

# THE MESSENGER

## ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH

December 2020

### \*\*\*SPECIAL EVENT\*\*\*

#### CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Sunday Dec 20 at 10 AM

Note: NO Sunday School this day!

### WEEKLY EVENTS

**NOTE: ALL IN-PERSON EVENTS  
ARE SUSPENDED UNTIL  
DECEMBER 20**

Sunday Worship - 8:30 & 10:30 AM

(MASKS REQUIRED)

Sunday School - Sunday at 9:30 AM

Confirmation - 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays

NA Meeting - Wednesdays at 7:30 PM

Spirituality Group - Thursdays at 7 PM

AA Meeting - Saturdays at 10:00 AM

Soccer Shots - Saturdays at 9:15 AM  
(Spring-Fall)

### 2020 Council Officers

President - Jerry Wessel

Vice President - Kelly Bryan

Secretary - Karen Houseman

Treasurer - Bob Thompson

### 2020 Council Members

Christian Education - Kelly B.

Youth Ministry - John B.

Comm. & Publications - Jason E.

Social Min./Evangelism - Rudy M.

Finance and Stewardship - Bob T.

Property - Tom L.

Worship/Music - Karen H.

Mutual Ministry - Jeff W.

Personnel - Jerry W.

### Next Council Meeting

Tuesday Dec. 8 at 7:00 PM



### *From Pastor Murdy's Desk*

## CHRISTMAS 2020

*Greetings in the name of our new born King!*

A blessed Advent and soon to be a Merry Christmas! It's hard to believe that it's that time of year again. It is even harder to believe that we will be celebrating in a way that we have never done before - apart. I pray that this letter finds you all in good health and in equal amazement for all that God continues to do in our midst!

I love art, and in particular, icons and all the stories that go into their creations. In my passion for symbolism I find peace in being a part of the story they tell. Icons in particular are a rich source of this storytelling. This great tradition of iconography comes from our Christian siblings in the East. Each icon symbolizes and represents a sort of window. Through these windows we can peer into the life of the church and gaze upon those persons and moments which have changed history. A religious tradition dating back nearly two thousand years, Icons are written with a great deal of prayer. The artist "writes" the story, rather than painting it. As windows, they are said to invite us into the story through meditation and prayer.

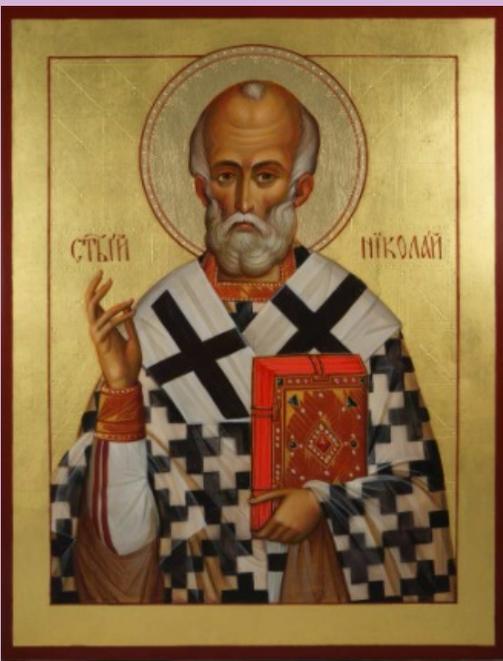
In preparation for the season of Advent, a season of waiting, I was meditating on the *Icon of the Nativity* asking myself, "Where do I see God in our world today?" It is sometimes really hard to see God, isn't it? It can be especially challenging today in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. If you look closely at the icon above you will notice a deep darkness surrounding Jesus. Perhaps your world seems to be clouded with darkness at the moment. Darkness is always something that surrounds us, our doubts, fears, worries, anxieties, and so on. They surround us like a veil, and all too often we lose sight of God and our faith in that darkness.

If we think about it, and are willing to believe and see it, God is in that darkness. God is present in the cavernous voids of our lives. His voice echoes in the chambers of our hearts, calling us to faith and love-in-action. Born in human

*continued on page 2*

## Celebrating Saint Nicholas!

Through hundreds of years, Saint Nicholas of Myra (c.280 - 6 December 343) has been honored and venerated by many. By his example of generosity to those in need - especially children - St. Nicholas continues to be a model for a good and righteous life.



Widely celebrated in Europe, the feast day of St. Nicholas (December 6 according to the Gregorian calendar, or December 19 according to the Julian festal calendar used by Orthodox Christians) kept alive the stories of his goodness and generosity. In medieval and Tudor times, it was traditional for a choir boy to be chosen on the feast of St. Nicholas as a “Boy Bishop” to dress and act as a bishop and to lead joyous processions around communities, collecting money for the church and parish funds. In Germany and Poland and other European countries, this tradition is still practiced.

