

## ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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

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Sunday, December 31, 2023 10:00 AM

First Sunday of Christmas

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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		Tomas Rosales	
Parish Nurse Program Coordinator		DyAnn Lauzon	
Organist		Elena Holub	

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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

*The psalmist calls on the natural world, celestial bodies, fire and earth, creatures, and all humanity, to praise God. The voices of Simeon and 84-year-old Anna join the chorus today, recognizing what God is doing in Jesus. Simeon's song is often sung after communion, for we have seen God's salvation in the assembled community and have held Jesus in our hands in the bread. Then, like the prophet Anna, we tell of Jesus to all who look for the healing of the world.*

### PRELUDE – performed by St. Paul Praise Band:

1. “Hope Was Born This Night”
2. “Bethlehem's Treasure”
3. “Hearts Waiting (Joy to the World)”
4. “Let the World Sing, 'Gloria!' ”

### 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 Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God, the Word made flesh, our life and our salvation.

**C Amen.**

P Trusting the goodness and lovingkindness of God our Savior, let us confess our sin first privately then together publicly.

*Silence for reflection and private confession of personal sins, then join in with combined voices this printed confession.*

P God of life,

**C you promise good news of great joy for all people, and call us to be messengers of your peace. We confess that too often we hoard our joy, our resources, and our security. We nurture conflict and build barriers. We neglect the needs of our neighbors and ignore the groaning of creation. Have mercy on us. Where we are self-centered, open our hearts. Where we are reluctant, give us courage. Where we are cynical, restore our trust. Renew us with your grace and give us again the hope of eternal life in you. Amen.**

P Hear the good news: We are children of God and heirs of God's promises through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In ☩ Jesus we are forgiven and redeemed. Sing with joy, for all the ends of the earth shall know the salvation of God.

**C Amen.**

#### \* HYMN ELW - #283 “O Come, All Ye Faithful”

1. O Come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant! O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem; come and behold him, born the king of angels:

#### REFRAIN:

***O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!***

2. The highest, most holy, light of light eternal, born of a virgin, a mortal he comes;  
Son of the Father now in flesh appearing!

**REFRAIN:**  
*O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!*

3. Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation, sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!  
Glory to God in the highest: **REFRAIN**

4. Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning; Jesus, to thee be glory giv'n!  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing: **REFRAIN**  
CCLI Song #31054 Words: John Francis Wade; translated by C. Frederick Oakeley Music: John Francis Wade  
©Words: Public Domain Music: Public Domain CCLI License #1729377

\* **GREETING**  
P The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.  
**C And also with you.**

\* **PRAYER OF THE DAY**  
P Almighty God, you wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and yet more wonderfully restored it. In your mercy, let us share the divine life of the one who came to share our humanity, Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.  
**C Amen.**

**FIRST READING:** Isaiah 61:10--62:3  
A Our first reading is from Isaiah, chapter 61, verse 10 to chapter 62, verse 3.  
*To the people who returned to Jerusalem after the exile, the prophet proclaims that God's salvation will fully come to pass. Jerusalem will become a shining light to the nations and righteousness and praise will spring up as surely as the earth puts forth vegetation.*

The reading begins:

**Chapter 61:**  
<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.

**Chapter 62:**  
<sup>1</sup>For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. <sup>2</sup>The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. <sup>3</sup>You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.  
A The word of the Lord. **C Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM:** Psalm 148  
A The Psalm today is Psalm 148. We will read the Psalm responsively. The congregation will please respond by reading the words in bold print.

