



**ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
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The Rev. Gregory W. Frey, Pastor

**JANUARY, 2022**

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)*

Much of what we like best about the celebration of Christmas: gift-giving, the star, lights illuminating the darkness, etc., really have been imported into Christmas from the festival of Epiphany.

The Epiphany far "outshone" Christmas as the primary winter festival of the early church. It still maintains a central role on the church calendar of the Eastern Christian tradition.

The Epiphany of Our Lord is a one-day festival (January 6) which is then extended over the season immediately prior to Lent. In the northern hemisphere Epiphany is cold and dark which is the best possible time to consider the central purpose of the Epiphany festival.

The word Epiphany comes from the Greek to appear or become manifest. The day has long been associated with the coming of the Magi (wise men) to Jesus, bringing gifts, but the essential text of Epiphany is really the first chapter of John referenced above.

Rev Eugene Peterson's rightly famous The Message presents this passage as, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." The season of Epiphany, then, is dedicated to beginning

to discover what Jesus reveals about God in the course of his early ministry, his taking up residence in the world.

And what is revealed? That through the Word of God all life was created. That created life then rejected the presence of the creating Word in their midst. But God would not give up on the people and would go so far as to accept death in order to demonstrate God's steadfast commitment to the world in love.

This epiphany season may the warmth of God's revealed love and the light of God's presence brighten your winter season and help you prepare yourself for the promise of new life in spring.

--Pastor Frey



#### **UPDATED PANDEMIC PRECAUTIONS**

Due to the high Covid transmission rates in Berks County the church council is implementing the following changes to worship precautions effective immediately:

- 1) We are asking all worshippers to wear masks during worship
- 2) Ushers will guide worshippers to maintain physical distancing during worship by seating people in the pews marked by numbers and leaving the unnumbered portions of the pews open. We are not reimplementing strictly numbered or assigned seating but will use the numbered spaces as a guide to try to maintain reasonably distanced seating. We recognize that maintaining physical distancing may be challenging at Christmas Eve services so overflow- distanced seating will be available in the fellowship hall.

We appreciate the patience and cooperation our congregation has demonstrated as church leadership had tried to provide a sensibly safe environment for continued in-person worship. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

May God's protective grace and our mutual concern combine to maintain a blessed and safe season of celebration of the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

On behalf of St Paul's Congregation Council, Pastor Greg Frey

**FROM THE PARISH RECORDS.....**

**Wedding: Nov. 28 --Brandon Strain & Erica Komorosky**

<b>--YTD Giving thru November, 2021--</b>				
	<u>Jan.-Nov. 2020</u>	<u>Jan-Nov. 2021</u>	<u>Variance</u>	<u>% chg.</u>
Offerings	\$ 319,557	\$ 307,859	-11,698	-3.66
Vision 2020 Contr.	52,959	46,927	-6,031	-11.39
Total Giving	\$ 372,516	\$ 354,786	-17,730	-4.76

**THOUGHTS.....by Joy Gerhart**

I remember my mother saying things to me like “I hope the Spirit moves you to do . . .” basically meaning I hope you will do what I want you to do. I’m embarrassed to say I caught myself saying “I hope the Spirit moves you to use the USPS (post office)” and amazingly I got a letter! These are improper ways to speak about the Holy Spirit. However, it is important to recognize that God’s Spirit is around and about us and can move us in wonderful ways if we are open.

We just studied the Holy Spirit in confirmation class. We profess our belief in the Holy Spirit in the creeds—the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. Neither Creed SEEMS to say much about the Holy Spirit, although the Nicene Creed does add that the Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life. Martin Luther in the Small and Large Catechisms teaches us that there is more about the Holy Spirit in the creeds than we think. He says that we cannot believe in Jesus without the help of the Holy Spirit. He says that the Holy Spirit calls us, gathers us as the church, enlightens us with its gifts, sanctifies us (or makes us holy, set apart), and keeps us. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that we are gathered as one holy catholic (universal) church AND the communion of saints (which means the community of believers, not super sacred people taking communion). Notice how those two phrases really mean the same thing? It is also THROUGH the Holy Spirit that we receive the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Most of us are still pretty fuzzy on who or what the Holy Spirit is. I guess that’s good because we are not meant to know EVERYTHING about God. We know that the Holy Spirit is God, and together the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are ONE God --equal but one-- and nobody can really explain that. We know that the Holy Spirit descended like a dove at the time of Jesus’ baptism by John, and also came to the disciples at Pentecost in wind and fire, with a flame touching each disciple on the head, maybe like a birthday candle. We can’t say that flame was harmless because it changed each of them forever—they spoke to the people in Jerusalem, converting 3000 souls that day, and moved them to follow Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations.



