



THE MESSENGER

ASCENSION LUTHERAN CHURCH

December 2023

WEEKLY EVENTS

Sunday Worship - 10:30 AM

Sunday School - 9:30 AM (adult & child)

Drum Class - Mondays 5-8 PM Apr-July

NA Meeting - Wednesdays at 7:30 PM

AA Meeting - Saturdays at 10:00 AM

- Mondays at 7:00 PM

Soccer Shots - Saturday mornings &

Tuesday evenings (Spring-Fall)



Ascension Church Council

2023 COUNCIL EXECUTIVES

President – Jeff Williams

Vice President – Chelsea Karaffa

Secretary – Thom Kruse

Treasurer – Bob Thompson

2023 COUNCIL LIAISONS

Christian Education

Pastor Joe Murdy

Communications & Publications

Jason Eager

Fellowship

Sharon Giza

Finance & Stewardship

John Bielewicz

Mutual Ministry

Jeff Williams

Personnel

Clay Marnich

Property

Phil Spano

Social Ministry & Evangelism

Sharon Giza

Worship & Music

Thom Kruse

Youth

Chelsea Karaffa, Venus Thompson

Next Council Meeting

Tuesday December 12 at 7:00 PM

Ready for Christmas



From Pastor Murdy's Desk

Christmas seems to come earlier every year. If you were at any store in September, you might have noticed that Christmas began to sneak its way in. Halloween decorations were gone as quickly as

they were put out and stores seemed all too ready and eager to bring out Christmas. Our family tends to wait until the day after Thanksgiving to begin pulling out the Christmas decorations. It has been our tradition to watch Miracle on 34th Street on Thanksgiving night to kick off the season. This year we broke the rules. As soon as Halloween was over, we were ready for Christmas.

I don't know what it is about Christmas this year. We were ready for Christmas movies, decorations and songs. Call me sentimental. I was ready for the traditions. We all have Christmas traditions that range from simple to elaborate. In our family we have the Christmas pickle, gnomes, cooking, the smell of our German "smoking man," cookie decorating and above all, Christmas music.

From *White Christmas* to *Away in a Manger*, we love them all! We sing in the kitchen, in the car and of course at church. Since music is so important to our family and we only get to sing Christmas music (hymnal) for two weeks, I thought I would put a few songs in your head as we prepare for Christmas during this Advent season. What is *your* favorite Christmas hymn? I'd love to know and include them in our Lessons and Carols service on December 31st.

I'd like to share a few of my personal favorite verses and also share a brief reflection on each:

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Mount Calvary Cemetery

1715 Middletown Road
McKees Rocks, PA 15136
Robert J. Dudek, Supervisor
mtcalvarycem@alcpgh.com



Mount Calvary Cemetery Board

Judy Henry Bob Hughes
Bette Ann Kallay Joyce Leister
Pastor Joe Murdy Jeff Williams



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

ELW 267 **Joy to the World** verse 4

"He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love, and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love."

This song is probably a favorite of many. Little known fact, in the LBW (39), this song used to be a Christmas song. Now it's the last hymn of Advent. I'm not sure why that change happened. In verse 4 we praise Christ as the king who rules with righteousness and love. Is Christ the king of your life? Do you give him this authority? How does his governance of love change the way you live?

ELW 294 **In the Bleak Midwinter** verse 3

"What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; if I were a wiseman, I would do my part; yet what I can I give him - give my heart."

This hymn has become a recent favorite. I'm not sure when I first fell in love with it, but I am drawn to its every word. What can I give to God? Everything belongs to God, so what can I offer that would make a difference? We can give God our heart. In our heart lies our true self. There we have a choice. There we can choose to love God or reject God. How might you give God *your* whole heart this holy season?

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“USE this time of Advent
and Waiting
to prepare
and
recognize CHRIST.”
~ PJ

4th Advent Sunday Worship

Sunday, December 24th at 10:30am



Christmas Eve

Sunday December 24, 2023

4 pm & 7 pm traditional Christmas Eve worship

HOLDEN EVENING PRAYER

Midweek Advent services

7 p.m. WEDNESDAYS: Nov. 29, Dec. 6, 13, 20

Join us as we await the newborn King throughout the season of Advent through our midweek services of Holden Evening Prayer. This unique contemplative worship service originally was written during the winter of 1986 while the composer, Marty Haugen, was in residence at Holden Village in the North Cascade mountains of Washington state. A remote wilderness community and retreat center, Holden is rooted in the Lutheran tradition which welcomes all people.

Ascension Church has long enjoyed this beautiful service (about 30 mins). We hope that you will join us on Wednesdays - Nov. 29, Dec. 6, 13, 20 throughout this sacred Advent season. Unsure of driving in the dark? Please just ask for a ride! Come take a break from the busy world and join us for worship.