<sup>1</sup>Hallelujah! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise God in the heights.  
**<sup>2</sup>Praise the LORD, all you angels; sing praise, all you hosts of heaven.**  
<sup>3</sup>Praise the LORD, sun and moon; sing praise, all you shining stars.  
**<sup>4</sup>Praise the LORD, heaven of heavens, and you waters above the heavens.**  
<sup>5</sup>Let them praise the name of the LORD, who commanded, and they were created,  
**<sup>6</sup>who made them stand fast forever and ever, giving them a law that shall not pass away.**  
<sup>7</sup>Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps;  
**<sup>8</sup>fire and hail, snow and fog, tempestuous wind, doing God's will;**  
<sup>9</sup>mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars;  
**<sup>10</sup>wild beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds;**  
<sup>11</sup>sovereigns of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the world;  
**<sup>12</sup>young men and maidens, old and young together.**  
<sup>13</sup>Let them praise the name of the LORD, whose name only is exalted, whose splendor is over earth and heaven.  
**<sup>14</sup>The LORD has raised up strength for the people and praise for all faithful servants, the children of Israel, a people who are near the LORD. Hallelujah!**

**SECOND READING:** Galatians 4:4-7  
A Our second reading is from Galatians, chapter 4, verses 4-7.  
*Paul seeks to show the Galatians that the purpose of Christ's birth was to liberate us from the law's condemnation so that we would be fully adopted into God's family as beloved children.*

The reading begins:  
<sup>4</sup>When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,  
<sup>5</sup>in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. <sup>6</sup>And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.  
A The word of the Lord. **C Thanks be to God.**

A Please stand as you are comfortable for the gospel.

\* **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:** (Sung)

Al - le - lu - ia. Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of e - ter - nal life. Al - le - lu - ia.

\* **GOSPEL:** Luke 2:22-40

*Luke’s narrative continues with stories that emphasize Jesus’ connection to Judaism. His family is devout in its observance of the law, and Jesus himself is recognized as one who will bring glory to Israel.*

P The holy gospel according to St. Luke, chapter 2, verses 22-40.

**C Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>22</sup>When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, [Joseph and Mary] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup>(as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), <sup>24</sup>and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” <sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup>It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. <sup>27</sup>Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup>Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, <sup>29</sup>“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; <sup>30</sup>for my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup>which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, <sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” <sup>33</sup>And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup>Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup>so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed — and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” <sup>36</sup>There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup>then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup>At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. <sup>39</sup>When they had finished everything required by

the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

P The gospel of the Lord.

**C Praise to you, O Christ.**

**CHILDREN'S SERMON**

**SERMON**

\* **HYMN ELW - #296 “What Child Is This”**

- 1. What child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping?  
This, this is Christ the king, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;  
haste, haste to bring him laud, the babe, the son of Mary!**
- 2. Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.  
Nails, spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you;  
hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary!**
- 3. So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh; come, peasant, king, to own him.  
The King of kings salvation brings; let loving hearts enthrone him.  
Raise, raise the song on high, the virgin sings her lullaby;  
joy, joy, for Christ is born, the babe, the son of Mary!**  
CCLI Song #30983   Words: William Chatterton Dix   Music: Traditional English Folk Melody “Greensleeves”  
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**OPPORTUNITY FOR HEALING:**

*Those who wish may come down the center aisle to the altar rail to receive the laying on of hands, prayer, and anointing with oil. Please respond by saying, “Amen” after the prayer. Please return to your seats by the side aisle.*

**PRAYER AFTER HEALING**

P Let us pray,  
Living God, through the laying on of hands and anointing, grant comfort in suffering to all who are in need of healing. When they are afraid, give them courage; when afflicted, give them patience; when dejected, give them hope; and when alone, assure them of the support of your holy people. We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
**C Amen.**

\* **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 OF INTERCESSION**

- A Trusting in God's good news of great joy for all people, we offer our prayers for ourselves, our neighbors, and the world God loves.

*A brief silence.*

- A Your praise is sung throughout creation in all times and seasons. As the new year turns, ground us in your changeless and sustaining love. Keep us attentive to the rhythms of the cosmos and inspire us to live in harmony with all the earth. Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**

- A Give hope and stamina to leaders who work tirelessly for the sake of the most vulnerable. We pray especially for organizations working on behalf of children to provide basic needs, to protect from abuse and neglect, to address trauma, and to rescue from trafficking. Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**

- A Let this community of faith be a joyful and welcome place for all ages and generations. Teach us to honor the wisdom of children, the inquisitiveness of youth, the thoughtfulness of adults, and the knowledge of elders. Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**