My favorite story about the Holy Spirit moving someone is in Acts 8:26-40. Philip, a disciple of Jesus, was in Samaria when an angel of the Lord tells him to go toward the south to the road that goes up and down from Jerusalem to Gaza. He meets an Ethiopian there, riding in a chariot and reading from the book of Isaiah. The Spirit tells Philip to go over to the chariot. Philip hears the Ethiopian reading from Isaiah and asks if he understands what he is reading. “Nope.” (My translation.) Philip proceeds to explain that the Isaiah passage points to Jesus, and then he shares all the good news about Jesus. The Ethiopian asks to be baptized—okay, he says “Is there anything to prevent me from being baptized?” --and we assume Philip’s response is “Nope” because he baptizes the Ethiopian. Then, this is my favorite part, “When they came up out of the water, the Spirit snatched Philip away; the Ethiopian saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing.” I guess Philip was beamed to another place, and this was all before Star Trek! The whole book of Acts is filled with amazing stories of the work of the Holy Spirit through the disciples.

If you think we only hear about the Spirit in the New Testament, you’d be wrong. We do say in the Nicene Creed that “he” has spoken through the prophets. The Spirit or *ruach* (Hebrew for wind) of God hovers over the waters at creation. The Spirit of the Lord helps Samson in Judges 14:6. When Samuel anoints David, the Spirit of the Lord comes mightily upon him. In 1 Kings 18:11-12 Elijah tells Obadiah, “Go, tell your lord that Elijah is here. As soon as I have gone from you the spirit of the Lord

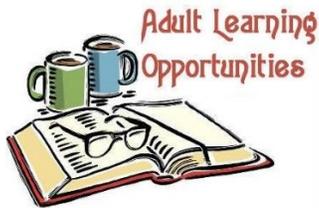
will carry you I know not where.” There is so much more in the “OT,” but that’s just a sampling.

What does all this mean? It means that God is active in and around us through the Holy Spirit. We may not completely understand, and we certainly can’t see the Holy Spirit but sometimes we can sense our attention is being drawn to something specific, or we are being directed in a certain way or called (or pushed?) to do a particular thing. If we are open to God’s guidance, the Holy Spirit will guide us. We may not see little dove footprints or a path of flames or feel a gentle push from wind, but be open and aware, for the Spirit may be calling!

### CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NEWS.....

#### Sunday Adult Class at 9:15 am

A new class for adults on Sunday will begin on January 9. A decision has not yet been made on the topic, but the class will be offered as a hybrid course, in-person and on-line. The in-person location will be in the library and the course will be led by Joy Gerhart. A survey was sent out to former Sunday adult “students” to get a sense of what topics might be preferred for study. As you might expect, there is no clear consensus, so stay tuned!



#### Bible Studies Continue

There will be no change in the new year with the weekday Bible studies. All three studies—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday—will be available online. Only Wednesday’s class will meet in-person as well as online. Monday’s 10:00 am class topic will be the upcoming Old Testament reading in church (or occasionally the epistle or possibly the psalm) led by Joy Gerhart, and the Friday’s 10:00 am class topic will be the upcoming gospel lesson in church led by Pastor Frey. Pastor Frey will also lead the Wednesday 9:30 am class which is a study of the Gospel of John from chapter 1 to 21. The links for the online studies can be easily accessed from our website.

### PRAY FOR THE FOLLOWING THIS MONTH.....

If you see your name here it is not because we think you have a specific need for prayer, but to let you know you are in our prayers whatever your need may be. Please include in your prayers this month: Alexander Stanley, Sophia Stanley, David Stauffer, Diane Stauffer, Joel Steever, Bonnie Steever, Gene Stewart, Nancy Stewart Skylar Stewart, Dominic Stoudt, Lincoln Stoudt, Helen Strain, Wendi Strain, Brandon Strain. If you have anyone to add to the prayer list, call the church office. Please pray for those with special concerns: Christina, William Cleaver, Debbie, Barbara Esposito, Eve, Bob Fisher, Angel & Israel Gamble, Edward Graefe, Norman Griffin, Joanne Guss, Sara Hartline, Kourtney High, Arlene Hildebeitel, Kasper, Sandy Klinger, Kim Koury, Troy Lambeth, Priscilla Leh, Bill Lerch, Lisa Lerch, Cheryl Lucia, Michelle Moriaty, Craig Nichols, Mark Painter, Elizabeth Roy, Gene Schaeffer, Brad Schittler, Linda Schmidt, Ellen Sheeler, Ava Stumhofer, MJ Talbott, Joan Wendel, family & friends of Chris Musetti, Karen Agrippine, Connie Schittler, Dave DiMarino, and all others listed below or those we name in our hearts: Makayla Becker, Avery Boorse, Michael Burd, Jake Campbell, Darrell, Barbara DePrefontaine, Ethan, Ron Glaser, Jevin Heller, Connie Hunter, Terry Johnson, Joanne Marnell, Ron Mutter, Richard Randolph, Henry Rhoads, Lauren Ridge, Audrey Serrian, John Shaner, Vernet Spence-Brown, Jason Stalneck, Craig Williams, Jane Williams; Sandi Zelinski, homebound -- Charles Brown, Fern Brown, Peggy Burns, Jennie Clouser, Carol DeLong, Betty High, Arlene Hildebeitel, Dale Szajek.



