

St. John's Lutheran Church

NEWSLETTER

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“Turning Winter Into Summer”

“He sends out His command to the earth; His Word runs swiftly. He gives snow like wool; He scatters frost like ashes.” – Psalm 147:15-16

As I write my message for the February newsletter, I am gazing out the large front window in my home office at the parsonage. The sun is brightly shining on nine inches of freshly fallen snow. The temperature is minus three degrees with a bitter wind chill factor that makes it feel several degrees colder.

For many people winter is a dreary and lifeless time of the year. Falling temperatures signal its beginning. Frost covers blades of grass that were at one time green. The weather is so unpredictable. It can be so frigidly cold and snowy one week (as it was January 20-22). The next week it can be gray and gloomy. The usual comment that I hear is: “What a lousy and depressing winter!”

But Who is it that gives us such weather? Have you ever stopped to think about God’s reasons for giving us this season? Have you ever stopped to give thanks for winter? On the opposite end of the spectrum stands warm, sunny, and glorious summer. It almost seems as if there are two gods. One god who gives us summer and another god who gives us winter. But we know that there are not two gods – one good and the other evil. There is only one God. And He is the One who controls the seasons and all that is associated with them.

In 1531, while on a hunting trip, Martin Luther, in his words, “bagged Psalm 147” as his game,

took it home, and carved it. Luther pondered the thanklessness of the human heart for all of God’s “ordinary” blessings. He reflected on the self-centered attitude of humankind which saw itself as the master and ruler of creation. He also considered the lessons of God’s love in nature. He thought about the awesome wonder of God’s power, in which He is able to create and sustain all things with the power of His Word.

As you meditate on Psalm 147, what blessings are specifically listed by the Psalmist? He mentions protection, prosperity, peace, and daily bread. Also hidden in the Psalm is the fact that God gives the blessings of summer, even in the midst of winter. In other words, the writer would have us consider the huge object lesson that summer provides. The Psalmist draws several comparisons. *“He gives snow like wool; He scatters frost like ashes. He hurls down His crystals of ice like crumbs.”* Snow and wool. Frost and ashes. Hail and crumbs. Though the snow and the cold would seem unbearable, God gives these as signs of how He provides for you. Wool provides warmth, as do ashes from the fire. Crumbs can provide food, as when God rained down manna for the Israelites in the desert. At the same time, only God can change winter into life and bring life from death.

Life from death. Help from distress. This is the lesson of winter from this Psalm. The seasons represent a visual symbol for what is spiritually true. By our old sinful nature we are cold, lifeless, and dead. But by the

power of His Word, God gives us the breath of life. So, too, the world in which we live is often bitter cold, loveless, and selfish. God’s powerful commands freeze ungodly activities in its tracks. Only in the warmth of the Good News of Jesus Christ is our faith renewed and refreshed. As we can do little to change winter into summer, so we can do little to change our own hearts. But the words “It is finished” and “You are forgiven” will bring life from death. Then the mood changes. The Gospel motivates renewed and righteous desires in our hearts. *“He sends out His Word, and melts them; He makes His wind blow and the waters flow.”*

The power of God is the power of His Word to cause change; a real change of heart. The signs of God’s comforting love are all around us. God’s power to change what by our own feeble power would be unchangeable is proven year after year, season after season, day after day.

Unfortunately, the signs and object lessons of God are sometimes so obvious and so ordinary and so commonplace that we do not stop to consider with reverent awe and wonder the importance of God’s care, the blessings He gives, and how He gives them. Even in the middle of winter, we are renewed in God’s amazing grace and abundant mercy through the almighty power of His Word contained in the simple verses of Psalm 147.

Thanking God For Turning Winter Into Summer,

Pastor Riley

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING



On February 4, after the morning worship, a Congregational Meeting will be held to discuss the business of the church, along with an update on the renovation project. Your input is needed for the growth of the church. All members of the congregation are encouraged to attend.



The Book Group will be discussing two books from the 23rd Psalm Mysteries by Debbie Viguie. On Saturday, February 16 at 11:30 a.m., we will meet in the church lounge. The two books are available in the church office or see Doris Love.

Women in God's Service: WINGS



The ladies are asking for volunteers to help with two projects they are working on. One project is to work on Chrismons to replace some for our sanctuary tree as well as to decorate the next donated tree to an organization in the community in need. If anyone would like to assemble them, there are simple and more intricate kits. These kits include step by step directions. The kits are located in the church office or speak to Erika Slozak.