- 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. Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**

- A We pray for all those in need of healing and whose needs are diverse and known to you including:  
Becca Hajdik; Ronnie Huebel; Shirley Trahan; Ricky Elly; Carolyn Kneller; those on our Prayer Team's list; and those we name in our hearts before you (*Pause*). Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**

- A We pray for those battling cancer, all expectant mothers, those who reside in care facilities and the homebound, all law enforcement officers, fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers, 9-1-1 dispatchers, and active duty military personnel. Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.** {See all those we pray for on page 12.}

- 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. Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**

- A We give thanks for all the beloved who lived with expectation and departed this life in peace. Sustain us in joy until we join them around your throne. Hear us, O God.

**C Your mercy is great.**

- P Abide with us, O God of mercy, and receive our prayers according to your abundant grace.

**C Amen.**

#### **\* PEACE**

- P The peace of the risen Lord be with you always.

**C And also with you.** (*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.*

\* OFFERTORY (Sung)



Let the vine-yards be fruit-ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of  
bless-ing. Gath-er a har-vest from the seeds that were sown, that we may be  
fed with the bread of life. Gath-er the hopes and dreams of all; u -  
nite them with the prayers we of - fer. Grace our ta - ble with your  
pres - ence, and give us a fore - taste of the feast to come.

\* OFFERING PRAYER

P God of abundance, receive and bless these gifts we have offered. Join our hearts with the song of the angels, and gather us at your table of celebration. Strengthen us to share with all the world the abundance of your grace upon grace, poured out in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

C Amen.

\* EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

\* 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 Glory to God in the highest! Come to the table of peace.

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.}*

**Special Music during Distribution: "O Come, All You Unfaithful" performed by St. Paul Praise Band**

\* BLESSING AFTER COMMUNION

P Now may the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

C Amen.

\* PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

P God our redeemer, you have fed us at this table with gifts of grace, truth, and life. As you have gathered us in joy, send us forth as messengers of your peace. Make us shine with the good news of your glory, born to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

\* BLESSING

P God bless you and keep you, ☩ Jesus grant you grace and truth, and the Spirit send peace upon your hearts, now and forever.

C Amen.

\* HYMN ELW - #289 "Angels We Have Heard On High"

1. Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
and the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains.

**REFRAIN:**

***Glo – ria in excelsis Deo; glo – ria in excelsis Deo.***

2. Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?  
What the gladsome tidings be which inspire your heav'nly song? **REFRAIN**



3. Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing;  
come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn king.

**REFRAIN:**  
*Glo – ria in excelsis Deo; glo – ria in excelsis Deo.*

Words: French carol; tr. Henri Frederick Hemy, *The Crown of Jesus Music*, 1864  
Music: French carol; arr. Edward S. Barnes

\* **DISMISSAL**  
P Go in peace. Proclaim the good news. C Thanks be to God, and we will.

**POSTLUDE – “Hearts Waiting (Joy to the World)” performed by St. Paul Praise Band**

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**USHERS:** Mike & Gerri Hackfeld; Sandi Roensch  
**LAY READER:** Sandy Cherniss  
**STREAMING:** Kay Wesson  
**SOUND:** Todd Jacobs  
**ALTAR GUILD:** JoAnn Venghaus, Belle Dungen, Emily Brod and Bethany Guthmann

**ACOLYTE:** Harlie Lewis  
**POWER POINT:** Peggy Geisler

**WELCOME:** We gather today, only halfway through the season of Christmas, and trusting God’s guidance for the new year. Welcome to worship, one and all.

We are pleased to have Pastor John Hunsicker and The Rev. Dr. Mazie Leftwich sharing their messages with us this weekend while Pastor Alan and Debbie are on vacation visiting family. Pastor John is presiding over worship and sharing his message Saturday, December 30, and Pastor Mazie is presiding and sharing her message Sunday, December 31. Thank you Pastor John and Pastor Mazie! ☺

**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

*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.*

**KEEP IN OUR PRAYERS: Those Battling Cancer:** 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; Bob Loy.

**Expectant Mothers:** Kyndall Beettner; Jamee Albert; Kristen O’Leary Bridges; Abegail Gatzke; Chelsea Gilstrap; Calli Guthmann; Dhara Comans; Nelma Grace Weathers; Rosalinda Rosales.