ALC Council Meeting Highlights

Council meeting was held Tues. Nov. 14, 2023

- **Call to order:** 6:57pm
- **Attendance:** All in attendance.
- **Motion to approve minutes** as written by Jason second by John. Passed unanimously.
- **President: Jeff Williams** – Letter received from Marnich Family – Motion by Clay to move \$1,200 from Christian Education to the purchase of an electronic sign, second by Jeff. 6 yes, 3 no, 2 abstain, motion passes.
- **Vice President: Chelsea Karaffa** – Meeting 10/22 for Cemetery committee. Bids for new equipment and review of budget.
- **2024 Ascension proposed budget review** - Motion to approve by John, second by Sharon. Passed unanimously.
- **2024 Mt. Calvary Cemetery proposed budget review** – Motion to approve by Jason, second by Jeff. Passed unanimously.
- **Fellowship, Social Ministry and Evangelism, Sharon: November** – collecting for food bank.
- **Subcommittee on Cemetery Gifts** – Consider that any purchases that use Cemetery funds should be in the year's Cemetery budget in which the expenditure occurs.
- **Important dates:**
 - Sunday, Nov. 19th Congregational Meeting
 - Tuesday, December 12th Council Meeting
- **Adjournment:** Motion by Pastor, Thom to second, Passed with one against. 8:08pm

ATTENTION: Giving Envelope users!

Please pick up your 2024 envelopes.

There also are unassigned boxes/numbers available for anyone who wishes to use envelopes. Please notify Pastor or the office.

Best Wishes . . .

DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS!

Date | Member/Friend

- 3 Donald Simpson
- 6 Travis McEwen
- 7 Ryan Bayer
- 10 Dorothy Barkley
- 12 Jeanne Rose
- 13 Natalie Rodriguez
- 14 Paxton Brown
- 16 Debora Whitfield
- 17 Kay Braisted
- 18 Judy Henry
- 19 Lauren Bayer
Dylan Siemons
- 20 Katie Neilson
- 21 Rudy Marnich Sr.
Pat Summerhill
- 22 Isabella Bryan
- 23 Joey Neilson
- 26 Phil Spano
- 29 Jake Zoltun



DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES!

Date | Members/Friends

- 2 Jerry & Paula Wessel
- 4 Jeff & Deb Williams



. . . and Blessings to ALL!

got NEWS?

If you have pictures, articles, or ideas to submit for the **JANUARY 2024** Newsletter, please contact the office or Pastor, or email office@alcpgh.com.

Lunch Bunch



A monthly gathering of members and friends of Ascension Church

Join Ascension's LUNCH BUNCH at Carmody's Grille - Thursday December 21

The **Lunch Bunch's** December adventure is **Thursday, December 21st** when they will travel to the Island of Neville (yes, that's Neville Island) for lunch at **Carmody's Grille** – located at 4905 Grand Avenue – a hop, skip & jump from Ascension. Call Nancy Schreiber at 412-859-3969 or Jerry Wessel at 412-787-1213 by Tuesday December 19 to get on board so that reservations can be made.

Driving solo - meet at the restaurant at 11:30.

Carpoolers - meet at church by 11:00.

See you there!

— Jerry Wessel

THANK YOU

to Ascension Youth who lent their helping hands to our Creative Hands Ministry for their quilt project!



ELW 296 What Child Is This verse 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."

I tend to be an emotional person. Sometimes I can't help if a tear comes out in a sermon. When I sing this verse, it always brings a tear to my eye. This song asks the question "why?" Why is this baby lying in a less than desirable setting? This baby shares our human experience. If we wonder by the Son of God wasn't born under better circumstances, shouldn't we ask that same question of children everywhere? This Word made flesh brings hope to our human condition. A hope we are called not only to share in word but also in deed.

ELW 274 On Christmas Night verse 1

"On Christmas night all Christians sing to hear the news the angels bring. On Christmas night all Christians sing to hear the news the angels bring; news of great joy, news of great mirth, news of our merciful king's birth."

Are you exhausted at the end of the day on Christmas? This season can be



stressful and exhausting. The key word here is, "can be." We can change our perspective of how the night ends by how the day begins. This Christmas, let the focus be on Christ. Let everything be done, bought and sung to honor Christ. Then, at the end of the day on the 25th may we find peace and joy as we sing and celebrate the news of our merciful King's birth.

My dear friends in Christ, may the song the angels sang at the birth of our Savior ring in your heart through this joyous season. May it echo through the year and resound throughout your life. Use this time of Advent and waiting to prepare and recognize Christ.

On behalf of our staff and our families, we wish you all a blessed Advent and a very Happy Christmas!

Yours in Christ+

~ PJ

2023 All Saints Remembrance



Parents' Night Out!

