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December
2023

Advent and Christmas

Easter is essential — without Easter, there would be no Christian faith. Advent and Christmas are beautiful, touching our hearts and restoring our hope in the darkest of days. The season gives us reason to gather with those we love. We enjoy rich food — just as the prophet tells us heaven will be like. The sacred music of Advent and Christmas has impacted the culture beyond the church. We are moved to generosity. And, is there anything better that we do all year together than sing “Silent Night” in a candlelit church?

Here are some special events for you at Bethlehem in Advent and Christmas:

Bells of the Bluffs Handball Ensemble Christmas Concert— Saturday, December 2, 2 p.m.

God’s Global Barnyard, with the Rev. Amanda White of the ELCA—Sunday, December 3, 10:45 a.m.

Musicorum Christmas Concert—Saturday, December 9, 6:30 p.m.

Choir and Ensemble Advent/Christmas Program—Sunday, December 10, 9:30 a.m.

Christmas Hymn Sing and Stewardship Thank You Brunch—Sunday, December 10, 10:45 a.m.; **Minnesota Riverbend Brass**, 7 p.m.

Children’s Christmas Program—Sunday, December 17, 9:30 a.m.

Service of Lessons and Carols—Sunday, December 24, 9:30 a.m.

Festival Service of Worship—Sunday, December 24, 4 p.m. and 6 p.m.

We rejoice together that our God was born into the world, and celebrate Jesus’ coming and birth. A blessed Advent and Merry Christmas to you! ~ Pr. Jay



An Update on the Cruz Family

The Cruz family continues to do very well! The family recently had an opportunity to go out to Wisconsin to visit some other family members who are in the United States. The WELCOME team also heard from the law office that asylum paperwork was officially filed at the beginning of October. At this point, it is just a waiting game until we hear about what next steps are. We were also told that work permits can be applied for 150 days after the asylum application is received. This would be sometime in March 2024 at the earliest. If the family is granted asylum, they will be eligible for residency/green cards 1 year after asylum is granted. So, in other words, it is a long process and we are very much still in the beginning stages. We continue pressing forward, though.

The fiesta for the family was a huge success! Thank you to all who were able to attend! We have been hearing a lot of feedback about how it was nice to get all 5 churches together to celebrate. We had approximately 200 people from all 5 congregations attend the celebration. It was a fantastic evening to celebrate all the ways that God has been among us all in this process!



Join Us For
Wednesday Night Suppers!

JD Truffles Catering will prepare a variety of delicious weekly meals, and Bethlehem volunteers will greet and serve you.

