



Mount Calvary Connected

January 6, 2022

Mount Calvary Connected is a weekly newsletter sent out at the end of each week. Our goal is to keep you connected to your church and your faith with messages from our pastors, information about upcoming activities at Mt. Calvary and more!

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LIVE STREAMING WORSHIP SERVICE INFORMATION

Mt. Calvary hosts live broadcasts of the liturgy at 8:45 AM Sunday mornings. The broadcast can be heard by tuning your radio to 88.3 FM if you are near the church. We also stream these services live over the internet. Simply visit www.mt-calvarylutheran.org and click "Live Radio Broadcast" from the home page on Sunday mornings.

Weekly worship bulletins can be found at: www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/bulletins/

A Message from Allegheny Synod Bishop, Rev. Paula J. Schmitt

As I was leaving the Synod office late one evening early in Advent, I got caught up in a parade of about 20 cars on 12th Avenue in Altoona. Each of the cars had on its roof a lighted menorah. They were clearly following a route as they carefully changed lanes together to get to their destination. I treated it like a funeral procession so as not to get in the middle of what seemed like a carefully planned event but followed closely behind.

I had all kinds of questions about what they were doing and where they were going. As we traveled along 12th Avenue, my questions diminished as I realized of course, these Jewish drivers were in the midst of celebrating Hanukkah, the Festival of Light. Each of their cars was carrying light. As I followed the cars through town, I realized I was following that light and that meant something to me on that cold, dark night after a long day.

Aren't we, too, called to follow the light? We call that light Jesus who came into the world in the form of baby and a light in the sky led the shepherds to see "this thing that had happened." While I did not turn off my route to home to see where the cars were going, the sense of being part of the trail of light those drivers were leaving has stayed with me.

The little child in the manger, who we celebrate at Christmas, came to be light in a dark world. The light of His love is in each of us and we have the ability to leave a trail of light wherever we go so that those who are traveling on a cold, dark night will see it and want to follow. And we don't get to do that just at Christmas; this Light is the Light of the World, the Light that overcomes the darkness, the Light that heals, restores and renews. Friends, you have been given this Light as a gift. I invite you to share that gift with as many as you can as often as you can throughout this season and all through the new

year. My prayer for you in this season of Christmas is that you will embrace the light of Christ that is in you and be empowered to shine that Light in dark places.

May you have a blessed Christmas and a safe and hope-filled New Year.
+Bishop Paula

Adult Sunday School

Adult Sunday School is ongoing! We were happy to see some new faces and hope that even more join us! We meet in the conference room/library each Sunday after worship.

Upcoming Meetings

Social Ministry Committee: Thursday, January 13th at 6:30 p.m.

WELCA: Monday, January 17th at 6:00 p.m.

Council: Tuesday, January 18th at 6:30 p.m.

Property Committee: Tuesday, February 1st at 6:30 p.m.

2022 Offering Envelopes

Offering envelopes for 2022 are now available in the narthex. Thank you in advance for your contribution!

Help Wanted

The Property Committee is looking to recruit a number of small job volunteers. Tasks might include replacing light bulbs, changing hardware on a commode, getting a lawnmower or snowblower ready for use, etc. The Committee believes we have a lot of talent in the congregation and wants to make greater use of it. Every small job handled by a member equals one less call that needs to be made to a vendor who may have a minimum visit charge or an hourly rate of \$50 or more.

Interested parties should contact Mark Rychak or one of the pastors. A message could also be left with the church office at 814-266-4859. Thank you!

Scheduled Worship Help

Saturday, January 8:

Greeters/Ushers: Mark & Debbie Rychak
Communion Assistants: Volunteers needed!

Sunday, January 9:

Greeters/Ushers: Volunteers needed!
Communion Assistants: Volunteers needed!

Saturday, January 15:

Greeters/Ushers: Mark & Debbie Rychak
Communion Assistants: Volunteers needed!

Sunday, January 16:

Greeters/Ushers: Volunteers needed!

Communion Assistants: Volunteers needed!

There are sign up sheets in the Narthex for Greeters/Ushers and Communion Assistants. Please sign up for the dates that would suit you best. We appreciate you volunteering. If you have questions about these roles, please contact Christine Koshute at [814-421-4921](tel:814-421-4921) or Chris Oleksa at [814-244-9851](tel:814-244-9851).



