

## ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

P. O. Box 267, 201 Veterans Dr., Columbus, TX 78934

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E-mail: [admin@splctx.org](mailto:admin@splctx.org) [www.splctx.com](http://www.splctx.com) **Pastor:** [pastor.akethan@gmail.com](mailto:pastor.akethan@gmail.com)

December 17, 2023 Contemporary 11:05 AM

Third Sunday of Advent

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Senior Pastor	Alan Kethan	<u>Home:</u> (979)-942-9060	<u>Cell:</u> (830)-708-1200
Youth & Family Specialist		Stephanie Polasek	
Congregational Chair		Donna Maas	
St. Paul Christian Learning Academy Director		Briana Bedford	
Secretary		Elena Holub	
Custodian		Tomasa Rosales	
Parish Nurse Program Coordinator		DyAnn Lauzon	

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**MISSION STATEMENT:** Love God, Love Neighbor (*Luke 10:27*)

**VISION STATEMENT:** We will work to strengthen and grow closer in relationship to God and to one another.

- *As we enter into a sacred time and space, a friendly reminder to please set your cell phone to vibrate.*
- ***We want to welcome all of our guests today and thank you for worshiping with us. If you have any questions or would like more information regarding our services, programs, day care, or preschool programs at St. Paul, please visit our Welcome Center in the narthex immediately following our service, and an attendant will be more than happy to assist you. If this is your first time at St. Paul, we hope you will take a gift along with you. We also have a gift bag for children.***
- *Hearing Assist devices are available for those who need assistance in hearing worship service better. Please see a person in the Sound Room (Usher Room) to request the use of a device during worship.*

\* **This symbol indicates that the congregation is invited to stand physically or in spirit.**

### INTRODUCTION

*“Rejoice always,” begins the reading from 1 Thessalonians. Isaiah and the psalmist make clear that God is turning our mourning into laughter and shouts of joy. “All God’s children got a robe,” go the words of a spiritual. It is not so much a stately, formal, pressed outfit as it is a set of party clothes, clothes we are happy to wear. We receive that robe in baptism, and in worship we gather for a foretaste of God’s party.*

## WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

### SIGNING OF ATTENDANCE PADS

*(Ushers will be handing out Attendance Pads during the announcements. Please be sure to sign your name and contact information.)*

### LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH

#### \* **CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

P We believe that the Bible contains instruction for us as followers of Jesus Christ to do what he asked of us. He taught the first disciples to help others to confess their sins and to proclaim to them the promise of forgiveness afterwards. So let us take a few brief moments in silence to open our hearts and minds to Jesus, to confess the things that weigh heavy on our hearts and the things we need help with so we might be more in line with what Jesus commands.

*(Silence for private confession.)*

P If you are truly sorry and asking God for help, here is the promise he commanded the leaders in his church to proclaim, “You are forgiven.” May this forgiveness free you and help you to live; to live in Jesus’ name.

**C Amen.**

### GOSPEL SONG: LIGHT OF THE WORLD

The world waits for a miracle. The heart longs for a little bit of hope,

O come, O come, Emmanuel.

A child prays for peace on earth and she’s calling out from a sea of hurt,

O come, O come, Emmanuel.

And can you hear the angels singing. . .

### CHORUS 1

**Glo – ry to the light of the world.**

**Glo – ry. . . the light of the world is here!**

**GOSPEL:** John 1:6-8, 19-28

*John’s gospel describes Jesus as the “light of the world.” John the Baptist is presented as a witness to Jesus, one who directs attention away from himself to Christ, the true light.*

A The holy gospel according to St. John, chapter 1, verses 6-8 and 19-28.

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>19</sup>This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” <sup>20</sup>He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed,

“I am not the Messiah.” 21And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.”  
“Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” 22Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us  
have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” 23He said, “I am the  
voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ” as the prophet  
Isaiah said. 24Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25They asked him, “Why then are  
you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” 26John answered  
them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, 27the one who is  
coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” 28This took place in Bethany  
across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

**GOSPEL SONG: LIGHT OF THE WORLD**  
The drought breaks with the tears of a mother,  
A baby's cry is the sound of love come down. Come down, Emmanuel!  
He is the song for the suffering. He is Messiah,  
The Prince of Peace has come! He has come! Emmanuel!

**CHORUS 2**  
Glo – ry to the light of the world. Glo – ry to the light of the world.  
Glo – ry to the light of the world. Glo – ry to the light of the word.

