

newsletter

St. John Lutheran Church

January 2026

On Christmas...and Epiphany By: Pastor Sean McNeil

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.-John 1:1-5

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. It's not the light as the life, but the life is the light.

The darkness has dissipated; the light of the world has come to us. Just a baby. But like all babies, the journey has just begun. This baby would go on to be presented to the Lord, circumcised, spilling his blood on the eighth day. He would be presented with royal gifts by Gentiles. He would be forced to flee into exile to Egypt. He would be found in the temple on the third day. He would be baptized, tempted, teach, heal, and graciously bring the lost sheep of Israel back into the fold. He would enter triumphantly into Jerusalem, the city he longed to gather as a hen gathers her chicks. They would turn on him. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. He came to his own, but his own rejected him. They would crucify him. On the third day, he would not be found in the tomb; rather, he was found in the garden, bestowing upon it the eighth day of creation.

Christmas is big. Bigger than we could ever imagine. Christmas is the start; Christmas is that first glimmering of light in a dark world.



Or as John would say, the first breath of new life into a dead world. By itself, Christmas is a nice story. But it has no ultimate hope, no ultimate point. Without Epiphany, Lent, and Easter, Christmas is exactly what the world has made it out to be: a time of year to be kind and generous, to tolerate family, and buy stuff.

Epiphany is upon us. We are about to have exactly who this Christ child is revealed to us. He is the life, life itself. His life is our light, our light that no darkness, no death, can overcome. How many people are in our community who are stumbling around in the darkness, grasping for something good, something real, something alive? We have it. Don't hoard it.

We have the life, and that life is the light of all people. And because we have the life, the light, we are part of this great story, the only true story. So, as you are being "epiphanized" in the Divine Service, go and epiphanize your neighbor. Let them see the life that is in you, the light. Be the vehicle of their Epiphany, show them that Christmas is just the beginning.

Need Pastoral Care? Contact Pastor McNeil by phone 231-750-2294
or email: pastor@stjohnaugres.com



Mission of the Month 2026

January	Right to Life of Michigan & Michigan Lutherans for Life
February	Lutheran Hour Ministries
March	Harbor Lights Pregnancy Center
April	Can Council
May	Orphan Grain Train
June	LCMS Sri Lanka Ministry: Pastor Mahlburg
July	Life Choices Resource Center
August	Au Gres Christian Charity Food Pantry
September	Concordia Theological Seminary Fort Wayne Food & Clothing Co-op
October	Family of God Church: South West Detroit
November	Wellspring
December	Worship Anew

Mission of the Month

Lutherans for Life of Michigan & Right to Life of Michigan

January is Sanctity of life Month and Sunday, January 18, is Sanctity of Human life Sunday. The goal of these observances is to bring to our attention the ongoing battle to protect the sanctity of human life from conception to the end of life.

Our church, as part of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, holds firm to the clear Biblical truths that living, yet unborn children are indeed persons in the sign of God from the time of conception. The psalmist writes, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well” Psalm 139:13-14 cf Job 10:9-11; Ps 51:5; Jer 1:5; Lk 1:41-44.

The sanctity of human life, the prohibition of abortion and protection of human life through life’s end remains the most pressing social issue for our church and Synod today. The two organizations that have been selected as Missions of the Month for January 2026 that serve as our advocates in the right to life fight and thus deserving of our support are Right to Life of Michigan & Lutherans For Life of Michigan. Please prayerfully consider how you can best support these organizations that remain critical in educating the public on life issues based on God’s Word and will for human life.

TO THE GLORY OF GOD
the church received the following
gifts in memory of Gene Mueller
and Roger Huber

For Altar Guild/Banners
Bob and Carol Britt
John and Karen Huber

For General
Gene Mueller Family



THE SYMPATHY OF THE
CONGREGATION

goes out to the family of Leo Temple
who went home to his Lord on
November 7, 2025
A service was held on November 12th

*
☆ Happy ☆
New Year
2026
* ☆

This New Year, make resolutions that
you are going to keep:

- "I will break my other New Years resolutions within the first week"
- "I will diet for two weeks and go back to eating pretty much anything I want after that".
- "This year I will no longer run while juggling knives."
- "This year I will trim my ear and nose hair"
- "This year I will consider taking up a new hobby of procrastinating. Or maybe later"

My Church Family,

I am humbled and honored that
you gave me a Recognition plaque.

