



St. John's

Ev. Lutheran Church

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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CHRISTIAN HEART ON WHERE TO FIND CHRIST OR, TIME TO MARK YOUR CALENDARS AGAIN

The opening salvo of the famous and much-loved Paul Gerhardt Christmas hymn (*LSB 372*) goes like this: “O Jesus Christ, Thy manger is / My paradise at which my soul reclineth.”

Christ’s manger, my paradise. And as my paradise, the manger’s where my soul finds rest. How? Gerhardt goes on to explain, “For there, O Lord, doth the lie the Word / Made flesh for us; herein Thy grace forth shineth.”

In other words, if I want to know God’s grace, I must find it in the enfleshed Son of God, the One who takes on Himself my flesh, sin, and death that I might have all that’s His—His righteousness, life, and everlasting salvation.

So...His manger, my paradise? Yes. In fact, wherever I find the enfleshed Son of God—whether Mary’s womb, manger, or donkey’s back; whether upper room, praetorium, or cross—that’s where my paradise is. That’s why we celebrate Christmas. The Son of God took on flesh for me, so that wherever the enfleshed Son of God is, there is my paradise.

Christian heart, you knew that already, of course.

And, Christian heart, if you could, you know you’d do it: you’d run to manger and cross. You’d be Mary clinging to the risen Lord Jesus. You’d be Simeon, covetously holding the Light of the Gentiles and the Glory of God’s people Israel. You’d be the woman who interrupts Jesus’ march to Jairus’ house—if only to just touch His hem!

You would be. Did you know you can be?

Here’s how. The Lord Jesus has “transferred” His presence—His presence as the enfleshed Son of God—to His holy Word and blessed Sacraments. That, Christian heart, is where you can cling, grasp, touch. In other words, to have Christ in the manger and on the cross, in fact, to have Him at the right hand of the Father, you must have Him at font, pulpit, and altar (see Rom 6:3-11; Luke 10:16; Matt 26:26-28).

And so, Christian heart, if you weren’t so fussy about meter, you could rewrite Gerhardt’s hymn to say, “O Jesus Christ, Thy font, pulpit, and altar are / My paradise at which my soul reclineth.” Pressed for an answer as to why, you’d respond in the same exact words as Gerhardt. “For there, O Lord, doth lie Thy Word / Made flesh for us; herein Thy grace forth shineth.”

Where’s Jesus now? Not far away. Not far away at all. He’s as near to you as His Word and Sacrament.

And so this New Year, embrace Jesus where He's to be found. Don't make any New Year's resolutions. They can't give you paradise—or rescue you from your sin, much less your death and eternal death. But Jesus can. Jesus does. And, better yet, Jesus *wants to*.

Instead, stop what you're doing right now. Take out your smart phone or wall calendar. Every Sunday at 8:15 or 11:00 and every Wednesday evening from Labor Day through Memorial Day you have an appointment (SWA). Those appointments are for you to be where your paradise is, to be where the One who once lay in a manger promises to come to you—at church. In His Word and blessed Sacraments. At His font, pulpit, and altar. Because until He returns again in glory, this is how He will be with you and how you will have Him, your paradise. This is how the New Year is made for you one more year of God's grace.

See you in church! Where you find Jesus. In the flesh.



Senior Pastor - Rev. J. S. Bruss, ext. 104
Associate Pastor – Rev. D. M. Kerns, ext. 101
Kantor - Bethany M. Johnson
TLS Teachers - Andrea Kosmicki, Edith Kerns, Rachel Kathman

2ND ANNUAL YEAR WITH THE BIBLE

On Monday, 14 January, our congregation will start our 2nd Annual Year with the Bible. Once again, we'll use the booklets available in the Breezeway titled *God's Promises in Christ...Fulfilled!* These are provided to you at no cost and will help you keep track of your reading. Following them will successfully allow you to read through the entire Scriptures in 365 days. Built into the schedule are make-up days in case you get behind in your reading. If you know of anyone in the congregation who embarked on this last year, ask them about their experience. We daresay you'll find nary a person who didn't find their reading engaging and rewarding. And once again this year, your effort will be supported by weekly Sunday a.m. Bible studies on your reading.

If you weren't able to participate last year, we encourage you to do so this year. And if you participated last year, it only gets better the more times you read through—last year's notes become this year's springboard to greater insight into God's words, works, and ways.

We hope everyone in the congregation will wish to participate!