**BRIDGE**  
For all who wait, for all who hunger, for all who've prayed, for all who wonder.  
Behold your King! Behold Messiah! Emmanuel! Emmanuel!

**CHORUS 3**  
Glo – ry to the light of the world. Glo – ry to the light of the world.  
Glo – ry to the light of the world. Behold your King! Behold Messiah!  
Emmanuel! Emmanuel!

The world waits for a miracle. The heart longs for a little bit of hope,  
O come, O come, Emmanuel.  
CCLI Song # 7023299 Words and Music by Lauren Daigle, Paul Duncan and Paul Mabury  
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**CHILDREN'S SERMON**  
  
**SERMON**

**\* SERMON SONG: HOW CAN YOU NOT**  
I see the sunrise in the morning, and a million stars at night.  
I hear the birds, they can't stop singing, “Hallelujah!”  
I see His goodness when I fall down, and His grace that picks me up.  
Every day I can't stop singing, “Hallelujah!”

**CHORUS**  
*How can you not see God in every little thing, in every little moment?*  
*How can you not feel loved? How can you not? How can you not?*  
*'Cause He's in the middle of every little thing, and every little moment.*  
*How can you not see God? How can you not? How can you not?*  
**2<sup>nd</sup> TIME TO BRIDGE**

I see the sunset, and I wonder if You paint it just for me?  
Nobody else could make a world so beautiful.  
How could I question His love when it's everywhere I go?  
Wherever I look, I find another miracle! **REPEAT CHORUS**

**BRIDGE**  
Everything is evidence showing me that You exist  
All creation's singing, “Hallelujah!”  
Everything is evidence showing me that You exist  
All creation's singing, “Hallelujah!”

**LAST CHORUS**  
How can you not see God in every little thing, in every little moment?  
How can you not feel loved? Oooh, oooh. . .  
'Cause He's in the middle of every little thing, and every little moment.  
How can you not see God? How can you not? How can you not?  
Oh, how can you not see God in every little thing, in every little moment?  
How can you not feel loved? How can yo not? How can you not?  
'Cause He's in the middle of every little thing, and every little moment.  
How can you not see God? How can you not? How can you not?

CCLI Song #7181373 Words and Music by Jeff Sojka, Jessie Early, and Leanna Crawford Capitol CMG Paragon; Jessie  
Parker Early Music; Sojka Songs; Songs of Combustion Four Point Five.  
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**\* APOSTLES' CREED**  
**A** With the whole church, let us confess our faith.  
**C** I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

**and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*(The congregation may be seated during the prayers.)*

**PRAYERS**

- A With hope and expectation, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all who await God's day of restoration.

*A brief silence.*

- A Fill our mouths with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy as we bear witness to the great things you have done. Give your church a spirit of gladness as we gather and as we are sent.

*A brief silence.*

- A Let the trees of the field sing your praise. Protect forests, orchards, rainforests, and all wooded areas from disease and deforestation. Keep us grateful for their gifts of oxygen, food, shade, and shelter.

*A brief silence.*

- A Give us strength to pray for our world without ceasing and provoke us toward love and good deeds for all who are in need, especially our brother and sisters in Tennessee. Empower us as helpers and advocates.

*A brief silence.*

- A We pray for peace in all the world, especially in war-torn areas of Ukraine, Sudan, Niger and Israel. Bring an end to wars and the destruction of lives and your creation.

*A brief silence.*

- A We give you thanks and praise for the births of Waylon Ryder Gorman to Jacob and Nancy Gorman and Brooklyn Kate Richardson to Joshua and Cassandra Richardson. Bless their families as they begin new lives together.

*A brief silence.*

- A We pray for the family and friends of Vickie Briles. Be with them and comfort them during this difficult time.

*A brief silence.*

- A We pray for all those in need of healing and whose needs are diverse and known to you including: Shirley Trahan; Ricky Elly; Sophie Stancik; Richanne Waddle; Carolyn Kneller; those on our Prayer Team's list; and those we name in our hearts before you.

