

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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

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E-mail: admin@splctx.org www.splctx.com **Pastor:** pastor.akethan@gmail.com

February 5, 2023 Contemporary 11:05 AM

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

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

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.*

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

INTRODUCTION

Light shines in the darkness for the upright, the psalmist sings. Isaiah declares that when we loose the bonds of injustice and share our bread with the hungry, the light breaks forth like the dawn. In another passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, the light of the world, calls his followers to let the light of their good works shine before others. Through baptism we are sent into the world to shine with the light of Christ.

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.)

* **CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

P Lord, we confess that we often have refused the gift of your Spirit. Content in our dimness we shrink from your Light. Comfortable in our coolness we withdraw from your Fire. We would be moved – but carefully. We would feel – but mildly. We would see your face – but dimly. Forgive us for begrudging the coming of your Spirit, or for accepting your fire, only to smother it selfishly. Forgive us, and visit us again. We pray, now, in Jesus' name, not for warm thoughts, but for burning hearts and your light to shine in us.

C Amen.

(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: ELW - #715 "Christ Be Our Light"

1. **Longing for light, we wait in darkness. Longing for truth, we turn to you. Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see.**

REFRAIN:

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today.*

2. **Longing for peace, our world is troubled. Longing for hope, many despair. Your word alone has pow'r to save us. Make us your living voice. REFRAIN**
3. **Longing for food, many are hungry. Longing for water, many still thirst. Make us your bread, broken for others, shared until all are fed. REFRAIN**
4. **Longing for shelter, many are homeless. Longing for warmth, many are cold. Make us your building, sheltering others, walls made of living stone. REFRAIN**
5. **Many the gifts, many the people, many the hearts that yearn to belong. Let us be servants to one another, signs of your kingdom come. REFRAIN**

Text: Bernadette Farrell Music: Bernadette Farrell Text and Music © 1993 Bernadette Farrell, admin. OCP Publications

GOSPEL: Matthew 5:13-20

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encourages his followers to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, doing good works and keeping God's commandments.

A The holy gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 5, verses 13-20.

[Jesus said:] ¹³"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. ¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. ¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

CHILDREN'S SERMON

SERMON

* **SERMON SONG:** ELW - #671 "Shine, Jesus, Shine"

REFRAIN:

**Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory;
blaze, Spirit blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy;
send forth your Word, Lord, and let there be light!**

1. **Lord, the light of your love is shining,
in the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us,
set us free by the truth you now bring us.
Shine on me, shine on me: REFRAIN**

2. **As we gaze on your kingly brightness,
so our faces display your likeness,
ever changing from glory to glory,
mirrored here, may our lives tell your story.
Shine on me, shine on me: REFRAIN**

CCLI Song #30426 Text: Graham Kendrick Music: Graham Kendrick
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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 Called together to follow Jesus, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

A Shape our congregation to be salt for the earth. Give us delight in your commandments, that we are generous with those in need. Make us steadfast in our trust in you, ready with tangible mercy and compassion for our neighbors.

A brief silence.

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

A brief silence.

A We pray for all those in need of healing and whose needs are diverse and known to you including:
Starla Cupples; Judge Ty Prause; Carson Crosby; Pastor Lemae Higgs; 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.)*
Melinda Rodiek; Melda Coleman; Donna Culton; Nancy Hartmann; Lydia Rojas; Catherine Poppe; Rodney Hackemack; Larry Stolar; Vivian Fortenberry; Rick Davis; Mack Machacek; Hines Harrison; Darryl Stancik; Jerry Ordner; Michael Yancey; Bubba Bencal; Al Gene Canik; Jane Venghaus Taylor; George Wright; Elrose Kollatschny; Sarah Stancik; Sandy Mosley; Charlene Tesch; Cynthia Coufal; Jeffrey McDaniel; Karen Bailiff; Julian Divin; Nancy Biers; Angie Beggs; Pam Potter; Charlie Hammock; Brad Bryson; Lynette Frnka; Riana Jamison; Jenna Escamilla; Margaret Ortiz; Keith Korth; Jodi Sebesta; Cathy Siglow; Paul

