

# The Epistle December 2026

A publication of St. James Lutheran Church,
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# Message from the Vicar

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you!

Happy New (Liturgical) Year! This week we turn the page on our liturgical year. It doesn't line up with the calendar we use to keep track of our weeks and months for work and school, but it is a fresh start for our life together as Christ's church.

Last year our readings came primarily from the gospel of St. Matthew. I enjoyed discovering the beauty of the Sermon on the Mount and the many parables in Matthew's gospel with you. In the coming year our attention will shift to St. Mark's gospel. We start our year with the season of Advent. As we celebrate the coming of Jesus, we celebrate in three particular ways.

1. We celebrate his coming to us when he was born as a baby in Bethlehem two-thousand years ago.
2. We celebrate his future coming to us when he will return at the end of this age.
3. We celebrate his coming to us in our lives every day while we wait between these two events.

We will find a mixed bag of comfort and challenges in this Advent Season. For those who walk in the light, we eagerly await the coming of Jesus to finally eradicate evil on the earth. This is a comfort. For those who walk in darkness, we may not be ready for Jesus to return. This is a challenge.

We are called by St. Mark and our other readings to examine our lives so we will walk worthy of the calling of Christ who has called us out of darkness and into his kingdom of light. I look forward to exploring these themes with you in the weeks to come!

May the peace of Christ rule in your hearts this Advent season.
Vicar Bryce Hewlett, SAM

# CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

St. James:

In early October, we initiated a Capital Campaign to raise funds for a new roof, restored parking lot, and interior upgrades. We set a goal of $150,000 pledged by Thanksgiving Day. This was quite a big request and you all came through beautifully. Since we have reached Thanksgiving Day, you deserve a report on our progress.

First, we broke down our goal into 31 gifts of varying sizes ranging from $100 to $50,000. We also offered an option to contribute one's physical labor toward the project (instead of money) for those who wanted to give but could not make a financial gift at this time. **I am happy to report that we have received 29 of 31 pledges toward our goal!**

Second, I spoke very openly to our Congregational Council and asked them to lead this effort by example. I asked them to focus on what they *were* able to give and not to worry about how much they might give relative to others in the congregation. **I am happy to report that 100% of our Council Members pledged toward our campaign!**

Third, our goal was lofty, but it was necessary. We estimate the cost of these updates may even exceed the $150,000 goal we set. This Campaign is intended to get out in front of the problem so we can have the bulk of the necessary funds available when the projects need to be completed. We want to be proactive instead of reactive. **I am happy to report that we just surpassed our $150,000 goal in pledges and contributions!** Praise God!!!

This wonderful news comes with three caveats that I want to briefly explain.

1. Some of the funds we received were designated to particular projects. We will be moving forward with those projects in a responsible manner with an eye toward the larger goal. This means that though our overall goal was met, we will continue to need pledges to balance out the funds that were designated to particular projects.

2. We cannot control the rising costs of material and labor for the larger projects on our list. For example, our Property Committee is concerned about the costs associated with replacing the roof. That project could exceed our initial estimates. Property will manage these issues closely.

3. We may be tempted to stamp “mission accomplished” on this project and move along. However, the success of this campaign will depend on all of us following through with our pledges. Please be vigilant in the months to come!

Finally, I would like to express my abundant and sincere gratitude for your generous response to this appeal. I am simply amazed by your response. I write this letter in deep gratitude for your sacrificial giving and commitment to the mission of Christ here at our church. It is that gratitude that I carry with me into this Thanksgiving holiday. THANK YOU!!!

In gratitude,
Vicar Bryce

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## PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Happy December, St. James!

As we enter the beautiful month of December, we are reminded of the greatest gift ever given to us—the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. During this season of joy, love, and celebration, may we take time to slow down, reflect on God’s goodness, and remember the true meaning of Christmas.