December 6 remains the main day for gift-giving and merrymaking in much of Europe. In the Netherlands, St. Nicholas is celebrated on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, the eve of the feast day, by throwing candies – many times chocolate “coins” – and small gifts into the doors of neighborhood children. Dutch children leave carrots and hay in their shoes for the saint’s horse, hoping that St. Nicholas will exchange them for small gifts.

This simple gift-giving and revelry in honor of St. Nicholas in early December is regarded as helping to rightfully preserve a Christmas Day focus on the Christ Child.



From Pastor Murdy’s Desk (continued from pg 1)

flesh, wrapped in rags, and placed in a feeding trough, God really does meet us where we are! God is in the midst of our darkness, resting in a manger. God came to earth in the muck and mire of our world. God is in those places we never expect, in the midst of His people. Who could have predicted that God would come into our world in such a fragile form? Who could have predicted that God would be “born” like you and me, fully dependent on this mother for life? Who could have predicted that the King of all creation would have stable animals as the first to kneel and pay homage to the almighty?

Sisters and brothers in Christ, this is a Christmas and holiday season like no other. We might be tempted to consider this Christmas season to be spoiled by Covid. But, despite Covid, it is still Christmas! We may not be able to celebrate the season of Advent and Christmas in the ways we have been used to. But, perhaps this challenging time can be an opportunity to remember what is truly important about this season - Jesus. We may not be in church together but together we are the Church. Nothing can change that. It is my prayer that despite the situation we find ourselves in, we may be able to recognize and celebrate this joyous season with renewed hope, faith and love.

May our Emmanuel grant you peace, joy, and a new vision to see God in new ways!

From my family to yours - a blessed Advent and a Merry Christmas!

Yours in Christ,

*Pastor Joe*

Pastor Joseph Murdy



# *A Special* CHRISTMAS

## *Remembrance*

Did you know that for the past 8 years our church has received a donation to purchase the Christmas tree? Every year we

receive a donation from Sheila Sima who is the sister of the late Sandra Schane, a

beloved member of Ascension who passed away 8 years ago. Here is the letter we received:

“Seasons Greetings from Sheila Sima. I am Sandra Schane’s sister who each year donates the Ascension Lutheran Church Christmas tree in memory of Sandy. This year again I am donating \$300 to continue that tradition. If you could please share that information in your weekly holiday bulletin, I would appreciate it ... As you may recall, Sandy passed away unexpectedly February 3, 2012. She was a dedicated and beloved member of Ascension Lutheran Church. She sang in the choir, was on church counsel, and participated in the women’s bible study circle group. Sandy loved her Ascension family dearly. Happy holiday season to everyone at Ascension.” – *Sheila Sima*

## ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

### HOLDEN EVENING PRAYER

During the season of Advent we hope to offer some unique opportunities throughout the season. For the first week of Advent we will record and share **Holden Evening Prayer**. Throughout the next 3 weeks of Advent, we will announce new weekly opportunities to worship, pray and study together.

### SERVICES for Christmas Eve - December 24

**3:00, 6:00 and 9:00 p.m.**

As of right now we are anticipating offering Christmas Eve services. However, they will be a little different this year. This year we are **limiting each service to 45 people** and you must sign up in advance to attend. Sign-up will begin December 1st. You will be able to sign up by contacting Pastor Joe or the church office.

## ALC Council Meeting Highlights

Council meeting was held Tuesday Nov. 10, 2020

### November Council Highlights

#### November 10<sup>th</sup>

- HEPA filters may be an idea for the church to purchase. The idea is to make people in church feel better about breathing the air in the building. John B. will put together some recommendations for next month’s meeting.
- 2021 Budget proposal update. Bob T. made a motion to present the budget as proposed. John B. seconded. Motion carried with 7 members in favor and 2 members of council abstaining.
- As many are aware our church has had some issues with the strength of our WiFi. Jason Eager would like to purchase a new router to replace the old one. He presented several options. Jeff W. made a motion to procure a new router with a cap of \$200. Kelly B. seconded. Motion carried.

#### November 20<sup>th</sup>

The Council convened via Zoom on Friday, November 20 to discern whether or not the church should suspend in-person activities effective immediately for a few weeks. This discussion was held based on rising Covid cases in Allegheny county, new mandates from the state and county and at the recommendation of our Bishop. Nine council members were present. The decision was made by consensus. Seven members felt we should suspend in-person gatherings, two felt we should remain open. We anticipate coming resuming on-site activities on Sunday, December 20<sup>th</sup> and Christmas Eve. Council will reevaluate at our next council meeting on December 8<sup>th</sup>.