Casinger; Fran Gillett; DeQuincy Lister; Angela Mazoch; Lily Presswood; Denise Lange; Doug Mason; Dr. Tom Hancher; Joe Berry; Gracie Brune; Margaret Rogers; Leonard Kahlden; Curtis Wallin; Megan Burch; Lisa Grazier; Phyllis Behrend; Jessica Mauchlen; Donna Tiner; Libby Divin; Diane Brooks; Bob Loy; Stanley King; Monty Gillett; Dawn Foster; Edward Halcolm; Amber Smith Kutach; Louis Camacho; Melvin Schobel; Janet Greene; Sabrina Galindo; Debbie Grimes; Horst Traub; Margie Fisk; Preston Carter; Penny Miller; Carl Hahn; Megan Cain; Amanda Fuchs; Cyndi Wallace; Karen Broussard; Donna Young; Sharon Heimann; and Brenda Baker.

- A We pray for all expectant mothers, and especially for:
Ashley Dungen; Magen Schindler Altieri; Katie Pagel Walcik; Kelsey Kethan McNeely; Montana Appelt; and Dina Anton de Espinoza 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.)*
Edwin Oevermann; Paul Minar, Sr.; Bobby Zajicek; Adrian Fritsch; Verna Coufal; Doug Hill; John Zwiegel; Robert Saunders; Coy Dell Schindler; Barbara McMath; Linda Munos Rodgers; Madeline Menke; Doris Horndt; Helen Perrard; Delores Purcell; Jane Booker; Pat Brasher; Curtis Berger; Dolores Hoelscher; Jesse Grabow; Ronnie Rogers; Joyce Dehmer; and Donna Dehmer.

- A We pray for all law enforcement officers, fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers, 9-1-1 dispatchers, and active duty military personnel that they are protected and kept safe. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*
Law enforcement officers: Todd Jacobs; Troy Neisner; Jacob Gorman; Nancy Gorman; Johnny Kovar; Abigail Weido; Dustin Lattimore; Luke Kanz; Bruno Flores; 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.; Garrett Flores; Kyle Burris; Dylan Walcik; Randy Wendt; Travis Neuendorff; Brenda Henkes; and Jan Willette, as well as those active duty military members including Brian Anderson; Michael Graham; Bryan Kubena; Brad Bergfeld; Cody Jowers; Kyle Appelt; Montana Appelt; Douglas Neuendorff; Scott Cherniss; Kameron Page; Ryan Neisner; Anthony D'Angelo; Dalton Kapel; Kindra Dawson; William Phillips; and Kevin Gonzalez.

- 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 Iglesia Cristiana Camino de Santidad 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 We bring to you our needs and hopes, O God, trusting your wisdom and power revealed in Christ crucified.

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 Liberating God, you break the bonds of injustice and let the oppressed go free. Receive these offerings in thanksgiving for all your works of merciful power, and shape us as people of your justice and freedom. You we magnify and adore, through Jesus our Savior,

C Amen.

* **REMEMBERING JESUS' WORDS, PROMISES, AND COMMANDS**

* **LORD'S PRAYER**

- P Lord remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

**C Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

* **INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

- P Come and taste the joy of God!

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 Holy One, we thank you for the healing that springs forth abundantly from this table. Renew our strength to do justice, love kindness, and journey humbly with you.

C **Amen.**

* **BLESSING**

P The God who faithfully brings forth justice and breaks the oppressor’s rod ⊕ bless, strengthen, and uphold you, today and always.

C **Amen.**

* **CLOSING SONG: ELW - #574 “Here I Am, Lord”**

1. “I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?”