**Those in Care Facilities and Homebound:** 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.. **Homebound:** Dolores Hoelscher; Jesse Grabow; Donna Dehmer; Cherie Moore; Lauren Lamb; Lydia Rojas.

**Those Law Enforcement Officers:** Charles Jobb; Joseph Smith; Todd Jacobs; Troy Neisner; Jacob Gorman; Nancy Gorman; Donnie Templeton; Jason Templeton; Johnny Kovar; Abbigail Weido; Dustin Lattimore; Zane Weido; Josh Jones. **Fire Fighters, First Responders, Healthcare Workers and 9-1-1 Dispatchers:** Brent Gorman, Sr.; Brent Gorman, Jr.; Reid Brasher; Donnie Templeton; Jason Templeton; 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 Neuendorff. **Active Duty Military:** Kyle Appelt; Montana Appelt; Douglas Neuendorff; Scott Cherniss; Kameron Page; Dalton Kapel; Kevin Gonzalez; Evelyn Rojas; Nelson Beettner.

**\*\* Notice!!** The church office will be closed for the holidays the week of **December 25-31, 2023 as well as Monday, January 1, 2024.** In case of a pastoral emergency, please contact Pastor John Hunsicker at 979-733-4519. We wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a safe and Happy New Year! \*\*

**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 Sunday, January 28, 2024.

**\*\* 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 Kuenstler, or Edna Bergfeld. \*\*

► 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.* ☺

🎵🎵 THE 11<sup>TH</sup> NIGHT CONCERT: This beautiful concert is one last chance to hear lovely Christmas and Advent music from the Lutheran churches and musicians in our area. The concert will be held at **St. Paul Lutheran Church**, 201 N. Rusk, **Fayetteville on Sunday, January 7, 2024 at 2:00 PM** and will be led by Pastor Ivy Schulz of Frelsburg/New Ulm. If any musicians are interested in participating in this concert, please select one or two of your favorite Christmas or Advent songs that you would like to perform and notify Betty Guthmann as soon as possible that you would like to participate. You can contact her with that information - or if you have any questions - by calling (979)-733-4513 or email [bettyguthmann@yahoo.com](mailto:bettyguthmann@yahoo.com). A freewill offering will be collected and used to support the Turtle Wing Foundation. Light refreshments will be provided after the concert. 🎵🎵

- 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 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., Jan. 1 –</b>	<b>Office Closed! (Happy New Year!)</b>
<b>Tues., Jan. 2 –</b>	5:30 PM – Prayer Team (library)
<b>Wed., Jan. 3 –</b>	10:00 AM-1:00 PM – Seniors Together (Lighthouse) 12:00 PM – Ministerial Alliance 1:30-3:00 PM – Continuing Education
<b>Thurs., Jan. 4 –</b>	Stephanie to Youth Ministry Network 10:30 AM – Pastor Alan to The Oaks 5:30 PM – Youth & Education Team 6:00 PM – Property Team
<b>Sat., Jan. 6 –</b>	8:00 AM – Men In Mission (Lighthouse) 7:00 PM – Holy Communion Worship
<b>Next Sun., Jan. 7 –</b>	9:00 AM – Holy Communion Worship 10:00 AM – Adult Sunday School 11:05 AM – Holy Communion Contemporary Worship 12:00 PM – God's Gals Undecorate the Church 2:00 PM – Eleventh Night Concert, St. Paul Lutheran, Fayetteville

**Upcoming Commemorations**

**Monday, January 1, 2024      Name of Jesus**

By Jewish law, every baby boy was circumcised and named on the eighth day of life, so on the eighth day of Christmas the church celebrates this event in Jesus' life. The keeping of the covenant as well as Jesus' name are signs of God's salvation given to us through him.

