



First Things ~ December 2024

It's the most wonderful time of the year. Or wait, is it? It's no longer anything close to a secret that the Advent season (the 4 weeks leading up to Christmas) is often an incredibly *stressful* time of the year! There's the stress of buying Christmas presents, meeting with family you may or may not get along with, attending church and school and other functions, as well as keeping up with our normal daily tasks. And with all of these stressors, it can become easy, as cliché as it is to say, to lose focus on the reason for the season. Advent is all about looking for a coming, but it might not be the one you're thinking of.

Advent isn't primarily about looking forward to celebrating when Jesus came on Christmas. Certainly we do look forward to Jesus' first coming at Christmas. However, Advent is primarily about looking forward to Jesus' second coming, when he will return to earth and bring about the end to this present age.

If looking forward to the end of the world sounds a little bit strange, stay with me for a moment to understand why it's something so worth looking forward to: About 2000 years ago, Jesus came to earth as a little baby, no power or fame to his name. No one else was singing the praises he deserved, so the angels sang out in the fields to the shepherds. He lived his life for 33 years and then that little baby was a grown man being put to death by the government. Three days after his death, something very unexpected happened: Jesus rose from the dead. He proved that his claims about himself were 100% true; he was, indeed, God. Shortly afterwards, he went up into heaven.

Why did he do all of this? Jesus died, suffering for every sin you've ever committed. He died for the sins of the whole world. And he did it in your place. Now, even though your sins deserve death in hell, God forgives you on Jesus' account. Simply through faith in Jesus and his atoning sacrifice for you, you get to have a place not in the hell your sins deserve, but in heaven with God.

So why look forward to the end of the world? Because Jesus, who paid for your sins and won your forgiveness, is coming back! He is going to return to earth; but this time it will not go unannounced. Jesus will return as the King of kings to whom every knee will bow. Through faith in him for forgiveness, life, and salvation, you will be one of those to whom he says, "Well done my good and faithful servant." And he will make you a part of the perfect and everlasting kingdom he is going to create. There will be no more deaths, stressful deadlines, broken relationships, uncertain futures, or anything else bad. You are going to live forever with the perfect King. That is what Advent (coming) is all about. That is something to look forward to.

Pastor Adam Pilarski

Live Nativity/Diorama Update

Thank you to everyone who contributed to help cover costs for the repairs on props at the Live Nativity/Diorama. Together we collected: \$243.00.

Our “Minnesota Church Weekend” to host and support is this first opening weekend, November 29 – December 1. Characters are needed each weekend *regardless* of which church group is hosting that weekend. If you would like to sign up you can either: go to <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10CoF4AACAC2BA3FCC25-52498266-live#/>, scan the QR code you see to the right, or show up at First Light in La Crosse by 4:00 PM.



Fellowship Opportunities and Events

November 29 –

December 1 Live Nativity: Minnesota Churches Weekend- The Minnesota churches are leading the way this weekend with volunteers for bringing in food and people for characters at Riverside Park for the Live Nativity. *Friday Evening*: Our church oversees the main hot meat, with additional donations of sides, and desserts. Members are welcome to serve in a character roll any day that weekend, but *we are working to really show up on that Friday*. Sign up to help at the link above or the QR code.

Saturday, Dec. 7 Church Decorating- The more the merrier for church decorating at 9 AM! Church Members with *last name starting with H – L are leading* this season in sprucing up our worship space, but all members are welcome!

Christmas Gala at St. John’s- Nodine –You’re invited to join St. John’s at 12:00 PM for a presentation by Adriana Moreno, a LHS Exchange Student from Spain, games and door prizes. If attending they ask you please bring a dish to share.

Saturday, Dec. 14 Love’s Pure Light: LHS Christmas Concert – located in the Luther High School Auditorium.

Thursday, Dec. 19 First Steps Christmas Program- 5:30 PM



Special Christmas Season Services

Sunday, Dec. 14 at 9 AM – CrossTalk Christmas Service

Tuesday, Dec. 24 at 6:30 PM – Christmas Eve Worship

Wednesday, Dec. 25 at 9 AM – Christmas Day Worship

Tuesday, Dec. 31 at 6:30 PM – New Year’s Eve Worship

Board for Lay Ministry Openings for 2025

Voting for these positions will take place at the January 2025 Annual Voters' Meeting:

Vice-Chairman: shall preside over all business sessions of the congregation in the absence of the chairman. He also facilitates communication between the First Women ministry group and the Board for Lay Ministry.

ELC Liaison: chairs the Early Learning Center Business meetings and works with the Director to oversee all aspects of the ministry providing support and guidance on issues such as budgets, tuition increases, regulatory changes and staffing. Additionally, he attends both the Board for Lay Ministry meetings and the ELC Business meeting and provides a report each month.

Encouragement Elder: shall concern itself with the total spiritual life of the congregation. It shall also visit, counsel and encourage members who have manifested a lack of concern for the hearing of God's Word and the reception of the Lord's Supper and who have shown a general disregard for the work of the church. Each month provides a report to the Board of Lay Ministry.

Overall, all members of the board are to help with communion and open church early. Please contact a current Board Member if you have any interest in serving the congregation through one of these positions. Thank you!