It was a honor and privilege to
serve you these last twenty
years. The verse that I kept is,
"and whatever you do, whether in
word or deed, do it all in the name
of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks
to the God the Father through
Him." Colossians 3:17

In Joy, Cheryl

Catechism Corner Baptism

In the Ten Commandments, we learn who we are. In the Creed, we learn who God is and what he does for us. In the Lord's Prayer, we learn to speak to our Father in heaven. Now we turn to baptism and learn how we have become his children. This marks the beginning of the second half of the Catechism, in which Luther teaches on the Sacraments. That word, "sacrament," gets tossed around a lot in our church, but what does it mean? What exactly is a sacrament?

Let's start at the beginning. The Greek New Testament uses the word 'Mysterion' (μυστήριον). As you may already see, the English translation is 'mystery.' When the New Testament was translated into Latin, 'Mysterion' was translated to 'sacramentum.' There you go, a Sacrament is a mystery. How does Baptism save? How is it that a pastor can forgive sins? How is it that simple bread and simple wine can become the body and blood of our Lord? Ask the boss. All we know is that he commanded us to do these things and promised that these things are so. Ultimately, a Sacrament is the Word of God applied to an element, which gives promises that are to be received by faith.^[1]

Baptism is not stagnant water. It's not a past event that happened to you before you were capable of forming memories. It's living, active, and eternal. We do not say, "I was baptized," we say "I am baptized." It's an ongoing reality of who you are. I have always been, and will forever be, the son of Kelly. It's who I am, it's part of me. If you

took my father out of the equation, I would be a completely different person.

So it is also with our baptisms. Baptism actually makes you a Son of the Most High. It forgives your sins, kills the old Adam, raises you with Christ, gives the Holy Spirit, and recreates you. You who are baptized are a new creation! Even in eternity, we are described as those who have been sealed with the name of God (Rev 7). This washing is an eternal reality, an eternal part of who you are.

What does this mean for our lives? As Luther says in our Catechism, "the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." He draws this from Romans 6, where Paul teaches that in baptism, we are crucified with Christ, and raised to new life with him! The promises that come with this reality require a lifetime to ponder.

As Epiphany comes upon us, baptism is a wonderful thing to meditate on. In Epiphany, we begin with the baptism of our Lord! Baptism. As we pass through Epiphany toward Lent, I suggest taking some time to read the following passages of scripture and consider the great blessings that we receive in our baptisms, and how this sacrament has recreated us in the image of Christ.

cont. on next page

^[1] Remember, the sacraments are not made efficacious by our faith. Sacraments are given their power by the Word of God. But Sacraments are promises, and promises are received by faith. If someone lacks faith, they still receive the body and blood of Christ, but they do not receive the benefit.

Catechism Corner cont.

New Testament:

Matthew 3:1-17 – John the Baptist’s ministry and the baptism of Jesus, **Mark 1:1-11** – Parallel account, **Luke 3:1-22** – Extended narrative, including Jesus’ baptism, **John 1:19-34** – John the Baptist’s testimony about baptizing and Christ, **Matthew 28:16-20** – The Great Commission: “baptizing them...”
Mark 16:14-18 – The Great Commission, **John 3:3-8** – Jesus and Nicodemus: “born of water and Spirit,” **Acts 2:1-41** – Peter’s sermon and the baptism of ~3,000, **Acts 16:11-15** – Lydia and her household baptized, **Acts 16:25-34** – Jailer and household baptized, **Romans 6:1-11** – Baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection, **1 Corinthians 10:1-4** – Typology of Israel’s “baptism” in Moses, **1 Corinthians 12:12-13** – Baptized into one body by one Spirit, **Galatians 3:23-29** – Clothed with Christ in baptism, **Ephesians 4:1-6** – “One Lord, one faith, one baptism”, **Colossians 2:8-15** – Baptism as circumcision of Christ, new life, **Titus 3:3-7** – “Washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”, **Hebrews 10:19-25** – “Our bodies washed with pure water”, **1 Peter 3:18-22** – Baptism saves you...through the resurrection.