*A brief silence.*

- A We pray for all those battling cancer that they may know comfort and strength. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*  
Kristen Downing; Ashley Roberts; Traci Edman; Michael Yancey; Amanda Aramijo; Zachary Schulke; Herbie Kollatschny; Tom Russell, Jr.; Melda Coleman; Al Gene Canik; Larry Bookout; Mike Wostarek; Elizabeth Frisby; Kristina Acevedo; George Krenek; Anne Dimas; Carl Geisler; Laura Walla; Randy Wendt; Heather Deviney; Paul Casinger; Dr. Tom Hancher; Leonard Kahlden; and Bob Loy.

- A We pray for all expectant mothers and especially for:  
Kyndall Beettner; Jamee Albert; Kristen O'Leary Bridges; Abigail Gatzke; Chelsea Gilstrap; Calli Guthmann; Dhara Comans; Nelma Grace Weathers; and Rosalinda Rosales that they have healthy terms and deliveries, and if not, may they find comfort and peace.

*A brief silence.*

- A We pray for all those who reside in care facilities and the homebound that they receive your caring and compassion. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*  
Clemons Venghaus; Joey Denby; Paul Minar, Sr.; Adrian Fritsch; Coy Dell Schindler; Madeline Menke; Doris Horndt; Helen Perrard; Jane Booker; Pat Brasher; Walter Glaeser, Jr.; Dolores Hoelscher; Jesse Grabow; Donna Dehmer; Cherie Moore; Lauren Lamb; and Lydia Rojas.

- A We pray for all law enforcement officers and especially for Charles Jobb; Joseph Smith; Todd Jacobs; Troy Neisner; Jacob Gorman; Nancy Gorman; Johnny Kovar; Abbigail Weido; Dustin Lattimore; Zane Weido; Josh Jones; as well as Donnie Templeton and Jason Templeton who are also fire fighters. For all fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers and 9-1-1 dispatchers, especially Brent Gorman, Sr.; Brent Gorman, Jr.; Reid Brasher; Dusty Dittmar; John Maertz; Ron Luedke; Pastor Alan Kethan; Kristi Weyand; Eric Weyand; Bradley Berger; Jon Berger; James Chollett; Edward Thraen, Jr.; Kyle Burris; Dylan Walcik; Travis Neuendorff; Nathan Bookout; Brenda Henkes; Jan Willette; and Terri Neunendorff, as well as those active duty military members including Kyle Appelt; Montana Appelt; Douglas Neuendorff; Scott Cherniss; Kameron Page; Dalton Kapel; Kevin Gonzalez; Evelyn Rojas; and Nelson Beettner that they are protected and kept safe.

*A brief silence.*

- A We pray for the church throughout the world. May we all proclaim the good news of your love effectively. We ask, especially, that you would bless the ministry of our sister congregations Cristo Rey and their Pastor Armando Capcha and Iglesia Cristiana Camino de Santidad and their leaders Pastors Gumer and Naomi Anton in Peru, all Missionaries, especially St. Paul's supported missionary, Dina Anton de Espinoza, and our companion synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic.

*A brief silence.*

A Listen to these and all our prayers, O God of hosts, and restore us with your great and everlasting mercy.

C Amen.

\* PEACE

P As Jesus shared peace, let us also share His peace with one another. (Share the “Peace of the Lord” with your neighbors.)

*(We will be collecting offerings before and after worship each week. This includes Power of One dollars.)*

OFFERING and POWER OF ONE

*“Power of One” is a ministry sponsored by your Stewardship Team. We are asking each and every one of our members to give \$1.00 above what your normal giving would be. We are asking each member to place this \$1.00 bill or change in the offering plate each week. The team is also inviting all children to participate to develop the habit of giving as part of their worship experience. Parents, a penny, nickel, dime, quarter, or dollar bill, any of these will do to help your children develop a habit of giving. These “Power of One” dollars will be used to support local ministries and ministries abroad. The purpose of this ministry is to demonstrate that something as small as one dollar can be used to make a difference in the lives of others.*

\* OFFERING PRAYER

P Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts: our selves, our time, and our possessions. Use us, and what we have gathered, in feeding the world with your love, through the one who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

\* REMEMBERING JESUS' WORDS, PROMISES, AND COMMANDS

\* LORD'S PRAYER

P Lord remember us in your kingdom and teach us to sing.

C Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.

\* INVITATION TO COMMUNION

P Come to receive Jesus, forgiveness and light.