SOUND WORDS ACADEMY DECEMBER 2018

Children

Rhythm of Faith Choir (Wednesdays – 8 May, 5:00-5:40 p.m.; Johnson) Rhythm of Faith uses God's gift of music to confess the truth of His Word in song. Develop life-long skills in singing, ringing, and reading music. Participate as a choir in Wednesday Evening Offices and Sunday services. Learn the rich heritage of Lutheran hymnody and liturgy. Enroll after Sunday services now through 9 September or contact Bethany Johnson.

Jr. Lutherans (Wednesdays – 8 May, 5:55-6:50 p.m.; Sweet) This fast-paced Bible, Catechism, and Lutheran history quiz game places Lutherans aged 4 – 12 yrs. in competition with one another and teams from other congregations—with “trivia” that is hardly *trivial*. Enroll after Sunday services now through 9 September or contact Daniel Sweet.

Adults

Every One His Witness (2 January – 6 February, 5:55-6:50 p.m.; Kerns) Witnessing. What's it all about? The *Every One His Witness* Lutheran evangelism program puts sound doctrine into practical action for sharing the faith with people in our everyday lives. Participants learn: What is witnessing? Why do we witness? And the "how-to" of witnessing using the LASSIE approach — Listen-Ask-Seek-Share-Invite-Encourage. See article and flyer included in this edition of the *Newsletter*, and keep your eyes open for reminders in the bulletin and on our bulletin boards.

College Students and Young Adults

Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Wednesdays – 12 December, 7:45-8:40 p.m.; Kerns) Martin Luther is the writer and Paul Althaus is the compiler. Join Pr. Kerns at Sound Words Academy as we go through one of his favorite Lutheran books. It is so good that once we come to the end of it, we will want to circle back around it again. Come drink from the fire-hydrant of good, confessional Lutheran thought.

Adult Catechesis

Adult Catechesis (Wednesdays – 8 May 7:45-8:40 p.m.; Kerns through December; Bruss January through May) The central teachings of the Christian faith. What does God say *about* me in His Law? What does God say *to* me in His Gospel? How am I to relate to God? And where can I find Christ and what He wants to give to me? This September through May course, with breaks scattered throughout those 8 months, weaves together the teachings of Scripture and *The Small Catechism* and shows how God encounters you in the Divine Service. For those interested in becoming members of St. John's or those seeking a refresher in the guts of Lutheran theology.

Youth Catechesis

YCat I (Wednesdays – 8 May, 5:55-6:50 p.m.; Kinnett) Typically for 6th graders. 1 year long.

YCat II (Wednesdays – 8 May, 5:55-6:50 p.m.; Bruss & Kerns) Typically for 7th and 8th graders. 2 years long.

BEARING WITNESS TO CHRIST

Every One His Witness is a Lutheran evangelism program that teaches you to witness to your friends, coworkers, and any other nonchurched people you may know. Using the LASSIE approach to witnessing (listen, ask, seek, share, invite, and encourage), you will learn how to naturally share the Good News of Jesus Christ through relational, contextual witnessing.

What does this mean? It means listening to those who are unsure about Christianity. It means asking questions that aren't accusatory. It means sharing the Good News about Jesus. **Notice how there's no bashing, no judgment, and no forced imposition of beliefs.** Instead, there's understanding, communication, and honesty between friends. And *Every One His Witness* teaches you how.

You can find out more about *Every One His Witness* by watching this quick video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=25&v=j2TkJemNLbE.

We hope that you can join us every Wednesday evening from 2 Jan through 6 Feb from 5:55 till 6:50 p.m. for this course held in the Courtyard. **See also the flyer attached to this newsletter.**

ENGAGING YOUR CHILDREN IN THE DIVINE SERVICE

Keep your eyes out for some helpful teaching tools at church. Last month we introduced a new bulletin format. This new format includes a cover picture that captures the Gospel lesson, an excellent way for you to help children to understand what's going on. The bulletin also includes an explanation of all the readings for that Sunday. You can use this when you talk to your children about what they heard in church—and

even use it to help them anticipate what they'll hear about. At the ends of the pews there's also now a laminated card that has two sides. On one side are some suggestions for parents to help their young children participate in the Divine Service. On the other side is a guide for young and old alike for getting the most out of the sermon. Coupled with our new Sunday School curriculum whose lessons are on the Gospel for each Sunday, we hope that these things will help you and your family grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2019 CONTRIBUTION ENVELOPES

Contribution envelopes are available to be picked up in the breezeway. Your envelope number may have changed for 2019. Please use the instructions on the clipboard located on the tables with the contribution boxes to locate your box of envelopes. If you did not receive a contribution box or if you have any questions regarding contribution boxes/envelopes, please speak with Yvonne Berry in the church office. Thank you!