Youth News

Sunday School is ongoing for Pre-K through 8th grade: "Mount Calvary Kid's Crew" is our program for Pre-K and up that gathers at 8:30am in Sander Hall with Pastor Jonathan. Students focus on a bible story and have an activity or craft before rejoining their parents during the worship service.

Childcare is now available during Sunday morning worship: Hannah Salamon is a Richland Learning Center staff member who will be joining us each Sunday along with Pastor Jonathan and other volunteers to provide childcare for infants through age 5. For the time being, drop-off for this service will take place in Sander Hall. Speak with Pastor Jonathan for more information.

Snow Camp 2022: Snow camp is BACK at Sequanota! Plans are in the works for the annual "snow camp" to return to Camp Sequanota on February 25th & 26th. This is an overnight event for youth in 6th through 12th grade. Registration opens January 15th, and we'd love to have a group. Contact Pastor Jonathan for details!

Junior/Senior High Lock-In: We're beginning to plan an overnight "lock-in" sleepover event for junior and senior high youth in January or February of 2022. If you have students in this age group, watch for information from Pastor Jonathan as we try to identify the best possible weekend for this event!

Pastor Jonathan LOVES to get out and see our Mount Calvary youth in action doing the things they enjoy! Be sure to share your schedules for sports, concerts, recitals, etc. You never know where he might show up!

Pastor Jonathan's office hours at Mount Calvary are Mondays & Wednesdays, 10am-3pm. He is available outside of those hours via email (RevJonoAdams@gmail.com), cellphone (412-817-6704), or Facebook.

Painting Party Hosted by the Property Committee

On Monday, January 10th at 8:00 a.m., come help us paint the main hallway of the church. The church will provide the paint. Please bring your own brush or two.

Giving Tree

Donations will be given to The Helping Hands Mission in Portage through February. Thank you for your continued support!

Wildfire Relief

The Marshall Fire ignited on Dec. 30th in Boulder County, Colorado. Over 6,200 acres burned quickly, forcing the evacuations of 35,000 people. The fire spread throughout suburban neighborhoods, destroying at least 500 homes.

Lutheran Disaster Response is engaging with the Rocky Mountain Synod and Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains to respond to the impact of the fires. We anticipate that immediate needs will include emotional and spiritual care, temporary shelters, food, and other necessities.

If you would like to donate to help the survivors, please make a check payable to Mount Calvary and mark in the memo line "U.S. Wildfires". Because the overhead expenses of Lutheran Disaster Response are covered by ELCA mission support, 100% of donations will be used to assist those affected by the wildfires.

Committee News

The Nominating Committee appointed by council in August has completed its nominating ballot for council. The committee's nominees are Kevin Oleksa (1st three-year term), Mark Rychak, (2nd three-year term), Judi Stinebiser (1st three-year term after completing remainder of somebody else's term), and Jack Weisbrodt, (1st three-year term after completing remainder of somebody else's term).

Below is some biographical info for each nominee:

Kevin Oleksa – Serving in various position, I have been with OTS, Inc, a computer and network company. for over 30 years. I have been owner of OTS since 2003. I am originally from the East Conemaugh section of Johnstown but have lived now with my wife Chris in Richland since 2006. Both Chris and I have attended Mt. Calvary for approximately 4 years with 2+ years of that being full time members. I bring to the table not only 15+ years business ownership experience but also service on several Boards of Directors for nonprofit organizations in the area like the Greater Johnstown YMCA and Allegheny Unlimited Care Providers (AUCP) for over 20 years. My knowledge of organizational strategy from a board level would be a help to Mt. Calvary.

Mark Rychak – I have been asked, and am happy to serve a second term on council. Deb and I were married by Pastor Brandau in what is now Sander Hall 38 years ago and have been members ever since. As the Holy Spirit grew in us, so did our commitment to our church through our time and talents. We have been blessed throughout the years in many ways. I have worked in the construction field for most of my adult life and I enjoy the many challenges that maintaining a building like Mt. Calvary can pose. I am honored that my company was chosen to build our new sanctuary in 1992. All businesses and organizations have been "through the ringer" in the last couple of years with the pandemic and I have enjoyed working with the entire council to work through these difficult times.