Friday December 1st, 6-8pm

Kids are invited to "hang-in" at church on Friday December 1st from 6 to 8 pm while their parents hang OUT for a few hours to check off some items on their holiday to-do lists!

Dinner, movies, snacks & cookie decorating will be provided for the kiddos.

Please RSVP to Melissa at melissadecola@hotmail.com

Hope to see you there!

Congratulations Emilia DeCola

on your Confirmation November 19, 2023



Your church family is proud of you!

It's time to

**Order Your
Poinsettias!**



Yes, it's a
Christmas
miracle!
Poinsettia
prices have
DROPPED

SIZE	PRICE ea.
4.5"	\$ 6.00
6.5"	\$12.00
8.5" (3-stem)	\$25.00

over last year's pricing, by over 25% to make your holidays even more festive, beautiful and affordable! Be assured from our professional floral friends at 2 Buds Floral Designs that these are quality plants which will enhance any space where they are placed - especially around the altar of our Lord as we await his coming! So please consider ordering a plant or two to adorn our worship space, and in turn beautify your home!

Order forms are available in the church narthex. December 10 is the last day to order.

Children's Christmas Program!

Sunday December 17

Celebrate the birth of
Christ in song!
Then join our children
following their
presentation
(after Sunday worship)
for a light luncheon
and birthday cake
in our fellowship hall.



Ascension's iconic
road sign is going
DIGITAL!

You can greatly help to
fund this new
Special Project by
directing a portion of your
Sunday offering to
"OTHER"
on your giving envelope.

Questions? Ask any Council
Member for more details.
Thanks for your generous support!



LESSER FESTIVALS & commemorations

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

Francis Xavier (SAYV-yehr) was born in the Basque region of northern Spain, later becoming a missionary to India, Southeast Asia, Japan, and the Philippines. At each point he learned the local language and, like Martin Luther, wrote catechisms for the instruction of new converts. Together with Ignatius Loyola and five others, Francis formed the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Francis spoke out against the Spanish and Portuguese colonists when he discovered their oppression of the indigenous people to whom he was sent as a missionary.

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

Born to a wealthy family in Damascus and well educated, John left a career in finance and government to become a monk in an abbey near Jerusalem. He wrote many hymns as well as theological works. Foremost among the latter is a work called *The Fount of Wisdom*, which touches on philosophy, heresy, and the orthodox faith. This summary of patristic theology remained influential for centuries.

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

Though Nicholas is one of the church's most beloved saints, little is known about his life. In the fourth century he was a bishop in what is now Turkey. Legends that surround Nicholas tell of his love for God and neighbor, especially the poor. One famous story tells of Nicholas secretly giving bags of gold to the three daughters of a father who was going to sell them into prostitution because he could not provide dowries for them. Nicholas has become a symbol of anonymous gift giving.

December 7 - Ambrose, Bishop of Milan d. 397

Ambrose was a governor of northern Italy and a catechumen when he was elected bishop of Milan. He was baptized, ordained, and consecrated a bishop all on the same day. While bishop he gave away his wealth and lived in simplicity. He was a famous preacher and is largely responsible for the conversion of Augustine. He is also well known for writing hymns. On one occasion, Ambrose led people in a hymn he wrote while the church in which they were secluded was threatened by attack from Gothic soldiers. The soldiers turned away, unwilling to attack a congregation that was singing a hymn. Ambrose is credited with authorship of three hymns in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, including "Savior of the Nations, Come" (ELW 263).

December 13 - Lucy, Martyr d. 304

Lucy was a young Christian of Sicily who was martyred during the persecutions under Emperor Diocletian. Apparently she had decided to devote her life to God and her possessions to the poor. Beyond that, however, little is known for certain about Lucy. However, her celebration became particularly important in Sweden and Norway, perhaps because the feast of Lucia (the name means "light") originally fell on the shortest day of the year. A tradition arose of a girl in the household, wearing a crown of candles, bringing saffron rolls to her family early in the morning on the day of Lucia.

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

John was a monk of the Carmelite religious order who met Teresa of Ávila when she was working to reform the Carmelite Order and return it to a stricter observance of its rules. He followed Teresa's lead and encouraged others to follow her reform. He was imprisoned when he encountered opposition to the reform. His writings, like Teresa's, reflect a deep interest in mystical thought and meditation. In one of John's poems, "The Spiritual Canticle," he cried, "Oh, that my griefs would end! Come, grant me thy fruition full and free!"

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

Born to an impoverished nobleman, when Katharina (Katie) was five her mother died and she was sent to live in a convent. She later 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. Though initially Luther felt little affection for Katie, she proved herself a gifted household manager and became a trusted partner. She was so influential that Luther took to calling her "my lord Katie."

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

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, as well as Revelation.

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.

Source: www.sundaysandseasons.com



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

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PLACE
STAMP
HERE