Old Testament:

Genesis 6-9 – The Flood, **Exodus 14** – Red Sea crossing, **Joshua 3-4** – Crossing the Jordan, **Ezekiel 36:24-27** – Water + Spirit rebirth, **2 Kings 5** – Naaman, **Psalms 51** – Washing + cleansing, **Zechariah 13:1** – Fountain for sin, **Isaiah 1:16-18** – Wash, be clean, **Isaiah 44:1-5** – Pouring water + Spirit, **Isaiah 55:1** – Come to the waters.

A Correct Assumption

A man was being tailgated by a stressed out woman on a busy boulevard. Suddenly, the light turned yellow, just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crosswalk, even though he could have beaten The red light by accelerating through the intersection.

The tailgating woman was furious and honked her horn, screaming in frustration as she missed her chance to get through the intersection.

As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered her to exit her car with her hands up. He took her to the police station where she was searched, finger printed, photographed, and placed in a holding cell. After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opened the door. She was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

He said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the guy in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him. I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do' bumper sticker, the 'Choose Life' license plate holder, the 'Follow Me to Sunday-School' bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk, Naturally... I assumed you had stolen the car."



In Praise of Manual Doors

By Austin Jantzi

Tuesday, November 25

I never expected to think this much about door logistics, specifically, how to manage them with a stroller in one hand and a rambunctious toddler in the other.

Our apartment complex has zero handicap buttons to automatically open doors. I asked someone who lives here who uses a wheelchair about its legality. He said, as long as a door is below a specific weight it doesn't need a button. Most places he's lived haven't had them. Every trip to the car requires an awkward extrication from the vestibule or holding the doors for my wife while she steers the stroller.

So this evening on my way into Target, I was thinking about door logistics. A woman and I were approaching at the same time, but I could see I'd get to the door first. I planned to hold it for her. Then the door opened automatically, and I felt a twinge of disappointment.

In that moment, I saw that doors are opportunities for connection, particularly manual doors, the sort you have to reach out for and pull open. I've held doors for strangers and others have rushed to help us as we're getting the kids to the car. Doors are an invitation to notice other people, to think about them, an invitation to be kind.



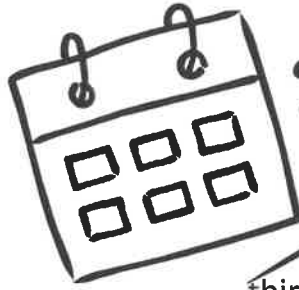
Au Gres Christian Charities Food Pantry

needs your help in replenishing it's shelves. Consider adding extra items to your weekly grocery y list. Place items in the grocery cart in the Fellowship Hall.

Items in high demand are:

Boxed cereal, Chicken Noodle and Tomato soup, spaghetti noodles, spaghetti sauce, Macaroni and Cheese, and hygiene items.





Dates to add to your calendar!

Quilting resumes the third Thursday of each month.

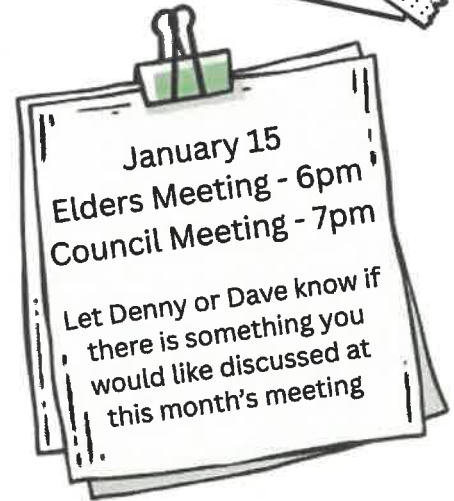
Next date: January 15 beginning at 10am. You may bring a sack lunch if you wish. No experience necessary. We make baby as well as 60"x80" lap quilts. Come when you can and leave when you must.



Installation of newly elected officers will be held during worship on Sunday, January 4, 2026

A sweet little miracle is on the way,
Let's celebrate with tea and sweets!