The second project is new for WINGS. The ladies are creating infant blankets, skin to skin squares, and hats for newborn infants in the NICU unit. If you would like to start knitting or crocheting, please speak to Doris Love for the yarn and directions.

Our next meeting will be Saturday, March 16. We are continuing to accept donations for Dress to Success. Please come and join us for fun, food and fellowship. Remember, every woman who is a member of St. John's is a member of WinGS.



A NEW SIGN-UP SHEET HAS BEEN POSTED OUTSIDE THE CHURCH OFFICE

Please help in the continuing outreach mission project of our Radio Broadcast of Sunday morning Worship . Broadcasts can be heard each Sunday at 7:30 a.m. on WHYN (560 AM). The cost for the program is \$125 per week. If you are interested in sponsoring a broadcast (or a part of a broadcast) in memory of or in honor of anyone please call the church or sign up on the sheet outside the office door. Donations of any amount are welcome. Additionally, we have posted previous weeks' broadcasts on our website along with the associated bulletin.

Let us know if there is a shut-in or someone who missed a week, and we will email a link so they can hear the whole service. Just log onto [http:// stjohnswestfield.org](http://stjohnswestfield.org); links to the broadcasts and the weekly bulletins are on the main page.

Please see/call Bill Schneeloch (413-568-4906 or 860-604-5264) or e-mail at [radio@ stjohnswestfield.org](mailto:radio@stjohnswestfield.org) with any questions.

WESTFIELD COMMUNITY TABLE:

One of St. John's ministries is to provide a meal to the Westfield area needy at the Community Table every fourth Friday of the month which will be February 22. If your gifts are to help the needy and can spare a couple of hours each month, I am compiling a list of helpers that I will call to help as needed. The time allotment is for cooking 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. and serving from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Please contact Sally Sienkiewicz at 562-3186 if you are able to be part of this ministry.

January and February Mission Project...



The Bridge at Our Savior Lutheran Church in South Windsor, CT.

The Bridge provides non-perishable food items and clothing for community members in need. This program has been modeled after Hands of Grace. Our Savior Lutheran Church has received training and the supplies to offer a Beyond the Basics Community Resource Center and Community Resources through their basic needs program. These help programs connect people to local services and resources that match their specific needs as well as providing spiritual guidance. Community Resource Coaches help encourage positive changes in people served through relational support and may meet one-on-one with people to motivate them to set goals and connect to appropriate resources.

Valentine's DAY BRUNCH

Everyone is invited to attend the Annual Valentine's Day Brunch to be held after the worship service on Sunday, February 10th. The menu will include ham/cheese egg strata or cheese egg strata, hash browns, bacon, sausage, English muffins, miniature muffins, coffee and juice. If you are planning to join us, please sign up on the sheet located in the foyer so the correct amount of food will be prepared. A free will offering will be taken. All proceeds will go towards the youth group .

The church's prayer shawl ministry has spread the warmth of God's love to those in need. If anyone knows of someone who would love a prayer shawl, please contact Doris Love or Pastor Riley by calling the church (568-1417).



Thrivent Notes:

The Thrivent Choice Dollars for 2018 *must be allocated by March 31, 2019 or be forfeited.* St. John's would like to ask you to allocate your Thrivent Choice Dollars to St. John's Lutheran Church. Last year these donations helped with improvements to the church, provide meals for the Westfield Soup Kitchen & Second Saturday Suppers, supplement coffee hours, buy supplies, donations to Domus House, Stockings and Christmas Cards for Soldiers, sponsor two children in Liberia for schooling, etc. Please log-on to your Thrivent account www.Thrivent.com to allocate these funds or call Thrivent at 1-800-847-4836, or call Louise at Jim Shuttleworth's office at 413-525-9165, or see Jane McClure for assistance.

Reminder, for the Action Team program, benefit members are eligible for two Action Team submissions/awards (\$250 each); associate members are eligible for one Action Team submission/award for \$250. Please try to be as detailed and specific as possible when submitting a request. This will help to get your application approved quickly. See Jane McClure if you need any ideas about projects to be funded.