Judy Stinebiser – Hi my name is Judy Stinebiser. I have been a member of Mt. Calvary Church for 50 years. I have served on council for one year, without missing any meetings. It has been an honor and a pleasure to serve on council, and a great experience. The members of council have accomplished a lot this past year to improve the church, and make it a safer place to worship God. I would be glad and happy to be able to serve on council for three years.

Jack Weisbrodt – I'm proud to say I'm a lifelong member of Mt Calvary, dating back to the 50's with Pastor Sander. My parents, who have been deceased for over 30 years, were also members and they too were very active, serving on different committees. My father had also served on council and was a member of the choir, and often performed solos. Unfortunately, he didn't pass down the singing gene! This is my second time on council. I served under Pastor Reed too. It was an exciting time, as I participated in the groundbreaking for the new sanctuary. And it's an exciting time now with Pastor Scott. He has worked tirelessly to make our church "better". It's great to see all the new members and even greater to see them get involved and serve in different ways. We've got a good thing going, and I'm proud to be part of it!

Annual Report

In anticipation of our annual meeting on February 5th, Erin Powell will be compiling and editing this year's annual report. If you are a council officer, committee chair, or ministry leader, please email your written report to Erin no later than Friday, January 14th. Erin's email address is epowell@mt-calvarylutheran.org.

ELCA Good Gifts

ELCA Good Gifts is a great opportunity to provide critical support to the ministries and programs of the ELCA in nearly 80 countries around the world.

How it works:

- Choose a gift (food, medical care costs, school supplies, etc.)
- Receive a card to share the news of your gift
- Make a difference in someone's life!

Visit goodgifts.elca.org for more information on how to donate!

Updates from Our Members & Community

Dear Pastor Scott and members of Mt. Calvary,

My family and I extend our deepest thanks for all the support, encouragement and prayers during my recent heart attack. Without your support our holidays would have been much harder. We are so grateful.

Thank you!

David Brehm III and family

Pastor Scott and my Brothers and Sisters in Christ at Mt. Calvary;

Thank you all for the prayers, texts, calls, support and encouragement during this difficult time for our family with my son DJ's recent heart attack. He has to be off work at least another 6 - 8 weeks so I ask you continue to keep him and his family in your prayers. And I am so grateful to all of you.

Thank you and God Bless,

Claudia Plows

Birthdays and Anniversaries for the Week: January 9 – January 15, 2022

Jan. 9 - Tammy Bachota, Jacob Sann, & Macey Whetzel

Jan. 10 - Samantha Eash, Clarissa Hill, Samantha Hill, Karen Kennedy, & Robert Loftis

Jan. 11 - Emylee Brandau & Rachael Wolfhope

Jan. 12 - Julieanna Brown, Laiken Cassidy, Pat Guinta, Vicki Karnes, & Ally Waterhouse

Jan. 13 - Holly Cowfer, Sean Horn, & Lori Leonardis

Jan. 14 - Marcie Kovalsky

Remember those that prayer has been requested for:

Jennifer & Ryan, Linda & Dick, Dolly & Chiz Palm, Claudia Plows, Maddie Pierce, Gladys Haupt, Maria, Bill & Linda, Jose & Family, Dave, Tom, Lt. Hunter Bergman, and Lt. Dylan Merchant, Harold, Rick, Midge, Shirley, Jennifer, Debbie, Jill McEntee, David, Lauren, Billy, Barb, Sara Solarczyk, Jackie Janak, Jack, Corinne, Joan, Dan, Natalie Zerby, Pastor Scott Custead, Luella Koontz, Al Lindner and Family, Bob, Dawn, Stacy & Josh, Florence Barker, Bob Trotter, Jean Pellon, Bill Layton, Deb Zilch, Bennett, Cassy Sojak, Paul Miller, Keith Mayket, Ruth, Pete, Annabelle, the Teplitz Family, Ethel Warshel, Melanie, Ken, John Nerone, Dane Wisner, Jeff, Don, Bill, Linda, Landon, Dorothy, Irene, Karen, Susan Dyers, Bob McMullen, Dwayne Dietrich, Wyatt George, Larry Hockensmith, the Family of Paul Swartz, Jean Pellon, Mike, Corey, and John Rychak.