- **Next Council Meeting:** Tuesday, Dec 8 at 7pm



# BEST WISHES . . .

## DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS!

- 6 Travis McEwen
- 7 Ryan Bayer
- 12 Jeanne Rose
- 13 Natalie Rodriguez
- 14 Paxton Brown
- 16 Debora Whitfield
- 17 Kay Braisted
- 19 Dylan Siemons  
Lauren Bayer
- 20 Katherine Neilson
- 21 Patricia Summerhill  
Rudy Marnich Sr.
- 22 Isabella Bryan
- 23 Joseph Neilson  
James Mentzer
- 24 Barbara Thompson
- 26 Phil Spano
- 29 Jake Zoltun



## DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES!

- 2 Jerry & Paula Wessel
- 4 Jeffrey & Debra Williams



## Flower Order Envelopes

Often when congregants sign up for flowers, it's unknown whether there is a specific dedication in mind. It also is necessary to make sure that when folks sign up for flowers that they also have been paid for. If you are interested in purchasing flowers (*which is greatly encouraged*), please fill out the flower envelope in the narthex with your name plus the display date and the person or occasion for the flowers. You can place your check inside and simply put it in the offering plate. *Reminder: you also must write your name on the flower order chart next to the date on which you wish to have the flowers displayed.*



## DECEMBER Lesser Festivals & Commemorations

### December 3 - Francis Xavier, missionary to Asia, d. 1552

A native of the Basque region of Spain, Xavier became a missionary to India, Southeast Asia, Japan, and the Philippines. He also helped to found the Society of Jesus (Jesuits).

### December 4 - John of Damascus, theologian, hymnwriter, d. ca.749

A monk in an abbey near Jerusalem, John wrote many hymns as well as theological works. One of his works, *The Fount of Wisdom*, remained influential for centuries.

### December 6 - Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, d. ca.342

Little is known about Nicholas, except that he was a bishop in present-day Turkey. According to legend, he was famous for his giving to the poor, and so has become a symbol of anonymous gift-giving.

### December 7 - Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, d. 397

While a governor of northern Italy, Ambrose was elected bishop of Milan on the same day he was baptized. He was a famous preacher, a writer of hymns we still sing today, and helped lead St. Augustine to faith.

### December 13 - Lucy, martyr, d. 304

Lucy was a young Christian of Sicily who was martyred during the persecutions under Emperor Diocletian. Her celebration became particularly important in Sweden and Norway, perhaps because the feast of Lucia (whose name means "light") originally fell on the shortest day of the year.

### December 14 - John of the Cross, renewer of the church, d. 1591

John was a member of the Carmelite monastic order, and worked to reform it. His writings reflect a deep interest in mystical thought and meditation.

### December 20 - Katharina von Bora Luther, renewer of the church, d. 1552

Born to an impoverished nobleman, Katie eventually took vows as a nun, but around age twenty-four she and several other nuns who were influenced by the writings of Martin Luther left the convent. Six children were born to Katie and Martin.

### December 26 - STEPHEN, DEACON AND MARTYR \*

Stephen was a deacon and the first martyr of the church. He was one of those seven upon whom the apostles laid hands after they had been chosen to serve widows and others in need. Later, Stephen's preaching angered the temple authorities, and they ordered him to be put to death by stoning.

### December 27 - JOHN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST \*

The son of Zebedee and brother of James, John was one of the twelve disciples and witness to the transfiguration. Tradition has named him also the writer of the Gospel of John, the three New Testament letters bearing his name, as well as Revelation.

### December 28 - THE HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS \*

This day commemorates the young children killed by Herod in Bethlehem in his jealous attempt to murder the baby Jesus, a sobering reminder of the evil that led Christ to be born for our salvation.

from [www.sundaysandseasons.com](http://www.sundaysandseasons.com)

NOTE: Lesser festivals are listed in small capital letters. Other listings are commemorations.

Dates after names indicate year of death.

\* Highlight: See in-depth information of these Lesser Festivals on page 6

# THANKS FOR GIVING!

Thank you to everyone who donated to this year's Thanksgiving food drive in support of the Good Shepherd food bank!



Volunteers with the Good Shepherd food bank in McKees Rocks, Pa. are pictured with the truckload of generosity which was donated by members of Ascension Church.