REFRAIN:

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.*

2. “I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them. They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?” **REFRAIN**

3. “I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?” **REFRAIN**

Text and Music: Daniel L. Schutte Text and Music ©1981 OCP Publications, Inc.

* **DISMISSAL**

P Go in peace; let your light shine.

C **Thanks be to God, and we will.**

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USHERS: John, Terri & Chase Brasher

LAY READER: Sandy Cherniss

STREAMING: Mike Maas

SOUND: Robert & Sydney Eaton

ACOLYTE: Devin Oppermann

POWER POINT: Kay Wesson

ALTAR GUILD: Donna Schindler

WELCOME: Welcome to worship as Jesus continues to reveal himself during Epiphany. May you sense anew your Savior’s deep love for you and all the world.

ALTAR WALL FLOWERS are placed by Sandy & Randy Neuendorff in celebration of Sandy's birthday on February 6.

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

Attendance: Jan. 28 & 29, 2023 – 171

Contributions: Jan. 28 & 29 – \$5,004.18

Power of One: Jan. 28 & 29, 2023 – \$52.00

Building Fund: Jan. 28 & 29 – \$400.02

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

Wednesday Night Attendance: – Wed., Feb. 1 – **100 Total**

BLAST/Confirmation: 75

Adult Bible Study: 2

Support Staff: 23

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.

Offering Envelopes are HERE!! Our offering envelopes came in this week! You can find them in the narthex in alphabetical order according to your last name. If you have any questions, please let the church office know. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we waited for the envelopes. ☺



The 2023 Flower Calendar is up in the narthex! It is hanging by the glass entrance doors. If you would like to have flowers in church on a certain weekend, please sign your name next to the date for that special weekend and write your phone number. Elena will call you the beginning of that week to remind you that you signed up for flowers and

will ask for the occasion (such as birthday, wedding anniversary, in memory of someone, etc.) to put in the bulletin. The monthly newsletter will also have who signed up for flowers for the month. Thank you for adding beauty to our sanctuary and worship services!



The St. Paul confirmation youth and high school youth will be attending Sky Ranch Lutheran Camp in Colorado this summer! They will be hosting their **annual Valentine Dinner on Friday, February 10, 2023 from 6:00-8:00 PM** in The Lighthouse. The students and their parents will prepare and serve chicken marsala on a bed of rice, salad, green beans, a roll and dessert. Grab a group of people, and come have dinner with us! Tables can seat 10 people, however, tables can be made to fit a bigger group if needed. Contact Stephanie Polasek for special reservations. Ticket are \$15 each and can be purchased before or after worship services from a student or can be purchased in the church office during the week. Can't dine in? We have To-Go tickets so you can enjoy the meal on the go. **Deadline to purchase tickets is Sunday, February 5, 2023.** Thank you for your support!

♣ **Senior Explorers:** St. Paul Senior Explorers are going back in Texas time to the location where, in 1823, Stephen F. Austin established a headquarters for his colony in Mexican Texas. **We are headed to San Felipe de Austin Museum on Thursday, February 9, 2023.** This historic site and new museum share the stories of early settlers in this region. We will **depart from the church parking lot at 9:00 AM.** We will have a guided tour of the museum. **The tour costs \$10/person.** There will then be time for shopping in their tremendous "Texas" gift shop and touring the out buildings if you desire. We will then travel to the Wolf Pack Bar and Brill in Sealy for lunch. Expected arrival time back at St. Paul is around 2:00 PM. **Please sign the sign-up sheet in the narthex (foyer) by Sunday, February 5, 2023.** If you have any questions, please call Kevin Page at 979-732-0845.

Meals to Heal: Meals to Heal will hold their next **cook session on Monday, February 6, 2023 at 10:00 AM** in The Lighthouse kitchen. We will be making two main dish casseroles, bagging veggies, bagging cookies and finally assembling meals to go in the freezer. Questions? Contact Terri Brasher at 979-732-1127.