**OFFERING ENVELOPES FOR 2022 ARE AVAILABLE FOR PICK-UP AT THE CHURCH.** Your envelope number has changed, so all contributions after December 31, 2021 will be posted to that new number.

**ST. PAUL'S ANNUAL PORK AND SAUERKRAUT DINNER---SAT., JAN. 15.** We are looking for at least 75 reservations (dine-in or take-out) by Sun., Jan 2, in order to have the event. Sign up in the narthex or call Ann Myers at 610-960-2378.

# Happy BIRTHDAY!

1/1	Blaire Eidell	1/20	John McCalicher
1/3	Michael Hasara		Helene Wallauer
	Harper McCord	1/21	Kelly Mooney
1/4	Barry Leier		Jeffrey P. Sowers
1/5	Breylan Kupp		Cindy Weidner
	Christopher Michener	1/24	Sarah Bartra
1/7	Lida McManus		Charles Eagle
1/8	Larry Barr		Kiara Ray
	Justine Sim		Richard Talbott
1/11	Phyllis Harwood	1/25	Michele Hensley
1/12	Daniel Kucharik		Aimee Luo
1/13	Diane Hartline	1/26	Anna Brown
	James Waring		Nathan Flamini
1/15	Kennedy Albright		Susan Murray
	Ruby Saylor		Tim Oister
	Lynne Zepp		Shirley Schaeffer
1/16	Hayden Moyer	1/27	John Cappellano
	Brooks Yetter		Nolan Tindall
1/18	Adrianna Cozzone		Kennedy Yetter
	Ray DiSandro	1/28	Carter Ahles
	Susanne Leier		William Ridge IV
1/19	Jill Michener	1/29	Bonnie Simmons
	Jamie Trout		Jeffrey M. Sowers
1/20	Kay Bonslaver	1/31	Eleanor Davidheiser
	Jeff Duplak		David Zepp
1/20	Willow Havrilla		

## CONGRATULATIONS TO THOSE CELEBRATING A WEDDING ANNIVERSARY.....

Harry & Susan Schweikert	1/3	52 yrs.
Chester & Marsha Springel	1/13	21 yrs.
LeRoy & Barbara DePrefontaine	1/19	65 yrs.



# SYNOD NEWS

NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD, ELCA

JANUARY 2022 • ISSUE 1 • VOLUME 30

## *Covid-19 Update & Guidelines*

**The Latest Situation:** The Covid-19 pandemic continues to generate fear, concern, confusion and division across the country and within our own Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod. The most recent developments – some troubling, some hopeful – include:

- The rise of new variants, especially “omicron”;
- The ongoing and in many cases, increasing numbers of new cases;
- The continued reluctance and refusal of some to get vaccinated, or to wear masks;
- On the good side: the increased opportunities for testing, for boosters, and for vaccines for all ages.

Here in our Synod, I now encourage us to use another trustworthy source of information to help guide our decisions concerning the pandemic: the “Covid Act Now Coalition.” This non-profit, web-based resource brings together non-partisan experts in medicine, law, and public policy, to provide objective data and analysis. Their website is being consulted as a reliable source by synods and congregations across the ELCA. From their site, we can see clearly that things are still very threatening here in NE Penn: all 14 of our counties have threat levels of “VERY HIGH” or “SEVERE” – Berks, Carbon, Lehigh, Northampton, and Schuylkill all are in that worst category. Additionally, the vaccination rate is at or below 60% for 7 of those 14 counties. Most of these numbers are worse than the data for many of our neighboring synods, including the Southeastern Penn Synod, whose leaders have nonetheless chosen to put in place stricter guidelines than we have. I believe we can become safer and return to “normal” sooner if we follow their lead.

### **Dr. Luther Shows The Way:**

Almost exactly 500 years ago – in November 1520 – Martin Luther published one of his most ground-breaking treatises: “On the Freedom of a Christian.” He begins the document with this famous declaration: “A Christian is the most free lord of all, subject to none. And a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.”