Christmas Word Search



N	P	O	V	N	I	J	C	W	K	X	D	M	G	A	L	I	L	E	E	F	B	X	D
I	J	B	I	C	F	N	R	I	L	U	V	Z	K	Y	N	Y	L	R	Y	D	F	R	A
B	X	E	C	W	R	T	Q	S	B	Y	W	N	W	H	K	T	P	T	R	Y	D	M	B
W	D	Z	S	X	E	U	D	E	Q	F	M	X	R	R	G	I	A	H	S	S	F	A	M
N	K	G	B	A	F	Y	I	T	G	T	L	U	T	K	F	V	V	R	L	H	H	T	J
G	E	S	N	E	C	N	I	K	N	A	R	F	I	W	U	I	S	E	E	E	D	T	S
U	J	Q	W	D	C	C	H	D	T	I	U	U	E	E	U	T	Q	E	M	P	A	H	L
Y	H	E	H	T	I	Q	Q	X	C	S	H	M	O	K	Z	A	A	F	A	H	V	E	A
I	M	C	L	O	T	H	E	S	C	G	A	T	H	U	K	N	Z	E	C	E	I	W	E
N	Z	W	S	G	J	R	U	Z	V	H	Y	A	L	E	S	N	G	C	R	D	L	P	
N	G	E	U	Q	M	X	Z	R	N	I	B	P	I	Q	H	Z	M	H	Z	D	H	J	B
G	P	F	S	S	D	P	V	L	O	K	S	G	S	Q	F	U	X	M	A	S	B	K	I
A	Z	U	E	P	C	K	O	E	C	A	R	Q	S	R	I	S	P	E	O	C	O	W	S
L	W	P	J	L	H	J	O	S	E	P	H	Y	E	V	Y	R	A	M	H	J	O	M	H
G	N	I	L	D	D	A	W	S	T	I	I	E	M	N	E	M	O	P	Q	K	R	S	G
G	A	V	X	V	V	J	B	H	T	J	A	R	E	Y	E	A	F	X	N	W	E	K	I
W	W	Y	X	L	Y	A	G	T	Z	C	W	E	O	K	L	S	C	G	Y	J	N	A	Y
W	A	T	G	R	W	P	E	E	H	S	S	G	O	P	B	B	U	Y	B	Z	W	R	C
G	W	S	O	V	V	Y	G	R	U	D	T	N	M	E	A	Z	W	L	E	G	N	A	S
J	R	A	T	S	C	I	Q	A	K	A	E	A	O	I	T	I	I	C	O	B	A	J	W
G	X	P	G	O	L	D	A	Z	O	J	C	M	I	A	S	C	T	U	L	F	Y	C	R
L	E	U	N	A	M	M	E	A	X	R	F	K	H	R	R	Y	M	P	Q	F	H	N	I
D	Y	S	F	O	X	J	M	N	X	X	M	S	X	M	E	H	E	L	H	T	E	B	K
D	Y	Z	E	X	B	H	S	A	M	T	S	I	R	H	C	K	L	Q	L	N	X	C	T

David	inn	clothes	swaddling	Emmanuel
Matthew	Luke	Messiah	men	wise
three	angel	Galilee	Nazareth	Bethlehem
frankincense	myrrh	gold	camels	sheep
cows	nativity	star	Shepherds	manger
stable	Joseph	Mary	Christmas	Jesus

October

Summary of Financial Information 2024

Financial Summary				
	YTD		Difference	Comments
	Actual	Budget		
Net Income (Loss) Church	\$24,568	(\$35,937)	\$60,505	
Net Income (Loss) ELC	\$34,537	\$13,028	\$21,509	
Total	\$59,105	(\$22,909)	\$82,014	
Grants (net)	(\$18,549)	(\$9,858)	(\$8,691)	
Without Grants	\$40,556	(\$32,767)	\$73,323	

Total Deficit of ELC	
2018	(\$17,051)
2019	(\$23,087)
2020	(\$2,544)
2021	\$39,832
2022	(\$10,484)
2023	(\$8,202)
2024	\$34,537
	<hr/>
	<u>\$13,001</u>

Giving Summary				
	YTD		Difference	Comments
	Actual	Budget		
Offerings	\$167,239	\$157,766	\$9,473	106.0%
Debt Reduction	\$17,060	\$0	\$17,060	
Total	\$184,299	\$157,766	\$26,533	

Assets					
	2023		2024		Comments
	December	October	October	Change	
Checking Account	\$78,454		\$80,776	\$2,323	
Money Market	\$0		\$51,127	\$51,127	
Total	\$78,454		\$131,903	\$53,450	Net increase in cash balance

Liabilities & Equity					
	2023		2024		Comments
	December	October	October	Change	
Dedicated Funds Total	\$90,965		\$88,639	(\$2,326)	
Other Liabilities	\$5,799		\$2,470	(\$3,329)	
Assets less Liabilities	(\$18,310)		\$40,795	\$59,105	Net increase in equity
Mortgage Balance	\$272,520		Interest Rate	6.34%	
Balloon Payment Due		11/1/2027			