** **PERU TEAM:** Our next Peru Team meeting will be **Thursday, February 9, 2023 at 6:30 PM** in the church library. We will be finalizing dates for our trip and planning our next fundraiser. Please join us! **



SOUPER BOWL

Each year our youth participate in the **Souper Bowl of Caring** on the weekend of Super Bowl Sunday. The Souper Bowl of Caring empowers youth and unites communities to tackle hunger using the energy of the Big Game. Its vision is to transform the Big Game into a nationwide movement inspiring people to give locally and make a collective impact on hunger. This past year our Columbus Food Pantry served an average of 250 households, and St. Paul Youth raised \$773.30 for the food

pantry on Souper Bowl of Caring weekend. This year our 4th-6th grade BLAST students will be collecting before each worship service on **Saturday, February 11 and Sunday, February 12, 2023** and at BLAST on Wednesday, February 15, 2023. So bring your change or bills and fill their pots! All donations will go to the Columbus Food Pantry. Thank you!

► **Worship. Lead. Serve.** – This retreat gathers together **6th-12th grade youth** from Texas, Louisiana and beyond for a weekend to explore discipleship in our daily lives. What does it look like to follow Jesus at work and home? We will practice discipleship as we eat community meals, explore our faith and engage in meaningful conversations. Oh. . . and there will be plenty of time for all your favorite camp activities! This retreat takes place **February 17-19, 2023 at Lutherhill** in La Grange, Texas. Stephanie will be taking a group and staying the weekend. Register at lutherhill.org and then let Stephanie know you are attending so we call all ride together as a group to Lutherhill.

** **OYSTER/FISH FRY TICKETS!!** If you are in need of tickets for the annual Columbus Volunteer Fire Department's Oyster & Fish Fry, please **see Pastor Alan** – or a fireman of your choice. The event will be **Sunday February 26, 2023 at Columbus Hall** (formerly K. of C. Hall) 11:00AM – 1:00 PM. The meal will be dine in or drive-thru. Advance tickets are \$30 for the oyster/fish combo ticket; at the door are \$35. (If you want only oysters, you need to purchase the combo ticket.) Advance tickets for fish only are \$20.00; at the door are \$25.00. **



Calling all actors, actresses and play production folks! It is time, once again, to sign up for the Good Friday drama. The drama will be performed **Good Friday, April 7, 2023 at the 7:00 PM** service. Please see the sign-up sheet in the narthex (foyer). We need actors and actresses (22 cast parts) as well as people to help with lighting, set design/props, costumes and set construction. If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Alan.



Habitat for Humanity: The Outreach Team is in search of a Team Leader to represent St. Paul Lutheran Church for Habitat for Humanity. The churches in our community coordinate and build a couple of houses a year for our neighbors in need. **We need someone to represent St. Paul and be the liaison between Habitat for Humanity and our congregation.** You do not have to build the house yourself, but help coordinate our efforts. Please let Kevin Page know (979-732-0845) if you are interested or have any questions. Thank you, and thank you, God, for our most generous church family!

♥ **Grief Support Group:** Are you experiencing grief from the loss of a loved one, loss of a job, loss of friend who has moved? The Grief Support Group is a place to share and discuss these issues with other individuals. The group meets the **third Thursday of each month from 5:30-6:30 PM in the church library.** For questions or more information, contact Peggy Geisler at 979-732-0350.