The following have signed up for flowers for the months of

February and March:

- February 3 - open
- February 10 - McClure
- February 17- Sienkiewicz
- February 24 - Kousch Fund
- March 3 - open
- March 10- open
- March 17 - Sienkiewicz
- March 24- open

If you would like to sign up in the 2019 FLOWER BOOK located on the round table in the foyer. The cost per bouquet is \$21.00. Checks may be made to the St. John's Flower Fund.

Volunteers are needed to care for the altar during 2018. If you cannot do a full month, two weeks will be fine. This activity doesn't take a lot of time and is very easy to do. A sign up sheet is located in the foyer. Training will be provided. For questions, speak to Jane McClure (562-0492).



SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS



In February, the younger children in our Sunday School classes will be sending off handmade Valentine Cards. If you know of someone who would enjoy receiving one, please leave their name and address in the church office or give it to Jane McClure.

COFFEE HOURS



Volunteers are needed to help host coffee hours on Sunday Mornings following the worship service. The coffee, juice and half & half are provided. All the host needs to do is provide baked goods or snacks, serve after the worship service, and clean up. There is a sign up sheet in the foyer. This time after church allows for wonderful fellowship among our members. There is a sign up sheet located at the coffee hour tables. For questions, please see Linda Slozak.

A MESSAGE from our TREASURER:

Each month in your offering box you will find a "Building Improvement" envelope. Prayerfully use this to help us maintain the beauty of our church buildings. There are some building projects that are needed in the upcoming year.

Thank you,

James Love Sr.



I would like to extend an invitation to join Zoe & I for the Vespers Concert at First Lutheran Church of Boston on February 2nd. The Vespers will be themed around the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (to which we owe the beautiful canticle of Simeon, the Nunc Dimittis: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace..."). Further details can be found at this link: [FLC VESPERS INFO](#). We will be car pooling to the event. Additional details about transportation will be forth coming once I know how many will be attending.

Itinerary for day of concert:

- 1) 4:40 p.m. - Organ Mini Concert for Prelude
- 2) 5:00 p.m. - Bach Vespers with Orchestra
- 3) 6:30 p.m. - Wine & Cheese Reception

Jeff Windoloski

WESTFIELD'S 350th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION PARADE

On February 10th, the St. John's Float Committee will meet after the morning worship. Join us with your ideas as we begin the planning stage of the St. John's float entry for our city's 350th Birthday Celebration on May 19th. The city has planned quite a celebration to begin at 1:00 p.m. on that day. We will also be looking for volunteers to help with construction. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Gary Wolfe (413) 297-4785 or Erika Slozak (413) 579-4962.

Building Relationships

Relationships need to be built; they don't just happen. Even in families where blood relationships exist, emotional relationships must be built. How do we go about doing that? What are the criteria? Let's look to the master of relationships: our Lord Jesus.

Jesus, the incarnate Christ, lived in a relationship with His earthly family. In the Gospel of Luke, we are told that, when His parents became separated from their son on the return from Jerusalem where they had attended the Feast of the Passover, they were distraught. When they were reunited, Mary asked, "*Son, why have You treated us so?*" He gave His well-known reply: "*Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*" Then, we're told, "*He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them...And*

Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:48-52). The Son of God, the Savior of the World, lived in obedient relationship with the earthly parents His Heavenly Father gave Him.

It is in the early days of His ministry that Jesus starts gathering to Himself His disciples, the Twelve who would sleep at His side, share their food with Him, endure the variances in the weather (as they were often outdoors), hear and try to understand His words, and seek to emulate Him, their Rabbi and Master. From Jesus we learn about being stewards of relationships. The criteria include quality time together, the opening of hearts to one another, trust and forgiveness, and interdependence.

Just as He called His disciples into relationship with Himself, so He initiates that closeness with us.

He calls us with His Gospel words, "*Come to Me...and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). He invites us, "*Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men*" (Matthew 4:19). He abides with us (John 15:4); He shares His Heavenly food with us (Matthew 26:26-28); He speaks to us by His Word, Jesus Himself, and through His called servants (Hebrews 1:1-2); He presents us to His Father as holy in His sight (Colossians 1:22).

Secure, then, in our relationship with Jesus, we come to understand both our identity and purpose as His stewards. Equipped by His Word and empowered by His transforming love, our stewardship is no longer limited to specific acts occurring here and there but encompasses our entire lives. With a growing awareness of Christ's redeeming love, we are motivated to express our faith by the way we live our lives.