**All are welcome!
Join us between 5:00
and 6:15 p.m.**

December 6
Chicken alfredo with salad & roll

December 13
Meatloaf, mashed potatoes,
mixed vegetables & roll

December 20 & 27
**NO SUPPERS —
Christmas break**



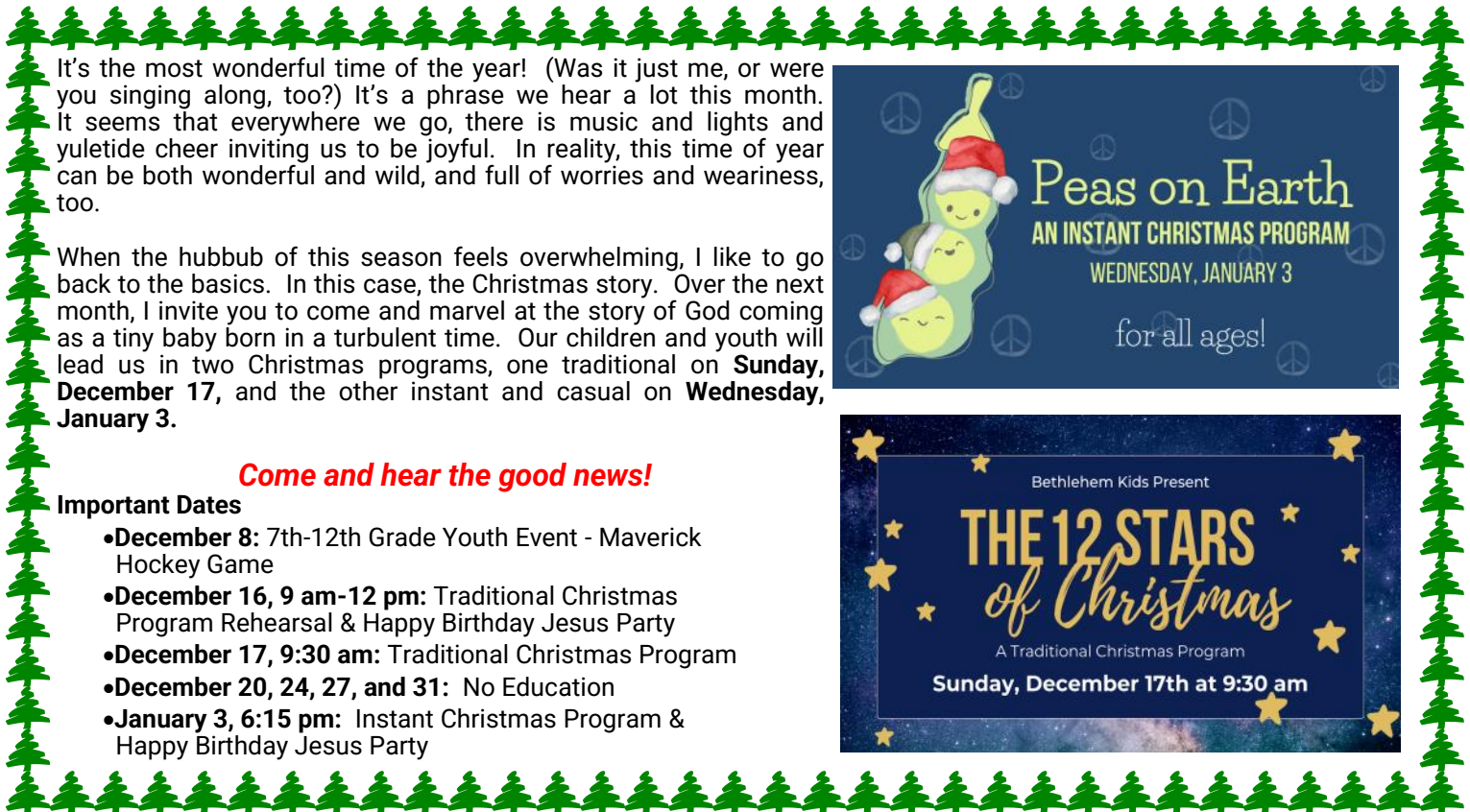
Be Part of BLC's
Prayer Shawl Ministry

Winter temps mean it's prayer shawl knitting and crocheting time again! New bags of yarn are available in the office waiting for your gifted hands. See Molly or Chris for assistance. Questions? Call Marcia Nagel at 507-420-9692.



Family Faith Formation Updates

Anna Wencel, Family Faith Formation Director



It's the most wonderful time of the year! (Was it just me, or were you singing along, too?) It's a phrase we hear a lot this month. It seems that everywhere we go, there is music and lights and yuletide cheer inviting us to be joyful. In reality, this time of year can be both wonderful and wild, and full of worries and weariness, too.

When the hubbub of this season feels overwhelming, I like to go back to the basics. In this case, the Christmas story. Over the next month, I invite you to come and marvel at the story of God coming as a tiny baby born in a turbulent time. Our children and youth will lead us in two Christmas programs, one traditional on **Sunday, December 17**, and the other instant and casual on **Wednesday, January 3**.

Come and hear the good news!

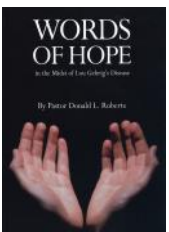
Important Dates

- **December 8:** 7th-12th Grade Youth Event - Maverick Hockey Game
- **December 16, 9 am-12 pm:** Traditional Christmas Program Rehearsal & Happy Birthday Jesus Party
- **December 17, 9:30 am:** Traditional Christmas Program
- **December 20, 24, 27, and 31:** No Education
- **January 3, 6:15 pm:** Instant Christmas Program & Happy Birthday Jesus Party



Pastor Don's Devotion

Pastor Don Roberts served as pastor at Bethlehem from 1989-1996. He was diagnosed with ALS/Lou Gehrig's disease in 1995 and continues to be an inspiration of life and faith to our congregation.



THEREFORE, WE ARE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, GOD MAKING HIS APPEAL THROUGH US. WE IMPORE YOU ON BEHALF OF CHRIST, BE RECONCILED TO GOD. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20

So we are ambassadors of Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ~ 2 Corinthians 5:20-21

We are about to celebrate Christmas. Christianity is the only religion I know that God became human. Let's explore that further. We all sin. God became human in the name of Jesus. He became sin to reconcile us with God. Although Jesus had no sin, he became sin for us. That is why he said on the cross, "God, why have you forsaken me?" Without Jesus, we can say, "Why have you forsaken us?" Without Jesus, we are doomed people. We would have no hope of eternal life. On the cross, Jesus experienced all the bad feelings we have. Today, through Jesus, we are reconciled to God. That is why we celebrate Christmas.

We are ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador for a country represents that country to its people. We are ambassadors for Christ. That shows us how we are to act towards others. Luther said we should be "little Christs" to one another. Be the ambassadors of Christ.



~ **Council Corner** ~
**Highlights from the
 Monthly Council Meeting**



Here are the “highlights” of the Bethlehem Council meeting held on **November 21**. Official minutes with more details are posted at www.blcmankato.org and are also available in the church office notebook. Visit with Council members with questions and concerns! We welcome your conversation & feedback!

Finances: The monthly deficit declined from **-\$62,076.01** on September 30 to **-\$31,786.86** on October 31. Increased giving and fewer major expenses contributed to this financial improvement. The goal is to further reduce this deficit in November/December for a positive end-of-year balance. Members are encouraged to fulfill their 2023 financial commitments to make this a reality.