He goes on to describe how God, through Christ’s sacrificial love for us on the cross, has granted us the grace and the freedom to make our own decisions; but this freedom does not release us to disregard the truth, or our call to care and concern for our neighbor. Luther writes: “Therefore [Christians] should be guided in all [their] works by this thought and contemplate this one thing alone, that [they] may serve and benefit others in all that [they do], considering nothing except the need and the advantage of [the] neighbor.”

So “what does this mean?” The inconvenience of mask wearing; and even the threat of temporary cold-and-flu reactions to vaccinations – these are simply the sacrifices we are called to make, as “the dutiful servants of all, subject to everyone.” It is within this traditionally and theologically Lutheran framing that we maintain our vigilance; and update our guidelines here.

### *Covid-19 Continued...*

#### **Latest Synod Recommendations:**

As we prepare for the larger crowds of Christmas Eve – and with Lent, Holy Week and Easter not far away – I am recommending the starting, the continuation, or the resumption, of any and all common-sense and good-neighbor precautions, including:

- Proof of vaccination or a negative test for all indoor events
  - Indoor masking
- Good air circulation, including open windows where feasible
- Social distancing, frequent washing and other effective protocols

Furthermore – at their January 15 meeting, I am encouraging our Synod Council to discuss and decide upon further appropriate actions, which may include mandates that all Synod-sponsored indoor events require masking, proof of vaccination, and/or proof of a negative test. As the duly elected governing body of this Synod, your Synod Council has the right and responsibility to make these decisions for Synod gatherings. When it comes to our individual worshipping communities, our authority is more limited; Synod Council (and myself) can only make clear and strong recommendations – based on the best science, on good conscience and on our common love for our neighbors, especially those who are most vulnerable. In other words, all congregations have the “freedom of a Christian” to decide for themselves how they will choose to act – or refuse to act. I invite us all to follow our baptismal call and Lutheran heritage, to follow God’s will and God’s love for all.

In God’s Love,  
Bishop Christopher deForest



**Send in your mission support commitments for 2022. You can find the form on the synod website, under the resources tab.**

**boundless**  
**god beyond measure**

JULY 24-28, 2022  
MINNEAPOLIS, MN  
REGISTER NOW AT [ELCA.ORG](http://ELCA.ORG)

Save the date **SYNOD ASSEMBLY 2022**  
June 10-11  
Reading

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

# January 2022

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>2</b> 8 & 10:30—Holy Comm. 9:15—Sunday School	<b>3</b> 10 AM—Bible study (zoom) 7 PM—Christian Ed.	<b>4</b> Quilting 2 PM--TOPS 6:15--CDC	<b>5</b> 9:30—Bible Study (in-person)	<b>6</b> Noon—Amity Fr. Circle 7 PM—Choir	<b>7</b> 10 AM—Bible study (zoom)	<b>1</b> <i>New Year's Day</i> 6 PM—Holy Comm
						<b>8</b> 6 PM—Holy Comm
<b>9</b> 8 & 10:30—Holy Comm. 9:15—Sunday School 9:30—Finance Comm.	<b>10</b> 10 AM—Bible study (zoom) 7 PM—Pastoral Care	<b>11</b> Quilting 2 PM--TOPS	<b>12</b> 9:30—Bible Study (in-person) 7 PM--Council	<b>13</b> 6 PM—T3 7 PM—Choir 7 PM—Prayer Shawl	<b>14</b> 10 AM—Bible study (zoom)	<b>15</b> 7:30 AM—Property Pork & sauerkraut dinner 6 PM—Holy Comm
<b>16</b> 8 & 10:30—Holy Comm. 9:15—Sunday School	<b>17</b> 10 AM—Bible study (zoom)	<b>18</b> Quilting 2 PM--TOPS	<b>19</b> 9:30—Bible Study (in-person)	<b>20</b> 10 AM—Social Min. 7 PM—Choir	<b>21</b> 10 AM—Bible study (zoom)	<b>22</b> 6 PM—Holy Comm
<b>23</b> 8 & 10:30—Holy Comm. 9:15—Sunday School 1 PM—Girl Scouts	<b>24</b> 10 AM—Bible study (zoom)	<b>25</b> Quilting 2 PM--TOPS	<b>26</b> 9:30—Bible Study (in-person) 7 PM—Worship & Music	<b>27</b> 7 PM—Choir	<b>28</b> 10 AM—Bible study (zoom)	<b>29</b> 6 PM—Holy Comm
<b>30</b> 8 & 10:30—Holy Comm. 9:15—Sunday School	<b>31</b>					