December can be a busy time filled with shopping, gatherings, and holiday preparations. Yet, in the midst of all the activity, let us not lose sight of the message of Christmas: God’s unconditional love for us. Through the birth of Jesus, God brought hope to the world, peace to our hearts, and the promise of everlasting life.

As we celebrate this season, may we look for opportunities to share God’s love with those around us. Our Annual Nativity is a great way to invite your neighbor for free food, fun, and a retelling of the greatest story. A simple act of kindness, a listening ear, a comforting word, or a prayer offered for someone in need can make a meaningful difference. Let us especially remember those who may be experiencing loneliness, grief, illness, or difficult circumstances during the holidays. May we be the hands and feet of Jesus by offering compassion, encouragement, and support.

As we reflect on the year coming to a close, let us give thanks for the blessings, lessons, and opportunities God has placed before us. Even through life's challenges, His faithfulness has remained constant.

My prayer for each of you this December is that your hearts will be filled with the peace of Christ, your homes with His love, and your lives with renewed hope. May we carry the light of Christmas beyond December and into the new year, sharing His grace with everyone we encounter.

Be good. Do good. God bless,

Madeline Schmidt

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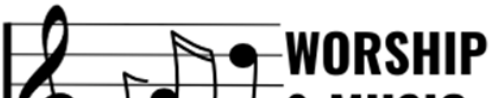
## DECEMBER WORSHIP ASSISTANT SCHEDULE

| Date | Assisting Minister | Reader | Acolyte | Usher | Usher |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **12/6/26** | Jason Forari | Pat Larson | Dex Hewlett | Melissa Forari | Ana Forari |
| **12/13/26** | Judie Brooks | Justina Pessein | Eli Pessein | Fritz Voss | Ryan Martin |
| **12/20/26** | Shirley Richlen | Judy Larson | Jude Hewlett | Ron Mekalson | Kelly Crooks |
| **Christmas Eve 4pm 12/24/26** | ***NEEDED** | ***NEEDED** | ***NEEDED** | ***NEEDED** | ***NEEDED** |
| **Christmas Eve 11pm 12/24/26** | ***NEEDED** | ***NEEDED** | ***NEEDED** | ***NEEDED** | ***NEEDED** |
| **12/27/26** | Ellen Hogbin | Pat Larson | Jude Hewlett | Fritz Voss | Judy Larson |

**Altar Guild:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Dec 5** | **Marilyn & Diana Worley** |
| **Dec 12** | **Shirley Richlen & Judie Brooks** |
| **Dec 19** | **Shirley Richlen & Judie Brooks** |
| **Dec 23 CHRISTMAS EVE** | **Ellen Hogbin & Audrey Lovell** |
| **Dec 26** | **Ellen Hogbin & Audrey Lovell** |



# Worship & Music 2026

### Christmas Eve Worship Assistant Sign-Up

We're looking for volunteers for our 4:00 p.m. Family service and our 11:00 p.m. Traditional service. All positions are currently available and there is a sign-up sheet in the Narthex.

## Advent Readers

The Advent Readings Sign-Up sheet is in the Narthex - there is one Sunday in Advent left open so make sure to sign up if you'd like to be a Reader!



## Christmas Poinsettias

We will be ordering poinsettias to decorate the church for our Christmas Services.
**Cost: $21.00 each.**

Order forms are in the bulletins or you can call the church office to place your order at (563) 355-4161.
***Orders must be placed by November 29th.***







# ANGEL TREE

Please join us in bringing relief and joy
to families in need this holiday season

**PLease be sure to sign
for each gift (angel or bell)
that you take!**

**EACH GIFT SHOULD INCLUDE CHILD'S
NAME AND FAMILY NUMBER
(*LOCATED ON ANGEL*)**

**PLEASE
RETURN GIFTS
BY DECEMBER
6th**

**If you have
multiple gifts
for your child,
please label
EACH one!**

**Family gifts
are also
appreciated!**

For questions or more information
contact Judy Larson at 563-340-7902

# St. James' Annual Nativity

# A Night in Bethlehem



1705 Oak Street Bettendorf

## Saturday, December 12th

2 Performances:

4:00 p.m. | 5:30 p.m.