# Youth Ministry News

December 4 (Parents' Night Out) Movie and Popcorn Night has been **CANCELED** due to the ongoing pandemic.



Lunch Bunch



Plans are in the making for the next delicious **LUNCH BUNCH** adventure!

*If you are interested in being informed of the next get-together, please contact Nancy Schreiber or Paula Wessel.*

*Everyone is welcome! Hope to see you soon!*

# Keep those "OTHER" contributions flowing!



The bathroom renovation offering has collected \$6,919.00 so far. Our goal is \$20,000.00. Thank you for your continued generosity!  
(this will be updated monthly)



Did you know that Amazon will donate 0.5% of everything you spend to a charity? How about giving that money to Ascension? **Sign up for Amazon Smile today!** Detailed instructions with pictures are available in the narthex. Amazon smile is available year-round!

# Let us hear from you . . .

If you have pictures, articles, or ideas to submit to for the JANUARY newsletter please contact the office or Pastor or email [office@alcpgh.com](mailto:office@alcpgh.com).

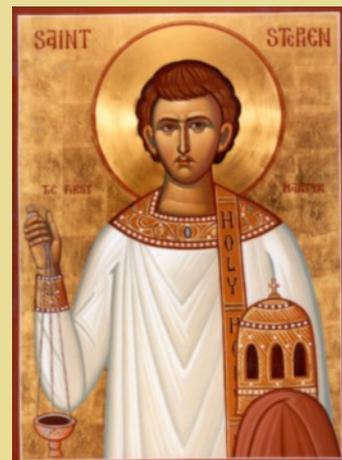
# DECEMBER'S LESSER FESTIVALS

Lesser festivals mark and celebrate events in the life of Christ, Christ's presence in the lives of the saints, and prominent festivals of the church. Observing these lesser festivals is a way of recovering and upholding the sense of the communion of saints that is so important to our understanding of the church: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints. . ." (*Apostles' Creed, Third Article*).

## December 26

### Stephen, Deacon and Martyr

Stephen was a deacon and the first martyr of the church. He was one of those seven upon whom the apostles laid hands after they had been chosen to serve widows and others in need. Later, Stephen's preaching angered the temple authorities, and they ordered him to be put to death by stoning, with Saul (later Paul) as one of the observers. As he died, he witnessed to his faith and spoke of a vision of heaven.



## December 27

### John, Apostle and Evangelist

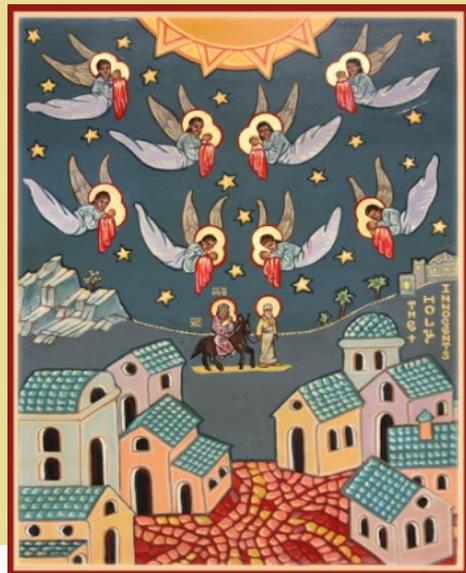
John, the son of Zebedee, was a fisherman and one of the Twelve. John, his brother James, and Peter were the three who witnessed the light of the transfiguration. John and James once made known their desire to hold positions of power in the kingdom of God. Jesus' response showed them that service to others was the sign of God's reign in the world. Tradition has attributed authorship of the gospel and the three epistles bearing his name to the apostle John. John is a saint for Christmas through his proclamation that the Word became flesh and lived among us, that the light of God shines in the darkness, and that we are called to love one another as Christ has loved us.



## December 28

### The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

The infant martyrs commemorated on this day were the children of Bethlehem, two years old and younger, who were killed by Herod, who worried that his reign was threatened by the birth of a new king. Augustine called these innocents "buds, killed by the frost of persecution the moment they showed themselves." Those linked to Jesus through their youth and innocence encounter the same hostility Jesus encounters later in his ministry.