**Tuesday, January 2, 2024     Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe, renewer of the church, died 1872**

Loehe was a pastor in nineteenth-century Germany. Loehe's chief concern was that a congregation find its life in the holy communion, and from that source evangelism and social ministries would flow. He sent pastors to North America, Australia, New Guinea, Brazil, and Ukraine.

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**SERVICE OVERVIEW: GO IN PEACE**

With Simeon and Anna we receive consolation and good news: Jesus frees us to go in peace. God’s Word is incarnate, and we have seen the light of our salvation. “Go in peace” is our call to action - a reminder that we are freed from sin and death and sent out to share that good news with the world. “Go in peace” is also our prayer as life ends - a reminder of a love more powerful than death.

**THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:**

Today, the Jewish ritual is held at which the infant Jesus is presented in the temple and his mother Mary is “purified” after childbirth. Receiving them in the temple are Simeon and Anna, two old people who speak about the redemption that will come through Jesus’ death. Welcome to worship! When we celebrate Jesus’ birth, we remember his death.

Luke’s narrative of Jesus presented in the temple is a stark reminder that Christmas is the beginning of the death of Christ. Animals are slaughtered, the infant son is temporarily saved from sacrifice, and two old people are themselves ready to die. Simultaneously, the words of peace that welcome the very Light Of The World also proclaim troubling words about death. The infant Jesus will be a source of turmoil for his people and his family. The words “*and a sword will pierce your own soul too*” were most likely not comforting to young mother Mary. Luke even includes the detail that Mary and Joseph offered the least expensive purification sacrifice, a reminder that Jesus was born into poverty. Even in the presence of God’s incarnate peace, all is not well with the world.

This is where we enter the story, full of questions. How do we experience God’s peace in our broken world? Faced with the reality of war, poverty, hunger, destruction, and loss, how do we speak of peace? How do we live God’s peace in our lives? Like Simeon and Anna, we have faith in God’s promise of peace. As Simeon and Anna witnessed, God’s word has been, is, and will be fulfilled. The salvation that is born in the person of Jesus Christ is not worldly in the sense of military might and political reversals, but has cosmic significance that will overcome all earthly power struggles.

New beginnings are a time of exploring, imagination, and hope for the future. The birth of Jesus holds promise and possibility for Mary and Joseph and all the world; the new year invites us to new possibilities as well. Reflect on how you connect with others. Resolve to adjust personal

attitudes or limiting beliefs. Be a part of your family of faith’s resolution to act in response to the immeasurable grace of God born anew in Bethlehem.

**KID STUDY:**

Today is New Year’s Eve, so Christmas must be over, right? Just kidding! There are twelve days of Christmas, just like the song says, and they don’t begin until Christmas Day. That makes today the seventh day of Christmas. In our gospel story, Simeon and Anna are filled with joy and excitement as they reach out for baby Jesus and cradle Him in their arms. God has come to earth! Remember that “heaven” is not only up beyond the sky, but is also here with us. It is in the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the table. When you go to communion today, hold out your hands just like Simeon and Anna. Feel their joy and excitement as you reach out your hands to hold the body of Christ in the bread. Make a cradle with your hands just like you would make to cradle a baby.

**INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:**

*Real worship, true worship, is to be the creature of God’s creating. When we begin with the confession and absolution we become creatures of God’s creating - living into the terrifying beauty of what’s possible without what’s possible being fettered by what’s come before. This is real worship: to sing of the very God who is not content to simply stand at a distance but who insistently draws near to us in an unexpected child and in the waters of baptism and in the bread and wine at the table and in the community of saints who gather around God’s story. We can identify with and be a part of the Gospel. We are prophets of our own story. - Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber*

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**Next Week’s Theme (Jan. 6 & 7):** Baptism of Jesus

**Next Week’s Scriptures (Jan. 6 & 7):**

**First Reading:** Genesis 1:1-5     “God creates light God creates light.”

**Psalm:** Psalm 29     “The voice of the LORD is upon the waters.” (Ps. 29:3)

**Second Reading:** Acts 19:1-7     “Baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

**Gospel:** Mark 1:4-11     “Revelation of Christ as God’s servant.”