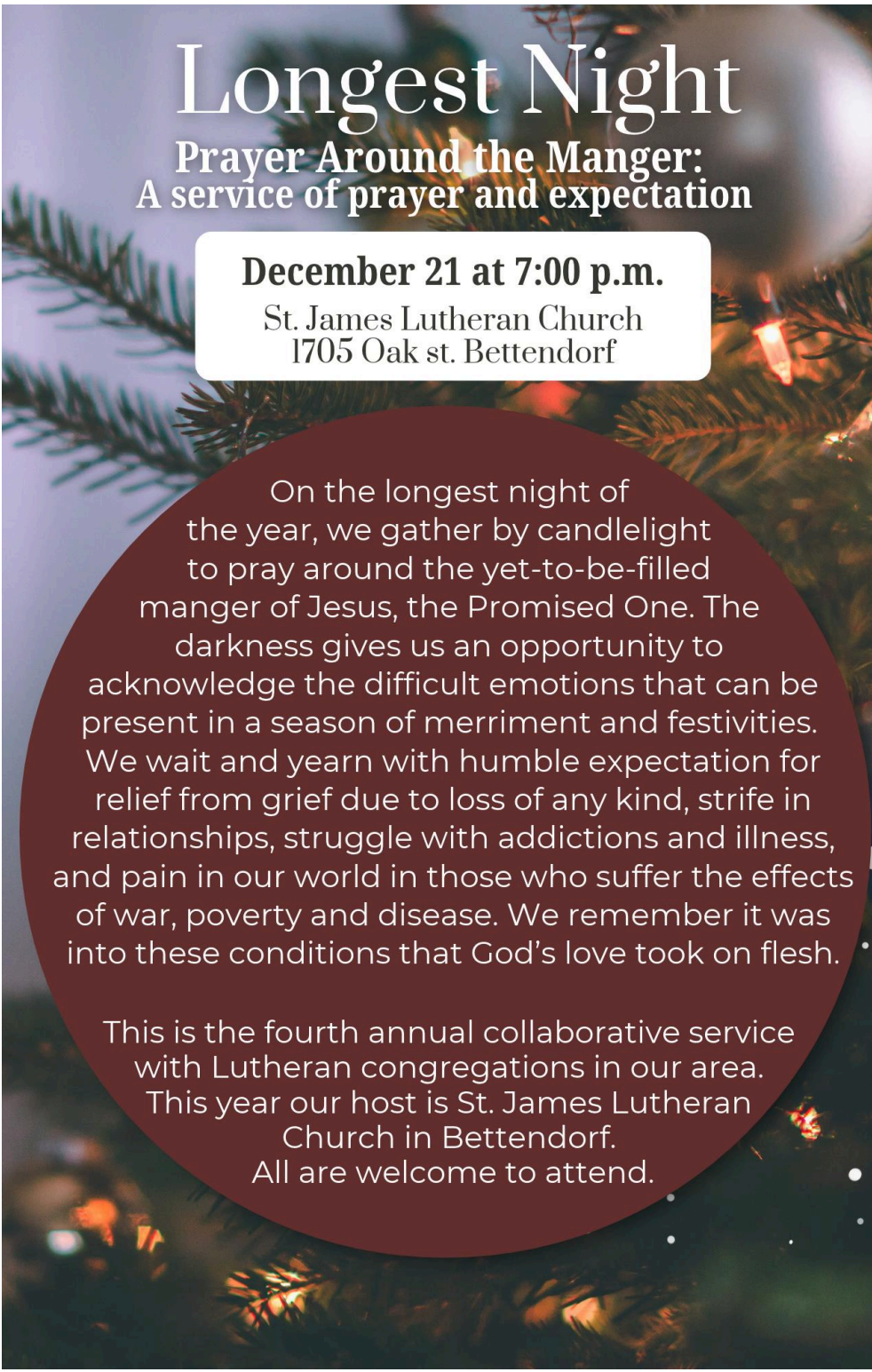
Join us for soup and more between performances in our Lower Level

Live Music • Kids Cookie Decorating • Free Admission

Crafts & Games

Find Us on Facebook!