Financial Update

Mount Calvary continues to do well financially. After nearly two years of a worldwide pandemic, we have been incredibly fortunate. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! What remains for 2021 is to finish with a strong December which has traditionally been our strongest month of the year. As for 2022, maintaining current levels of support and increasing support where and when it's possible will continue to be important. Though we still have many, many blessings to count, we are not as well-endowed as other congregations and the age and population decline of our community continue to present ongoing stewardship challenges. But thanks to you, we've overcome all of this thus far. Thank you!
Thank you! Thank you!

Condensed Worship for Sunday, January 2, 2022

Prayer of the Day

O God our redeemer, you created light that we might live, and you illumine our world with your beloved Son. By your Spirit comfort us in all darkness, and turn us toward the light of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-14

⁷Thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel." ⁸See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. ⁹With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. ¹⁰Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock." ¹¹For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

¹²They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. ¹³Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. ¹⁴I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the Lord.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Psalm 147, 12-20

P: Worship the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion,

A: who has strengthened the bars of your gates and has blessed your children within you.

P: God has established peace on your borders and satisfies you with the finest wheat.

A: God sends out a command to the earth, a word that runs very swiftly.

P: God gives snow like wool, scattering frost like ashes.

A: God scatters hail like bread crumbs. Who can stand against God's cold?

P: The Lord sends forth the word and melts them; the wind blows, and the waters flow.

A: God declares the word to Jacob, statutes and judgments to Israel.

P: The Lord has not done so to any other nation; they do not know God's judgments. Hallelujah!

Second Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Gospel: John: 1:1-18

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

P: The gospel of the Lord.

A: Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke

Once already this holiday season our appointed readings from Scripture have hearkened us back to the beginning of God's relationship with humankind. If you were present at one of the two later services on Christmas Eve, you might recall this. Every year on Christmas Eve we hear Isaiah speak of how God has multiplied the nation through the birth of the Prince of Peace. As I said on Christmas Eve, this talk of multiplication goes all the way back to the beginning when we humans learned our mission in life was to multiply God's very good beginning. And as I've already intimated, today's readings from Scripture also encourage us to revisit the beginnings of our relationship with God as our Christmas celebrations continue.

Unlike Christmas Eve, I'd say today's encouragement to go back to the beginning is hard to miss. During this second weekend in Christmas, our reading from John reminds us that the evangelist begins the fourth and final gospel with the words "in the beginning." This is an obvious reference to the Bible's first chapter which also begins with the words "in the beginning." In Genesis chapter one we read, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth." Then, in John chapter one as we've heard today, we get, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." There's an obvious connection here which makes it equally obvious that the Old and New Testaments are in fact connected. From the very beginning of the gospel bearing his name, St. John suggests you can't understand Jesus without going back to the beginning of the relationship tying together God and humankind.

To lift up some options, it may be that in Jesus we get something which God has held in store or in reserve from the very beginning. This would make Jesus a surprise, an enigma, a mystery. That said, it

just as easily could be that in Jesus we find God reclaiming that which has someone gotten lost or stolen since the beginning. This would make Jesus our Savior and Redeemer more than a surprise, an enigma, or a mystery. And so, which is it—surprise and enigma or savior and redeemer?

I'd suggest there's no reason to make a choice. John presents Jesus as both. To start with Jesus being our Savior and our Redeemer, five verses into his gospel John starts to talk about darkness. This also harkens back to the beginning when darkness initially covered the face of the deep. As you might recall, God had chased back this darkness through the creation of light. But in his description of darkness as a kind of menace that Jesus has come to address, St. John seems to suggest that some of God's initial gains over darkness have been lost. Jesus needs to be our light, the light of all people, John suggests, because darkness has become a problem again. This definitely puts Jesus in the savior and redeemer column. But as I've already indicated, our reading from John pairs this talk of Jesus as savior and redeemer with that which represents Jesus as some kind of mystery or curveball thrown down from heaven.

A bit after describing Jesus' adversarial relationship with darkness, John goes on to say that the world didn't know Jesus when he became flesh and pitched a tent among us. He goes on to say that Jesus came to his own people and they also didn't recognize him—didn't accept him. In both instances, Jesus is certainly presented more as surprise and enigma than as Savior. And to thicken the plot a bit, our reading from Ephesians also presents Jesus in multiple ways.