C Amen.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION (Continuous with Individual Cups)

*{Distribution will be continuous. All are welcome for communion. Please come down the center aisle starting from the front. Follow directions of the ushers, coming up one side at a time. Pastor will hand you the bread. If you wish to have a gluten-free wafer, please tell Pastor “Gluten-free, please.” Afterward, you will choose either wine or white grape juice from the individual cups in the tray – white grape juice in the center with wine surrounding. Place the empty cups in the baskets located off to the side. Although communion is continuous, you are welcome to kneel at the rail in prayer after receiving communion. Please return to your seat by the side aisles.}*

\* PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

P Generous God, in bread and cup you have revealed your glory for all people to see together. Nourished by this meal, send us out to proclaim your good news of liberation and release, brought to birth in Jesus Christ our Savior.

C Amen.

\* BLESSING

P The God of peace bless you, the love of Christ sustain you in hope, and the anointing of the Spirit ✠ remain upon you now and forever.

C Amen.

\* CLOSING SONG: BELIEVER

I walk a bit different now, now that my heart's been found,  
nothing feels the same. I hold my head a bit higher,  
I lift my voice a bit louder. Yeah, something inside has changed.

CHORUS

*I am a mountain mover, water walker,  
more than just an overcomer, 'cause I've been set free.  
I am a gospel preacher, heart on fire,  
Freedom singing testifier, 'cause I've been redeemed!  
I am a believer! I am a believer!*

I know this is not my home, I know I don't walk alone.  
No matter what comes my way. I have peace through the trouble,  
I have joy through the struggle,  
And now my hope's in a brighter day.

CHORUS

*I am a mountain mover, water walker,  
more than just an overcomer, 'cause I've been set free.  
I am a gospel preacher, heart on fire,  
Freedom singing testifier, 'cause I've been redeemed!  
I am a believer! I am a believer!*

**BRDIGE x2**  
I am a child of the Father, an orphan no longer.  
No doubt about who I am. I'm in the hands of the Healer,  
The arms of the Savior. His grace makes me who I am.

**LAST CHORUS**  
I am a mountain mover, water walker,  
more than just an overcomer, 'cause I've been set free.  
I am a mountain mover, water walker,  
more than just an overcomer, 'cause I've been set free.  
I am a gospel preacher, heart on fire,  
Freedom singing testifier, 'cause I've been redeemed!  
I am a believer! I am a believer!  
I am a believer! I am a believer!

CCLI Song #7129946 Words and Music by Bryan Fowler, Mitch Wong, and Rhett Walker © RELWOF (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) | Ships In A Bottle (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) | So Essential Tunes (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC) | Integrity's Praise! Music (Admin. by Integrity Music) CCLI License #1729377

\* **DISMISSAL**  
P Go in peace. Witness that others may believe                      **C Thanks be to God, and we will.**

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**USHERS:** Bethany Guthmann; Sandy Cherniss; Fay & Thomas Ulbricht; Cindy Kahlden  
**LAY READER:** Courtney Busselman                      **ACOLYTE:** Berkley Anderson  
**STREAMING:** Mike Maas                      **POWER POINT:** Peggy Geisler  
**SOUND:** Sydney Eaton and Todd Jacobs                      **ALTAR GUILD:** Bethany Guthmann

**WELCOME:** Welcome to what some branches of the Christian church call Gaudete, or Rejoice, Sunday. May we find joy in worshiping God and anticipating the celebration of Christ's birth.

**ALTAR WALL FLOWERS** are placed by Michael & Donna Maas in celebration of their 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on December 16.

**Congratulations** to Cody & Cassidy Parks on the baptism of their daughter Tiegan Mae Parks. Tiegan was baptized Sunday, December 17, 2023 at the 9:00 AM service. Sponsors for Tiegan are Brittani Anderson and Tyler Abke.

***It's a Boy!!*** Jacob and Nancy Gorman are excited to announce the birth of their son **Waylon Ryder Gorman**. Waylon Ryder was born at 9:40 AM on Wednesday, December 13, 2023. He

weighed 7 lbs. 11 oz. and is welcomed home by big brother Bennett. Proud grandparents are Patty and Brent Gorman, Sr., and proud great-grandmother is Doris Gorman.

***It's a Girl!!*** Joshua and Cassandra (Thompson) Richardson are pleased to announce the birth of their daughter **Brooklyn Kate Richardson**. She is welcomed home by big sister Braylin and big brother Bentley.

**COLLECTION OF OFFERING:** Offering for the worship services is collected before and after worship. Offering bowls are placed in the back entrance and inside the side sanctuary door for you to place your offering in. This includes "Power of One" dollars.