Sources: [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org) and [www.sundaysandseasons.com](http://www.sundaysandseasons.com)



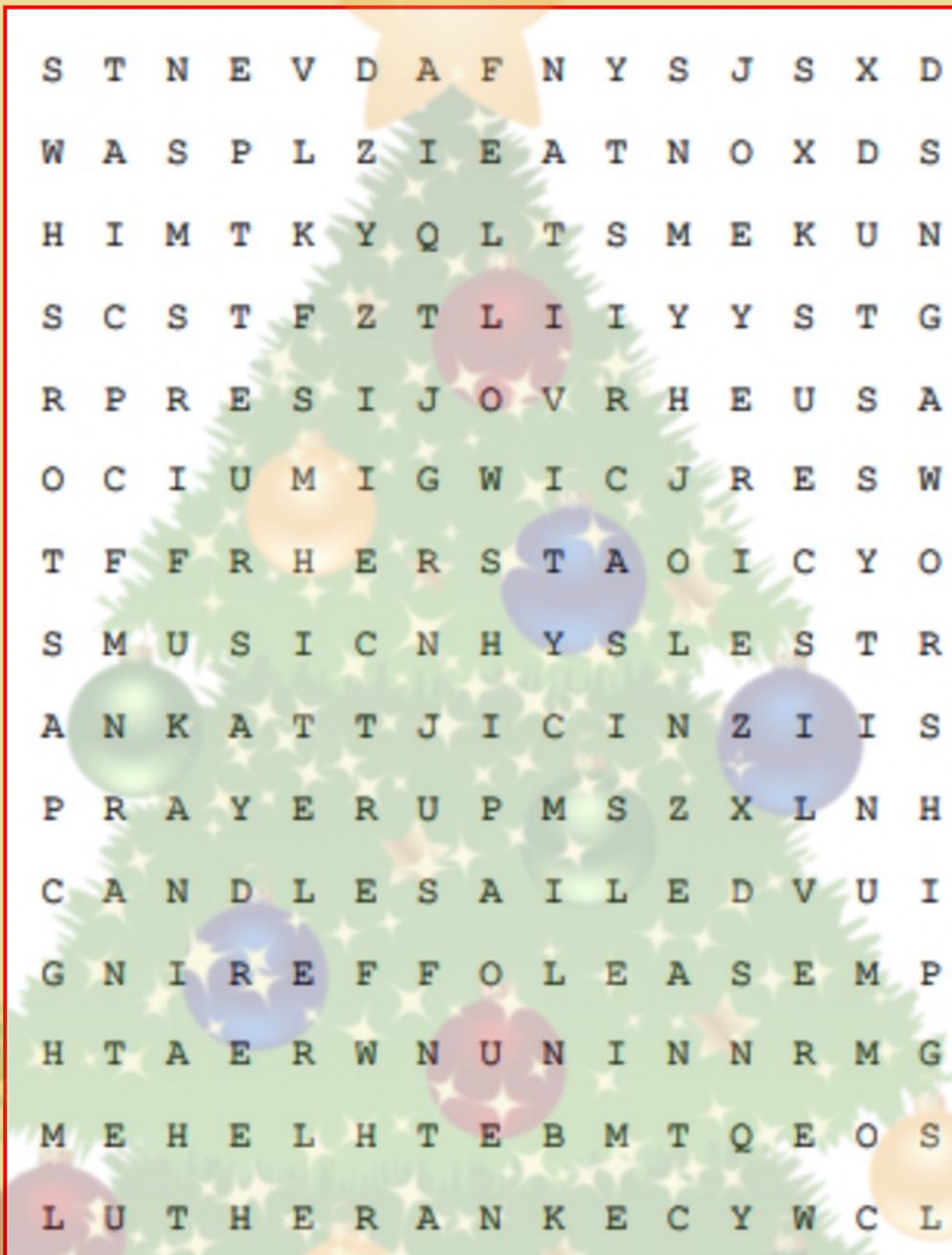
**Evangelical Lutheran  
Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

This is Christ's church.

There is a place for you here.

We are the church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace. Liberated by our faith, we embrace you as a whole person – questions, complexities and all. Join us as we do God's work in Christ's name for the life of the world.

# ASCENSION CHRISTMAS WORDSEARCH



**ADVENT**

**ASCENSION**

**BETHLEHEM**

**CANDLES**

**CHRISTMAS**

**CHURCH**

**COMMUNITY**

**FAMILIES**

**FELLOWSHIP**

**GIFTS**

**HYMNS**

**JESUS**

**LUTHERAN**

**MUSIC**

**NATIVITY**

**OFFERING**

**PASTOR JOE**

**PRAYER**

**SACRISTY**

**SILVER LANE**

**SPIRITUALITY**

**WISEMEN**

**WORSHIP**

**WREATH**

NOTE: words appear on the grid horizontally, vertically, and diagonally, both forwards and backwards!



**To be Christ's Disciples,  
nurture our faith, serve God,  
welcome our neighbors,  
and joyfully share in His love**

**Contact Us**

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