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Today (Feb. 5) – ***Deadline to Purchase Valentine Dinner Tickets!!***
Mon., Feb. 6 – 10:00 AM – Meals to Heal Cook Session (Lighthouse)
1:00 PM – Deacon Sandye to TLC
6:00 PM – Evangelism Team (library)
Tues., Feb. 7 – 12:00 PM – Noon Bible Study (library)
5:30 PM – Prayer Team (library)
6:30-8:00 PM – The Gathering
Wed., Feb. 8 – 9:00 AM – CLA Chapel
10:00 AM – Staff Meeting
10:00 AM – Deacon Sandye to Columbus Oaks
2:00 PM – Deacon Sandye to The Oaks
4:30 PM – Confirmation (2nd year)
5:00 PM – Meal
5:30 PM – BLAST, Confirmation (1st yr.), Adult Class & HS Youth
Thurs., Feb. 9 – 9:00 AM-2:00 PM – Sr. Explorers to San Felipe
10:00-11:30 AM – Manna for Moms (Lighthouse)
5:00 PM – Worship Team (Lighthouse)
6:30 PM – Peru Team (library)
Fri., Feb. 10 – 10:30 AM – Adult Bible Study (library)
6:00-8:00 PM – Valentine Dinner Fundraiser (Lighthouse)
Sat., Feb. 11 – ***Souper Bowl of Caring!***
9:00 AM-3:00 PM – Church Council Retreat
7:00 PM – Holy Communion Worship
Next Sun., Feb. 12 – ***Souper Bowl of Caring!***
9:00 AM – Holy Communion Worship
10:00 AM – Adult Sunday School and Confirmation
11:05 AM – Holy Communion Contemporary Worship

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

Thursday, February 2, 2023 Presentation of Our Lord

Forty days after the birth of Jesus we mark the day Mary and Joseph presented him in the temple in accordance with Jewish law. There they were greeted by Simeon, an aged priest who offered the song "Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace," as well as by the prophet Anna, who spoke of the redemption of Israel.

Friday, February 3, 2023 Ansgar, Bishop of Hamburg, missionary to Denmark and Sweden, died 865

A monk who helped bring Christianity to Scandinavia, Ansgar returned to Germany where he was named bishop of Hamburg. He is remembered for his love for poor people.

Sunday, February 5, 2023 The Martyrs of Japan, died 1597

Christianity was brought to Japan in the sixteenth century by Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries. The religion was suppressed, however, and in 1597 twenty-six missionaries and converts were crucified. Nevertheless, Christianity survived and later prospered.

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OTHER READINGS: Isaiah 58:1-9a

Shortly after the return of Israel from exile in Babylon, the people were troubled by the ineffectiveness of their fasts. God reminds them that outward observance is no substitute for genuine fasting that results in acts of justice, such as feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and clothing the naked.

The reading begins:

¹Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. ²Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. ³"Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. ⁴Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. ⁵Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? ⁶Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? ⁸Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. ^{9a}Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

PSALM: Psalm 112:1-9

¹Hallelujah! Happy are they who fear the LORD and have great delight in God's commandments!

²Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

³Wealth and riches will be in their house, and their righteousness will last forever. ⁴Light shines in the darkness for the upright; the righteous are merciful and full of compassion. ⁵It is good for them to be generous in lending and to manage their affairs with justice. ⁶For they will never be shaken; the righteous will be kept in everlasting remembrance. ⁷They will not be afraid of any evil rumors; their heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. ⁸Their heart is established and will not shrink, until they see their desire upon their enemies. ⁹They have given freely to the poor, and their righteousness stands fast forever; they will hold up their head with honor.

OTHER READINGS: 1 Corinthians 2:1-12

Though people such as the Corinthians are enamored with human philosophy and wisdom, Paul continuously presents God’s hidden wisdom which is Jesus Christ crucified. True spiritual maturity involves judging ourselves and others in light of God’s revelation in the cross.

The reading begins:

¹When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. ⁴My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. ⁶Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. ⁷But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” — ¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

SERVICE OVERVIEW: IT’S TIME TO LIGHTEN UP!

This is a strange time of year. The days are short, the nights are long. A quick scan of today’s news can be equally as bleak. It is time for a little more light in an otherwise dark and dreary time. Enter Epiphany.