**Amount needed for average weekly budgeted expenses:** \$8,405.00

<b><u>Attendance:</u></b> December 9 & 10, 2023 – 206	<b><u>Contributions:</u></b> Dec. 9 & 10 – \$7,886.01
<b><u>Power of One:</u></b> December 9 & 10, 2023 – \$59.00	<b><u>Building Fund:</u></b> Dec. 9 & 10 – \$523.04

*Thank you to those who contributed to last week's offerings. Loving God/Loving Neighbor.*

**ATTENTION:** *Names on the prayer list in the bulletin will be printed for 2 weeks. After 2 weeks, the names will be removed from the bulletin unless the church office has been notified to keep them.*

► **Children's Activity Bags** are available for use by our young members and guests! You can find them on the coat hooks in the coat area of the narthex. After worship, **please place the used activity bags and their contents in the receptacle in the narthex.** Thank you! ☺

**\*\* Church Council Nominations:** If you are interested in serving on the Church Council, please email a brief bio of yourself to Elena Holub at [admin@splctx.org](mailto:admin@splctx.org) as soon as you can. Your bio should include, but not be limited to, how long you have been a member of St. Paul, ministry teams you have served on, the reason you want to serve and a brief background description. If you have any questions, please contact Judy Sirois (979-732-1920), Shelley Janik, Bradley Polasek, Lora Kuentler, or Edna Bergfeld. **\*\***


**++ FAMILY ADVENT READINGS:** Families are encouraged to sign up for the **Family Advent Litany Reading and Candle Lighting** that will take place at the beginning of services during Advent. A family will come forward to read the Litany and light the candle for that particular Sunday in Advent. If your family is interested, **please sign up on the sign-up sheet in the narthex.** A different family is needed for each service. **The final date and time is:** Sun. Dec. 24 at 10:00 AM. A copy of the reading will be sent to you.




► **Offering Envelopes:** 2024 Offering Envelopes are ready to be picked up in the narthex (foyer). They are in **alphabetical order**. If you want a box of offering envelopes and do not see your name, please notify the church office, and we will have a box for you next week. ◀

▲ **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY:** *To all that can help – skilled or unskilled:*  
Something for everyone! Group efforts are invited. Contact Ruth Bedford at (281)-703-3124 for any additional information or contact information. Or, just show up! We can also use a hands-on Co-Leader to help Ruth on our Habitat for Humanity Outreach Team.

*A message of request for help from the Colorado County Habitat Director, Charmaine:*  
“We are starting construction on our 30<sup>th</sup> house Fridays and Saturdays from 8:00 AM till whenever you prefer – 12:00 PM or 2:00 PM. We need help December 15 & 16 and then January 5 & 6 and so on.” *Thank you Charmaine and Ruth for all you do for this very worthwhile endeavor of love.* ☺

 If you will be **purchasing your own poinsettia to place in church for Christmas, please bring it to the church Thursday, December 21, 2023.** We ask that you do not bring it any earlier since there will not be any place to store the poinsettia or keep it watered.


 **2023 Christmas Eve Worship Services:** There will be no worship service Saturday, December 23. **Sunday, December 24** there will be a **CONTEMPORARY Christmas Eve service at 10:00 AM.** *Traditional candlelight services will be at 4:00 PM and 7:00 PM.* Be sure to make note of these times!

**\*\* ATTENTION!! ANNUAL REPORTS of various Ministry Teams and organizations are due in the church office by Wednesday, January 3, 2024!!** These need to be compiled for our regular congregational Annual Report for our annual meeting to be held January 28, 2024. **\*\***

- The **Noon Bible Study group that meets on Tuesdays** in the church library is taking a **brief winter break.** *They will resume on Tuesday, January 9, 2024.*  
Have a safe and happy holiday season! ●

**ST. PAUL QUILTERS:** The St. Paul Quilters are taking a brief winter break as a group to relax and rejuvenate for next year. **They are taking off all of December and will resume quilting as a group Tuesday, January 9, 2024.** The quilters meet the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month in the Lighthouse. If anyone is interested in getting fabric to cut blocks at home or to sew quilt tops at home during that time, please contact Carol Lighthill at 832-371-3308. She will be happy to meet you and get you the fabric you need.