BOARD OF STEWARDSHIP: BUDGET AND RECEIPTS REPORT

In an effort to keep our congregation informed about our financial situation, the Board of Stewardship has agreed to publish monthly budget reports. These reports are designed to give you a snapshot of our congregational support of the budget adopted by the voter's assembly for 2018. We hope that you will find this information useful.

Budget Receipts through November 30, 2018	\$620,288.16
<u>Budget through November 30, 2018</u>	<u>\$691,225.33</u>
Over (Under) Budget Year to Date	(\$70,997.17)

PAID IN FULL UPDATE & SAVE THE DATE

Sunday, February 10, 2019: Save the date! We've paid off our loan! As we enter the last few months of our capital campaign, the *Paid in Full* steering committee is planning a celebration of the success the Lord has granted just two and one-half years into our campaign in allowing us to pay off the loan on the addition entirely as of December 21. Sunday, February 10, we are planning a single Divine Service at 10:00 a.m. followed immediately by a celebratory program and potluck with special guests District President Peter Lange and Pr. Tim Rossow of Wittenberg Church Consultants. We hope the entire congregation can attend this momentous occasion. If you have outstanding funds pledged to the campaign we ask that you prayerfully consider continuing with your gifts. Gifts to *Paid in Full* from this point forward will be directed to a newly-established Building Maintenance and Enhancement Fund to address large, specific, and known future needs. You might also consider using your pledge to support the upcoming capital campaign for Topeka Lutheran School.

MONTHLY BREAKFAST IN JANUARY

Sunday, January 13 we will have a potluck breakfast between services. Bring a breakfast dish to share and come join in the fellowship. It is also a great time to bring a friend to church.

LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Please remember that the speed limit in the alley way behind St. John's is 15 m.p.h. This is especially important to observe since cars must back out of garages (blindly), the households along the alley way include children and grandchildren, and there's school traffic in and out of Mater Dei.

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES SEEKING VOLUNTEER(S)

Anyone interested in a Fall through Winter project of renewing, repairing, and painting the window putty on the Breezeway windows and the lower portions of the stained-glass windows on the Courtyard side of the nave is asked to contact Trustees chair Jeff LaCrone or Dennis Hintz. Jeff can be contacted at 785.969.1387 or Dennis at 785.235.9684. Please leave a message to return your call.

2019 FLOWER CALENDAR

Please check the Flower Calendar on the bulletin board outside of the church offices. If you would like to provide flowers for a particular service this coming year, please sign your name and phone number by the date of your choice.

DOORSTEP NEWS

The Doorstep staff and volunteers would like to thank everyone who donated to Doorstep during the holiday season, and throughout 2018. Because of your generosity, and the Topeka community, they were able to provide food and gifts to our neighbors in need.

Along with the start of a new year also comes the cold weather and high utility bills. Please remember your neighbors who are struggling to pay those high bills when looking for a place to donate. Doorstep offers utility assistance to individuals and families throughout the year as funds are available.

Souper Bowl Sunday is February 3rd! Just around the corner! On this weekend Doorstep asks our member congregations to collect soup and crackers to help restock our food pantry. A can of soup can be a meal, and in the past, with a successful collection, we have had soup and crackers to last us into the summer months! Please remember Doorstep when you go grocery shopping, and pick up a few items for your neighbors in need.

Also, mark your calendars for the 16th Annual Operation Soup Line! This year it will be on Wednesday, February 27, 2019 from 11am – 2pm!

Doorstep is open Monday – Friday, 8am – 3pm for donations. They are located at 1119 SW 10th Street (10th & Buchanan). They ask that you do not leave donations outside their building when they are not there. Thank you!



TLS NEWS

The Augustana College Choir, Rock Island, IL., under the direction of Jon Hurty, will be performing at Grace Cathedral on Monday, February 18th at 7:00p.m. The Topeka High School choir will be joining them in some selections. Lutheran Fine Arts Council of Topeka will be responsible for housing the 60 students and will be asking for your help at that time.

Save The Date: The TLS Chili Supper and Raffle is February 1st from 5-7.