The emphasis of this Epiphany season shines like a beacon of light and hope in the dead of winter, bringing good news in the middle of the world’s constant stream of bad news. This week God provides the mission in Isaiah - feed the hungry, care for the homeless, clothe the naked. Upon accomplishing this mission God tells the people, “Your light shall break forth like the dawn.”

Jesus gives followers of every day and age a mission to share the light which scatters the darkness. Whether you are looking in the news or out the window, things may seem pretty dark and dreary at this time of year, but do not miss the light of Epiphany! We are indeed created in God’s image, therefore the spark of the divine is alive in all of us. The light shines through us as we live out God’s mission for our lives each day. As Epiphany continues, we should all be prepared to let our light shine and share the good news.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

We cannot live without salt or light. Today we are called to be like salt and light for others. Enter once again into the light of the baptized assembly to hear the word and to share in the meal of forgiveness. Welcome to worship! Examine your life. To be light in the world, we must reflect the Light who is Christ.

Lent, the penitential season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, is only a few weeks away. If you have not already considered it, remember that inward practices of worship must be accompanied by outward expressions of God’s justice. To what outward expressions of your faith can you commit? Jesus’ words remind us that in the same way that salt is essential, our daily acts of Christlike love and mercy are crucial for the flourishing of the whole world.

Jesus said, “You are the light of the world,” but it’s important to remember that there are all sorts of ways of shining that happen in hidden, but powerful, ways. Jesus says the light of faith is not to be put under a bushel but put on a lampstand. Lampstands hold the light so others can see. Who in your community is like a lampstand, lifting up others so their light can be seen and God can be glorified? Who is behind the scenes making everything work? Think about those often overlooked but needed servants whose light involves lifting up other lights!

Today’s gospel ends on a confusing and hard word. After using these wonderfully tangible examples of faithful stewardship, Jesus seems to say that the disciples’ righteousness must *exceed* that of the religious leaders. This can seem overwhelming and unattainable. Remember, though, that *righteousness* means “*right relationship*.” What seems like a harsh and high bar is actually pretty low, and yet necessary and important. Jesus is not asking for some herculean feat, but rather inviting us to analyze how we are - and are *not* - in right relationship with our ego, achievements, and faith. After all, the salt and the light of our being is meant to give glory to God, not shine the light on us.

KID STUDY:

When preparing a recipe, you need ingredients. Today we hear about two ingredients that are important for us in our lives of faith: salt and light. This might sound like a strange pairing, but being salt and light can add a lot to our lives of following Jesus. To be salt is to be “of the earth” and helps us to be humble and loving. When baking something sweet, like cookies, adding salt helps balance the flavors. Light comes from God and can shine through us as we love God and love our neighbors. That means caring for people, animals, and the earth.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

For Jesus, salt and light came out of a long tradition of biblical teaching: salt and light were images for the law of God. Salt and light must take us back to the fullness of the law and the prophets, and the fullness of Jesus’ radical teaching in this Sermon on the Mount. The prophets plead for fullness of life: freedom from oppression, bread for the hungry, homes for those who have none, clothing for the naked. Is this not what it means to be the salt of the earth, to keep this prophetic word alive in the midst of our world? If we lose this vision, if we give in to other values, if we forget God’s longing for justice, our salt has lost its taste. If you think Jesus’ call is impossible, remember that the One who is our bread is with us and within us, empowering us to be salt and light in this world. - Barbara Lundblad [Barbara Lundblad, in Homilies for the Christian People, ed. Gail Ramshaw (NY: Pueblo, 1989), 38.]

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Next Week's Theme (Feb. 11 & 12): Anger, Lust, Divorce, Swearing / Where's the Grace

Next Week's Scriptures (Feb. 11 & 12):

First Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

"Choose life."

Psalm: Psalm 119:1-8

"Happy are they who follow the teaching of the LORD." (Ps. 119:1)

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

"God gives the growth."

Gospel: Matthew 5:21-37

"The teaching of Christ: forgiveness."