Free-will donations will go to Lutheran World Relief!



# Longest Night

## Prayer Around the Manger:
## A service of prayer and expectation

**December 21 at 7:00 p.m.**

St. James Lutheran Church
1705 Oak st. Bettendorf

On the longest night of the year, we gather by candlelight to pray around the yet-to-be-filled manger of Jesus, the Promised One. The darkness gives us an opportunity to acknowledge the difficult emotions that can be present in a season of merriment and festivities. We wait and yearn with humble expectation for relief from grief due to loss of any kind, strife in relationships, struggle with addictions and illness, and pain in our world in those who suffer the effects of war, poverty and disease. We remember it was into these conditions that God's love took on flesh.

This is the fourth annual collaborative service with Lutheran congregations in our area. This year our host is St. James Lutheran Church in Bettendorf.
All are welcome to attend.

# Special Service Times

| | |
|---|---|
| **SATURDAY 12/12**<br>Annual Nativity | 4:00PM \| 5:30PM<br>PERFORMANCE TIMES |
| **THURSDAY 12/24**<br>Christmas Eve | 4:00PM<br>TRADITIONAL FAMILY SERVICE<br><br>11:00PM<br>CLASSIC SERVICE |
| **FRIDAY 12/25**<br>Christmas Day | PRE-RECORDED SERVICE<br><br>*- ONLINE ONLY -*<br>*Pick up Bulletin on Christmas Eve*<br><br>FIND IT ON OUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL! |
| **WEDNESDAY 1/6/2027**<br>Epiphany | 6:00PM<br>"AROUND THE WORLD" POTLUCK AND CELEBRATION<br><br>7:00PM<br>SERVICE FOR THE FEAST OF EPIPHANY<br><br>BLESSING OF THE CANDLES |

# December 2026

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 29 | 30 | 11 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9AM Worship | | | 6-8PM Food Pantry<br><br>6PM Choir Practice | 9-11AM Food Pantry<br><br>11AM BHCC Service | | 5PM Worship |
| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 9AM Worship<br><br>12PM Confirmation @ Zion Lutheran | | 4:30PM Property Mtg. | 6PM Bonfire Church<br><br>6-8PM Food Pantry | 9AM Finance Mtg.<br><br>9-11AM Food Pantry | | 8AM Men's Prayer Breakfast<br><br>4PM Annual Nativity<br><br>No 5PM Worship |
| 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| 9AM Worship<br><br>10AM Coffee & Convo | | 1PM Sarah Circle | 8AM Worship & Music Mtg.<br><br>6-8PM Food Pantry<br><br>6PM Choir Practice | 9-11AM Food Pantry<br><br>11AM BHCC Service<br><br>11:30AM GANG<br><br>2:30PM Bingo @ BHCC | | 5PM Worship |
| 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 9AM Worship<br><br>11AM Service in Dixon | | No Quilting | 6PM Food Pantry | 9-11AM Food Pantry<br><br>4PM Family Worship<br><br>11PM Classic Worship<br><br>*Christmas Eve* | *Christmas* | No 5PM Worship |

# WELCA NEWS

## SARAH CIRCLE

November Sarah Circle will meet on Tuesday, December 15th at 1:00 pm in the Lower Level.

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St James GANG

The St James GANG will meet in the Fellowship Hall at 11:30AM, December 17th. Bring your own lunch, dessert and beverages are provided.

See you all there, and bring a friend. All are welcome!

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From the Quilt Block

## December 2026

Our annual drawing for quilts will start November 29th, with the drawing on Sunday, December 20th. This year we have 7 quilts for you to consider. Please remember that your donations are for quilt batting and LWR projects. Tickets are still $1.00 per ticket or 6 for $5.00 and will be available from November 29th through December 20th, the day of the drawing. If you would rather just donate to the quilters, we are glad for your donations. Our quilts are great gifts for family and friends, if not for yourselves.