Ladies of the Congregation and friends, please
Join us for a baby shower honoring
Katie McNeil
Saturday, January 17, 2026
2:00pm – 4:00pm
St. John Lutheran Church
206 N Court St
Au Gres, Michigan
Hosted by St. John Ladies Aid - Katie is registered at Amazon



January 15
Elders Meeting - 6pm
Council Meeting - 7pm

Let Denny or Dave know if there is something you would like discussed at this month's meeting



All ladies are invited to the card party on Friday, January 23rd, from 1-4pm in the multi-purpose room. Get out of the house and join your sisters in Christ for fun, fellowship & snacks.

Ladies Aid Minutes
December 2025

- Ladies had their Christmas luncheon after decorating the sanctuary on December 1st at Anchor Pub.
- We collected donations for the Good Samaritan Rescue Mission of Bay City, specifying children needs.
- Ladies Bazaar brought in \$4,761.25, the 10% for missions will be divided between the Au Gres Food Pantry and Closet Exchange. Thank you to the many ladies who helped to have another very successful bazaar.
- Hostesses for our January meeting are Cheryl Appold and Jean Hogan.
- Sunday fellowship coordinator for January is Pat Metzger.
- Ladies are planning a baby shower for Katie McNeil on Saturday, January 17 from 2 -to 4 in the afternoon.

Submitted by Vicki Huber

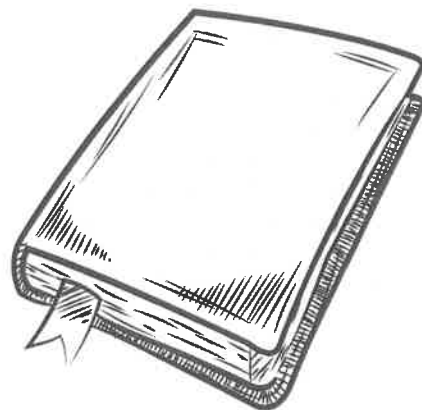
We all wish for happiness in the new year. We pursue happiness with a passion. But happiness does not come by looking for it. Eric Hoffer correctly stated, "The search for happiness is one of the chief sources of unhappiness." Happiness is a by-product. It is the result of right living, of seeking something greater than one's own interest. The wise man wrote, "Whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he" (Prov. 16:20).

Here's a simple New Year's acrostic, to help you think about happiness from a spiritual perspective:

Hold fast to your Faith
Assemble weekly with your church Family
Pray every day.
Purify your life from worldly lusts.
Yield not to temptation

Never give up!
Examine yourself spiritually.
Walk in love.

Yield your will to God's will.
Enthusiastically live each day for the Lord
Add the Christian graces (2 Peter 1:5-7).
Read your Bible daily.



Kids Corner

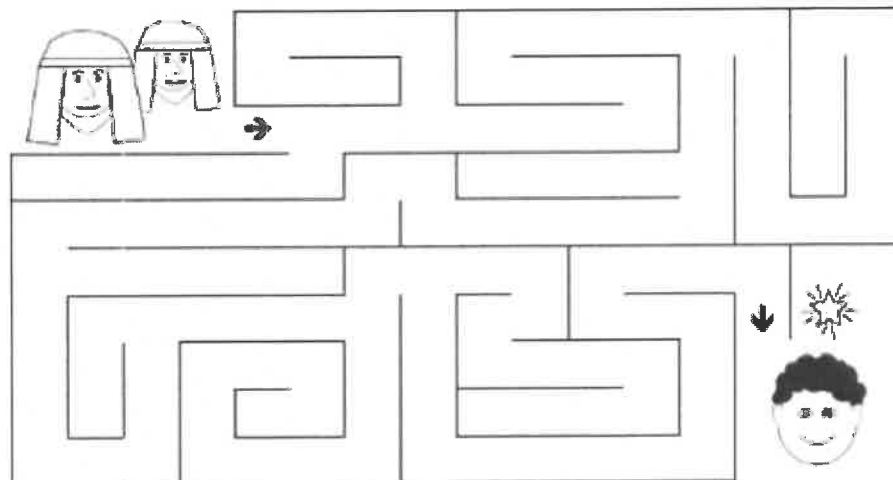


What Does the Bible Say about the Wise Men?