WOMEN'S LEAGUE NEWS

We, the Women's League (LWML) want to thank you the members of St. John's and Women's League for another successful bazaar and luncheon. Without your contributions, planning and organizing, helping in many ways and shopping we would not be able to give what we do to our missions projects. This year our proceeds came to \$8,622.90 this includes the choice dollars from St. John's. There were over 80

volunteers, so it's quite an undertaking, but worthwhile and fun and fellowship. Thanks to all you wonderful people who bake or provide a pie. Many hands make for a successful project.

There will have a detailed report in the February newsletter on the division of the proceeds to our mission projects. Again thank you and Thank You God for the blessings you give us all.

PLEASE NOTE A NEW TIME for Sarah Circle meetings. Beginning Monday, Jan. 14, Sarah Circle meetings will begin at 6 pm instead of 7 pm, so members will be home earlier in the evening. They will still be the second Monday of each month through May and held in the Choir Robe Room. Please join your Sisters in Christ "Serving the Lord with Gladness".

OUR YOUTH NEED YOUR HELP!

The pastors are in the beginning stages of creating a more cohesive and coherent curriculum for our high school youth Sunday School class. Our vision? A comprehensive curriculum, regularly repeatable (every 2 or 3 years) that works through the critical questions Christians face as they mature from childhood to adulthood. Our goal? To apply the Word of God faithfully to these questions to keep our young people in the Faith and to give parents additional incentive to make sure their kids regularly attend the high school youth Sunday School class.

Here's where you come in. We'd like you to send us your "critical questions"—the questions every Christian needs an answer to. You can communicate them to us orally, via email (jbruss@stjlcms.org and/or dkerns@stjlcms.org), via text, on the phone, in writing—whatever. We'll amass those questions that need a solid, biblical answer, and use them, along with many of our own, as the spine of our curriculum.

To get the juices flowing: The answer to what question would have made a difference to you as you matured in the Faith? What have you only recently discovered that would have made a big difference to you as you grew up? What do you know today that you wish you knew years ago? What killer question has plagued you for a long time?

A SPECIAL "THANK YOU" FROM THE STAFF

Each member of the called staff and the support staff wish to thank the congregation for the thoughtful and generous Christmas gifts. We are most grateful for the support, love, and care each of us receives from you throughout the year. May God in His mercy continue to bless the Body of Christ in this place with His Presence and His work in us and through us to the praise of His glory.

OUR SINCEREST THANKS TO ALL OF OUR VOLUNTEERS

We give thanks to our gracious God for His continued gifts of the means of grace through which He establishes and nurtures our faith and life. We also give thanks to God for all the support of the mission and ministry of St. John's by our members of all ages, in both financial and time devoted ways. Without the willing hands and hearts of our members, much work would go undone that is vital for the efficiency of the congregation's ministry. Once again, we express our appreciation to all volunteers in the numerous capacities in which they serve.

ANNUAL VOTERS MEETING

The Annual Voters Meeting of St. John's will be held on Sunday afternoon, January 27, beginning at 2:00 p.m. in the nave. Each board and committee will present its annual report for the work of this past year and indicate plans for this coming year. The 2018 year-end reports of the Treasurer, the Financial Secretary, and the Eagle Foundation Treasurer will be presented.

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS FOR JANUARY 2019

This new year we continue on our journey through the Lectionary. This has given our children a greater understanding of the Gospel reading for each Sunday. It has also helped them gain knowledge of the Church Year and what season we are in. During advent, we spent our time talking not only about when Jesus came as a baby, but also looking forward to His Second Coming.

January 6:	Epiphany	The Wise Men	Matthew 2:1-12
January 13:	The 1st Sunday after Epiphany	My Father's House	Luke 2:41-52
January 20:	The 2nd Sunday after Epiphany	The Wedding at Cana	John 2:1-11
January 27:	The 3rd Sunday after Epiphany	Jesus the Healer	Matthew 8:1-14

COAT DRIVE

Please help share the warmth. St. John's is having a "Coat Drive" to give a warm coat/jacket to those in the neighborhood in need of one. The coats will be distributed by Doorstep and Grace Cathedral. If you have a used coat in good condition that you no longer need please consider donating it to our "Coat Drive". New coats will be accepted also. Coats should be left at the "Coat Drive" drop off location, on the coat racks in the narthex, on both sides of the main entry doors. The "Coat Drive" goes thru January 31. After that, used coats may still be donated to "Doorstep" using the Doorstep display at church. Thank you!



THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19–20a)
 So that we may obtain faith in Christ, God instituted the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. Through the gospel and sacraments, as through means, God gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when He wills, in those who hear the gospel. (*Augsburg Confession*, Article 5)