The quilters need cotton fabric to make quilts. If you know of anyone who has fabric “sitting” around, encourage a donation also if you see a good deal on fabric at a garage sale, estate sale or store, please let one of our quilters know so we can take advantage of that opportunity to continue our mission.

The quilters will not meet in December or January, but will return to meeting on February 23rd.

Thank you again for all your support.

Pieces be with you,
Shirley Richlen

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## SOCIAL MINISTRY NEWS




**Zion Meals:** The last Zion meal was November 23rd at 5:30 p.m. We served 90 meals! Currently we are looking for people to help with serving the Zion meals! It takes less than an hour. It is very fulfilling and they are so grateful for whatever we serve! If you would like to volunteer, please contact Judy Larson at 563-340-7902!

**We will not meet in December.**

**Bingo: December 17th at the Bettendorf Health Care Center.** The residents win prizes such as small stuffed animals (Beanie Baby size), and quarters. We enjoy calling the numbers for them and they are always happy to see us!

Please consider joining us.. new ideas are always welcome!

**Angel Tree: Please have your Angel Tree gifts back by Sunday, December 6th. <u>Every gift should be labeled with the child’s name AND family name</u>!**

Thank you for your support :)

Judy Larson (563) 340-7902!

# DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

12/4 HARLEN BRIGGS

12/9 SELENA GARCIA-HOGBIN

12/10 JASON FORARI

12/12 JACKSON PUETZ

12/14 MELISSA FORARI

12/15 SAMUEL PESSEIN

12/23 ELLEN HOGBIN

12/23 CAROL LEACOX

12/24 CARA CHAMBERLAIN

12/26 CHRISTIAN MALLI

12/30 JUDITH RYAN

# DECEMBER ANNIVERSARIES

12/27 ED & SANDY ARP

## Prayers for Healing and Support

### Congregational Members

**Ed** Arp, **Bev** Chappen, **Sandy** Henry,
**Frieda** Houldsworth, **Jeryl** Krumbholz, **Mary** Meumann,
**LaVonne** Mienke, **Shirley** Niewald, **Kaylee** Pessein

### Family and Friends

**Amanda** (friend of Melissa), **Annette & Rick** (Steve & Sue Miller & Pat Sorenson's sister & brother-in-law), **Brenda** (Friend of Janene Anderson), **Carol** (friend of Joleen Bakken), **Donna** (Ed Arp's sister), **Drew** (Pat Larson's friend), **Elliot** (Gary and Eunice Grell's great grandson), **Emmett** (friend of Diana Worley), **Hattie** (Frieda's sister), **Heather** (Jason Forari's Sister-in-Law), **Jack** (family of Martens/Schmidts), **Jane** (friend of Deb Crooks), **Jason** (Sherry Germanio's son), **Jim** (Pat Larson's nephew), **John** (Pat Larson's brother), **John** (Frieda's nephew), **Karen** (Shirley's Aunt), **Kayla** (friend of Angie Schmidt), **Larry** (family of Doug Larson), **Mark** (friend of Jason Forari), **Pat** (Judy Larson's Sister-in-Law), **Peg** (friend of Deb Crooks), **Phil** (Steve Miller and Pat Sorensen's brother), **Stacy** (Fritz' son's cousin), **Steve** (friend of Sue Miller), **Wally** (Frieda's nephew)

### Those Whose Duty it is to Protect Others

**Anthony** Karasek (Judy Larson's great nephew)
**LCDR Chris** Tribble USN (Erik & Joleen Bakken's friend).
**CPT Eli** Smith (Jerry and Myrna Mattly's grandson)
**Nathan** Pearson USAF (Jenna & Kane Schmidt's friend)
**Tyler** McLaughlin, First Responder (Family of Pat Larson)