- ◆ The **Adult Bible Study group that meets on Fridays** in the church library will take a brief winter break and resume in January, 2024. Everyone is welcome! ◆

 **NOTICE!!** We are **looking for a person** to take over the business of the **rental of the Lighthouse.** That person will be responsible for checking what dates are available, handling the paper work and collecting fees & deposits, contacting the custodian, and contacting the person who would open and close the Lighthouse for an event, as well as training additional members to open and close. If you are interested, please contact the church office at (979)-732-2423.

► **The Mowing Team is looking for more people to help mow the interior church lawn.** Typically it takes an hour and a half, or less, to mow and edge. Please call John Brasher at 979-253-1448 if you are interested or if you have any questions.

🎵🎵🎵 **Musicians Wanted for Praise Band!!** The St. Paul Praise Band is in need of a keyboard player. They would also like to add at least one guitarist, a bass guitarist and singers. If you are interested or have any questions, please contact Tracy Baker at 713-516-8017. 🎵🎵🎵

- **Women of JOY Bible Study:** The Women of JOY Bible Study group meets on Mondays to cook and have interesting Bible study and discussions. The ***first Monday*** of the month we **meet in the Lighthouse to cook** for BLAST. The **2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays** of the month we meet in the **high school room (old choir room) for Bible Study.** If you are interested or would like more information, please contact Gerri Hackfeld at 979-732-4711.

♥ **Grief Support Group:** The Grief Support Group is for anyone who has lost a loved one, either recently or a few years ago. We share and support each other. Come join us and get support from others walking this journey. We meet at **5:30 PM** in the youth room (formerly the choir room) the **third Thursday of the month.** **NOTE:** You do not have to share or talk until you are ready! If you have questions, please contact Peggy Geisler at 979-732-0350.

**SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:**

<b>Mon., Dec. 18 –</b>	1:00 PM – Nursing Home Team to TLC 6:00 PM – Church Council
<b>Tues., Dec. 19 –</b>	10:00 AM – Pastor to Columbus Oaks 5:30 PM – Prayer Team (library) 6:00 PM – CLA Board
<b>Wed., Dec. 20 –</b>	9:00 AM – Morning Circle (library) 10:00 AM-1:00 PM – Seniors Together (Lighthouse)
<b>Thurs., Dec. 21 –</b>	5:30 PM – Grief Support Group (old choir room)
<b>Sat., Dec. 23 –</b>	<b>No worship service!</b>
<b>Next Sun., Dec. 24 –</b>	<b>10:00 AM – Contemporary Christmas Eve Service</b> 4:00 PM – Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship 7:00 PM – Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship
<b>Next Mon., Dec. 25 –</b>	<b>No worship service!</b>
<b>Dec. 25 – Jan. 1 –</b>	<b>Office Closed! (Merry Christmas and Happy New Year)</b>

## UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

**Wednesday, December 20, 2023**     **Katharina von Bora Luther, renewer of the church, died 1552**

Born to an impoverished nobleman, Katie eventually took vows as a nun, but around age twenty-four she and several other nuns who were influenced by the writings of Martin Luther left the convent. Six children were born to Katie and Martin.

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### OTHER READINGS:     Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

*Though the people had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, they continued to face hardship and oppression. In the language of the jubilee year described in Leviticus 25, the prophet, moved by the spirit of God, announces deliverance for those who are oppressed and comfort for those who mourn.*

The reading begins:

<sup>1</sup>The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; <sup>3</sup>to provide for those who mourn in Zion — to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. <sup>4</sup>They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. <sup>8</sup>For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. <sup>9</sup>Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed. <sup>10</sup>I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. <sup>11</sup>For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

### PSALM:     Psalm 126

<sup>1</sup>When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream. <sup>2</sup>Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy. Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." <sup>3</sup>The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed. <sup>4</sup>Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses of the Negeb. <sup>5</sup>Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy. <sup>6</sup>Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

### OTHER READINGS:     1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

*Paul concludes his letter to the Thessalonians by encouraging them to live lives of continual joy, prayer, and thanksgiving. The closing blessing is grounded in the hope of Christ's coming.*

The reading begins:

<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. <sup>19</sup>Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Do not despise the words of prophets, <sup>21</sup>but test everything; hold fast to what is good; <sup>22</sup>abstain from every form of evil. <sup>23</sup>May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup>The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

### SERVICE OVERVIEW: GIVE WITNESS AND REJOICE

The third Sunday of Advent - also known as Gaudete (rejoice) is one in which the church has rejoiced as the advent of the Messiah draws nearer. Today's texts echo this rejoicing, this "*we're almost there*" excitement, in a multitude of ways. If the story sounds familiar – it is! We heard about John the baptizer in last week's gospel from Mark. What's the difference? Today's story goes deeper into the backstory: prophecies and expectations. Today's reading from Isaiah contains rich imagery of restoration and healing that Jesus will quote in Luke's gospel when he begins his ministry. The textual crossovers reinforce what we already know, that God's people in every generation long for restoration, repair, and new life.