Mark each statement yes (true) or no (false). Then check your answers on the back of the page.

The wise men followed a star to find Jesus.	yes	no
There were three wise men.	yes	no
The wise men brought three gifts to Jesus.	yes	no
The wise men saw Baby Jesus in the manger.	yes	no
The wise men worshipped Jesus.	yes	no

Help the wise men find their way to Jesus.



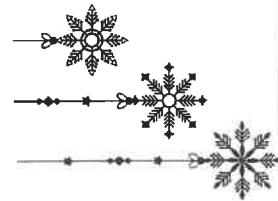
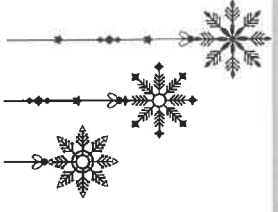
CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PROGRAM DECEMBER 21ST 2025



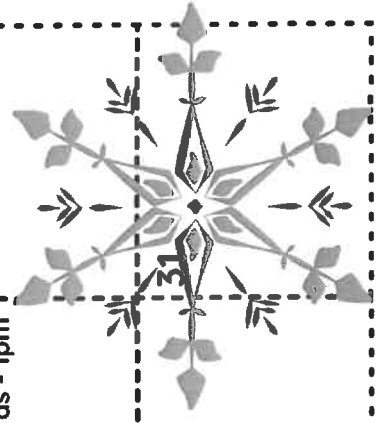
True or False answer key:
a)true b>false c>true d>true e>true

note: The Bible does not tell us how many wisemen there were, only that they brought three gifts.

JANUARY 2026



SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
4 W/HC - 9am Bible Study - 10:15 am Mites collected	5 Women of the Word Bible Study - 10am	6 Women of the Word Bible Study - 10am	7 W/HC - 6:30pm	8 W/HC - 6:30pm	9 Christ 4 Kids 1-3pm	10 Christ 4 Kids 1-3pm
11 W/HC - 9am Bible Study - 10:15 am Blood Pressure Clinic	12 Women of the Word Bible Study - 10am	13 Women of the Word Bible Study - 10am	14 W/HC - 6:30pm	15 Quilting - 10am Elders Mtg - 6pm Council Mtg - 7pm	16 McNeil Baby Shower 2-4pm	17 McNeil Baby Shower 2-4pm
18 W/HC - 9am Bible Study - 10:15 am	19 Women of the Word Bible Study - 10am	20 Ladies Aid Mtg 1 pm	21 NEWSLETTER DEADLINE	22 NEWSLETTER DEADLINE	23 Ladies Cards - 1pm	24 Ladies Cards - 1pm
25 W - 9am Bible Study - 10:15 am	26 Women of the Word Bible Study - 10am	27 Women of the Word Bible Study - 10am	28 W/HC - 6:30pm	29 W/HC - 6:30pm	30 Ladies Cards - 1pm	31 Ladies Cards - 1pm





St. John Lutheran Church
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Letter from the Editor

As I reread the story of the wisemen this year I wondered if any of them asked the age-old question, “Are we there yet?”. After chuckling a little bit and then wondering if I should be thinking about a question that was a little more “holy”, I found myself going down the rabbit trail of what does the question really mean? The question is a rhetorical one, because if the wheels are moving the answer is always, “not yet”. It can be asked from boredom and discontent, but it can also be asked in anticipation of what is at the end of the journey.

The question is usually asked when driving from one place to another. But we often ask a variation of that question every day. “Have I arrived, yet?” Have I arrived at the place in my life where I am happy, where the scales say the number I want to see, where I can master a skill with perfection? The answer often differs from day to day.

Reality is, if we depend on our own ability and self-control (what it that?) we will fail to arrive at the place we want to be. If we find ourselves continually traveling towards happiness, the perfect number on the scale, the ability to perform with perfection, we will never “arrive”. We are traveling toward the wrong destination.

The wisemen were looking for a king to worship. That is the path we should be traveling. Hebrews 12:2 reminds us, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.” In Christ alone are we made perfect. Not because of anything we can do, but because of what He’s done. I pray that in the coming year, we will travel each day toward the correct destination, anticipating what is to come, with our eyes fixed firmly on Christ.

Sandra Jantzi