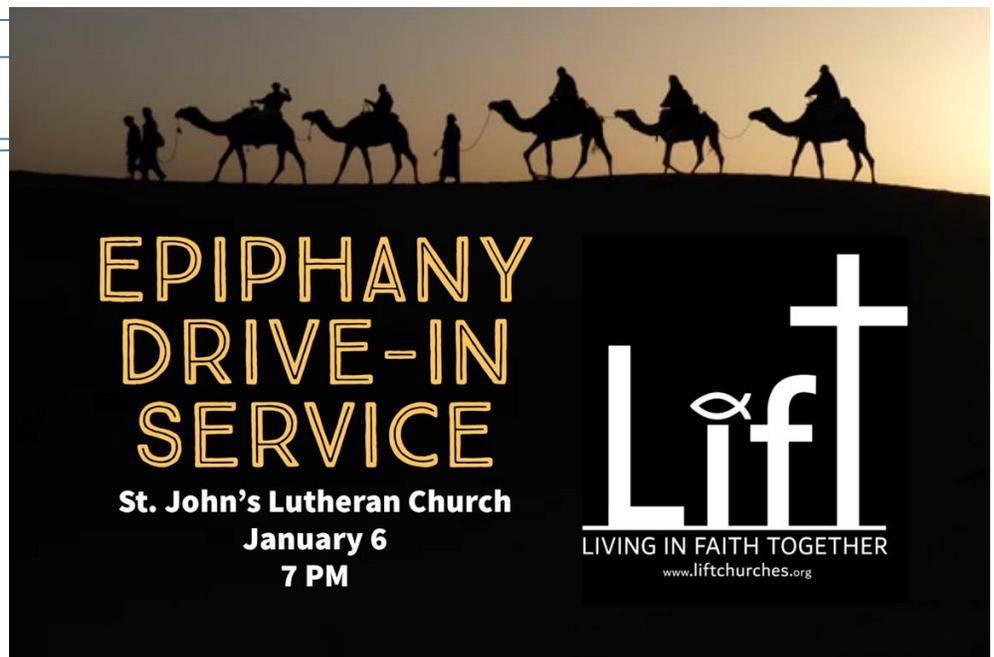
SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS:



****Sunday, December 26th -NO SUNDAY SCHOOL**
****Sunday, January 2nd -NO SUNDAY**

SCHOOL

I would like to send out a BIG thank you to everyone who donated canned goods and nonperishables for our food drive/putt-putt golf course. With the help of 9 jr/sr. high youth and their parents we set up 10 different golf holes... after the second service approximately 35+ people came over from the church to have food, fun and fellowship!!! Special thanks to Alex Boroff for sharing this idea and Pastor Matt and Chrissy for the lunch for everyone!!! Dave



FROM THE LIFT PASTOR

As we begin a new year, we move from Advent into Christmas into Epiphany. Our waiting and anticipation becomes celebration and hope. Epiphany is a season of revelation. We hear stories about how God's promise is revealed in our world through the person of Jesus. On Epiphany, traditionally celebrated on January 6, we remember how the Magi found Jesus. I'm looking to our drive-in service that day at St. John's at 7 PM. These foreign astrologers saw a sign in the heavens, and followed to find its meaning. The Bible is not totally clear on their complete identity. Only mentioned in Matthew's gospel, it does not say how many of them there were, or that they were kings. They did, however, bring three gifts to the Christ Child. As we think of these visitors, we remember that the message of Jesus crosses all sorts of boundaries.

As a pastor, I like to encourage faith practices in the home. Family life complements life in the congregation. One spiritual practice to consider in the new year is a blessing of your dwelling place. Epiphany is a traditional time to have a prayer of blessing for a house. When the Magi visited Jesus and his family, they were filled with joy. "On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage" (Matthew 2:11).

thank
you!

According to an ancient practice, you can use chalk to put a visible blessing on the doorframe of your house. With the numbers of the new year written above the door, the letters mean *Criste Masionem Benedica*, which means in Latin, "Christ, bless this house." There is also a tradition that the letters could be the names of the Magi, but this is a later tradition not described in the Bible, as mentioned above. This year the inscription looks like this: 20+C+M+B+22

Let us pray: O God, you revealed your Son with the light of a star. The Magi followed the star to find your divine promise in the human form of Jesus. Reveal your healing and life-giving promise in this house during the year ahead. Christ, bless this house. Amen.

As we go into the new year, I hope that we can keep discovering how God's promises are being revealed in our LIFT congregations. I look forward to congregational life as we live out a life of discipleship together here in Fremont.

Peace, Pastor Paul Bailie



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