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

It is the third week of Advent, and we light three candles on the Advent wreath. While our society goes crazy with Christmas preparations and the northern hemisphere grows darker each day, we gather to wait for God to bring us into peace and light. Welcome to worship! Join John the Baptist to make a pathway for Christ. Come to the table for strength to focus on justice and mercy.

In his own way, John the Baptist calls for rejoicing by his acknowledgment that he is *not* what we are waiting for. John, like us, has a mission to bear witness, but when he says "I am not," we hear a clear contrast to all the ways Jesus will soon identify himself with the Father: "I am the bread of life." "I am the resurrection." "I am the good shepherd." Jesus will be all these things for God's people, but John's job (and ours) is simply to bear witness to the light.

How do we bear witness while still waiting? Can our joy in the midst of waiting be that very witness? In Advent we are not called to act as though we do not know how this story ends, as though Jesus' birth and life, death and resurrection, are still before us. What we *do* know is that sense of longing for God's salvation to be fulfilled, and the temptation to believe we have to save ourselves instead of waiting for God's purposes to be worked out in God's time. John reminds us that there can be joy in taking our proper place, pointing to Jesus without needing to *be* Jesus.

The second reading advises, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." For anyone struggling with

grief, anger, and doubt, this advice can feel shallow and cold. Receive the invitation to accept the comfort of God’s presence, even in painful situations. It is always God’s desire to be with us. The Gospel of John points to Christ as the light and we embrace that hopefulness. The proximity to the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere also invites us to embrace the imagery of God’s presence in our times of spiritual and literal darkness.

**KID STUDY:**

Do you notice all the Christmas lights around this time of year? They are a beautiful reminder as we prepare for the birth of Jesus that he is the light of the world. How do those lights work? What makes them light up? They have to be plugged in. One neat thing about Christmas lights is that if one string is plugged into an outlet, another string can be plugged into that first string to provide more and more lights.

Today we hear about John the Baptist. He was like the first string of Christmas lights. John was the first person to tell other people about Jesus, the Light Of The World. He told everyone to prepare a way for Jesus. When we share Jesus by being his hands and feet, we are like extra strings of Christmas lights that come to life when we are connected.

**INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:**

*It is interesting that the calculation theory of the origin of Christmas places the feast at the winter solstice in relationship to biblical accounts of the birth of the Baptist. The festival of the nativity of John the Baptist is on June 24, the old date for the summer solstice, which is the time of the greatest light in the northern hemisphere. But as the world’s light wanes towards the time of greatest darkness at the winter solstice, we come to the feast of the true Light, brighter than the sun, given in the midst of our darkness. Advent is like John when its continuing decrease of light is made to bear witness to the coming of God’s grace in the midst our need. John is present in our Advent when we know this about our observances and our days: They are not the light. But it is not that we simply turn toward the still coming One. Advent is not playacting, pretending to be the people waiting for the Messiah. Every Sunday assembly, even and especially during Advent, is a gathering in the power of the Spirit and in the presence of the risen Christ before the revealed face of God. “Waiting” is our human condition. This text heightens our waiting, turning us toward God and connecting us to the darkness that at every time of the year and in all religious systems waits for the transcendent one. - Gordon Lathrop [Gordon W. Lathrop, Advent/Christmas, Proclamation 4, Series B (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 28-29]*

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**Next Week's Theme (Dec. 24):** Great news that will come to all people Luke 2:1-20

**Next Week's Scriptures (Dec. 24):**

**First Reading:** Isaiah 9:2-7  
*“Light shines: a child is born for us.”*

**Psalm:** Psalm 96  
*“Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad.” (Ps. 96:11)*

**Second Reading:** Titus 2:11-14  
*“The grace of God has appeared.”*

**Gospel:** Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]  
*“God with us.”*