Stewardship: As of November 12, a total of 165 financial pledges representing \$371,289 have been received for 2024. This reflects a 3.64% increase totaling \$13,046 more in member commitments. Thank-you notes have been mailed and reminders will be sent to other members with hopes of additional pledges to meet planned 2024 expenses.

Financial Review Report: A standardized financial review report form was approved to assess the annual financial operations of the church by the Financial Review Committee.

Pastoral Housing: Specific tax designations of pastoral salaries for housing expenses approved.

November 19 Semi-Annual Meeting: A positive fall semi-annual meeting was held on 11/19 with 98 members in attendance approving the 2024 church budget. Budget, along with the annual goals for the Council, boards & committees and the strategic plan, are available on the church website.

Iambi Secondary School: Over \$10,000 in funds received for school scholarships.

WELCOME: 200 members of 5 churches attended community celebration of Cruz family on 11/9. Asylum paperwork officially filed with extended timeline expected for approval & work permits.

Strategic Goal 4 Update: "We will continue to work in partnerships to serve the needs of the community with relevant purpose and meaningful action" is Goal #4. Activities related to 11 specific objectives focusing on refugee/asylum seeker support, Connections Shelter, community needs assessment, Lincoln Park neighborhood participation, community use of BLC facilities, the REACH, tax preparation services, blood drives, and Wednesday night suppers were reviewed.

Youth Activities: BLC youth participated in 6-church Winter Warm Up event. WOW Zone laser tag event held with plans for Maverick hockey game on 12/9. Efforts continue to involve more young adults in activities. First “Brave Conversation” planned for 5th-8th grade youth to focus on mental health with outside speaker.

Community: New ministerial association being organized with Mankato churches to share resources and work together to address community needs.

New BLC Members: Tanya Mallen and her children Rose and George approved for reinstatement as BLC members.

Next Council Meeting: Tuesday, December 19.



~ **Monthly Mission** ~
**Notes from the
 Community & Global Missions Board**



Our December Monthly Mission partner is **God's Global Barnyard**. This is a program of ELCA World Hunger which helps purchase animals for people in developing countries who are dealing with food scarcity and poverty. Training and support in managing care of the animals is provided, as well as help in the business aspect of selling the products. The goal is long-term sustainable solutions for hunger. While there are similar programs around, **God's Global Barnyard** has the advantage of building upon long-term relationships of trust between the church and communities throughout the world. Animals include chicks, honeybees, piglets, goats, fish (farms), and cows. This makes a particularly meaningful gift for friends and family at Christmas time that is a bit out of the ordinary! How often can you give your brother-in-law a goat?!? Gifts start out at very affordable levels, and there are ways to give group gifts for the larger purchases, which include a complete Family Farm. Bethlehem has been especially generous in giving to this mission in the past. Our goal this year is \$8,000. There will be lots of additional information out in the narthex, and Christmas cards are available to go with the gifts.

Thanks for being a part of God's work!



December 21
1:00-6:00 p.m.
Grounds for Joy



Financial Report
Elizabeth Ruiz, Financial Secretary



At the end of September, the general fund deficit had grown to \$62,076. The good news, however, is that by the end of October, the general fund deficit had shrunk to \$31,788. This was due to strong member giving and lower expenses during the month of October.

Please remember that all 2023 contributions have to be in the church office by December 31, or postmarked December 31.



Bethlehem Lutheran Church
720 South Second Street
Mankato, MN 56001

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

(507) 388-2925
blchurch@blcmankato.org



*A Reconciling in Christ
Congregation*

Pastor Jay Dahlvang: (507) 469-3792
pastorjay@blcmankato.org

Pastor Jacie Richmond: (612) 581-8855
pastorjacie@blcmankato.org



@bethlehem.mankato

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Opportunities to get involved!

Worship

**Sundays at
9:30 a.m.**
in sanctuary & online

**Wednesdays at
6:15 p.m.**

Our Sunday service is
streamed live on
Facebook &
broadcast at 11 a.m.
on KTOE Radio.

Adult Bible Study

Tuesdays, 7 a.m.
Lectionary online

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**Book of Faith:
Wednesdays at
10:30 a.m.**

**Fellowship
With Food**

Join us for coffee &
treats In Grounds for
Joy after worship on
Sundays!

**Wednesday Night
Suppers**
5:00–6:15 p.m. in the
dining room

Education

Please check Family
Faith Formation on
our website for details
about children's/
youth activities.

Adult Forums are in
Grounds for Joy
at 10:45 on
Sunday mornings.

Small Groups

Book clubs, school
kit assemblers,
young adults, Life in
the Spirit, BLC Men,
Meet & Eat,
Women's Circles,
etc.

Please check online
calendar for times
& places.

Music Groups

Choir, Gospbells,
BLC Brass,
Brass & Sass,
Praise Band

To join the music
program, contact
Charlie Leftridge,
Director of Music
& Worship.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

*Bethlehem is an inviting community that is
growing in Christ, loving our neighbors,
and serving God's world.*

***All calendar details can be
found on our website at
blcmankato.org/calendar.***



For unto you
is born this day
in the city of David

***A Saviour
which is
Christ the Lord.***

Luke 2:11