On the hand, our reading from Ephesians describes Jesus as an agent of grace and redemption and forgiveness. This is Jesus as savior and redeemer, But on the other hand, the writer to the Ephesians also speaks of Jesus as the one who discloses the mystery of God's will—the one who uncovers what God had been planning to do since before the world was founded. This is Jesus as enigma, mystery, surprise. Whether it's John or our reading from Ephesians, it would seem that Jesus' connections to the beginning described by the Bible's very first chapters are not singular, but multiple. It would seem that one sermon or one lesson on Jesus is never going to cut it—that there's always going to be more to say about him. But as today's readings from John and Ephesians speak to Jesus' complexity, they may also give us a hint as to where the various roads that travel in and out of Jesus unite or cross.

To be specific, our reading from Ephesians says that in Jesus God is gathering up all things whether they be in heaven or on earth. This suggests that there's a unity to God's creation that's been lost or split apart; a unity that's been missing for so long that its existence may surprise, stun, and shock us. In restoring this long-forgotten unity, Jesus can function as both Savior and Surprise. On the one hand, he rejoins that which sinister and sinful forces have disjoined. On other hand, this coming back together amounts to that which the passage of time had led us to believe was impossible. This is to save and to surprise. Jesus' identity as what John calls the Light of the Word functions similarly.

Like Jesus, light can do a lot of things. Light can create and sustain life. Light reveals and uncovers. Light can shock, stun, and startle. Think deer in the headlights. But whatever it may be doing, light unites and reconnects, whereas darkness separates and divides. When its light out, I can see my neighbors, or at the very least, the houses in which they live. Light brings the reminder that Julia and I are not alone. Together, with the neighbors the reemergence of light reveals, we're one family of many. But darkness works against this important recognition. Were it not for artificial light, many nights would hide or obscure the larger whole to which both you and me belong. And so, whether it's Jesus as the one who

gathers up all things or Jesus as the Light of the World, I do we think we can find the thread that sews Jesus together. Whether it's in his work as Savior or Surprise, Jesus is connecting and uniting; harmonizing and synchronizing; joining and linking. And getting back to where I began today, this does very much build a bridge between Jesus and the way things were back in the beginning.

Back in the beginning, the first chapter of the Bible finds God calling many things "good." God saw light in various forms was good. God saw that both land and sea were good. God saw that fruit yielding plants and trees were good. God saw sea and land creatures of all kinds were good. God saw human beings created in the image of his own goodness. Individually, all these things were good, but it was only after they were all in place and working together that God could see everything that God made and regard it not just as good, but as very good. With this in mind, we might say the Bible tells us there's a unity and a harmony to God's creation which we don't want to break apart. Unfortunately, the Bible also tells us it happens. What God has joined together we too often put asunder. But Jesus, he saves us from this divisiveness and shocks us with how we really are better together than we ever will be apart. And on this weekend when we celebrate the beginning of another year a significant happening in American history works with these accomplishments of Jesus.

One hundred and fifty-nine years ago, on the 1st of January, Abraham Lincoln signed The Emancipation Proclamation; declaring people of all races and colors to be free and equal citizens of the United States of America. Almost a year later, in a place called Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the same president would remind his hearers that our nation had been conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all people are created equal. Might this be why John Winthrop told the pilgrims who traveled with him to this land in 1630 that they were destined to be a city upon a hill; what might also be called a light unto the nations? I don't know and I can't say, but I do know we follow in the footsteps of the Prince of Peace, the One we are to follow and emulate, when we practice and pursue peace; the peace that leaves all of God's creatures in place and working together so that God might once again look upon all that God made way back in the beginning and again call it very good.

Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

P: Joining our voices with the heavenly host and Christians throughout time and space, let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

P: You make yourself known in the gift of language in diverse forms. Draw our attention to those who communicate through sign, braille, and technology. Make your church a place where all methods of communication are celebrated. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Creating God, the sun greets us anew each morning. Thank you for waking us up today to witness and share your abundance. Awaken us always to your wisdom and deepen our care for your natural world. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Emmanuel, in your name we are assured that you are with us. Train nations and peoples to honor and respect one another, especially those whose names and identities have been mistreated, neglected, or oppressed. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: You adopt us as your beloved ones. Accompany parents and children navigating the adoption process, especially those in the foster system. Sustain those struggling with infertility or pregnancy loss. Tenderly embrace all in need (*especially*). Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: You journey with us through change. Guide those assuming new roles in this congregation or making transitions in their families, workplaces, or communities (*especially*). As the seasons and the calendar change, equip us for unexpected challenges. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: We give you thanks for all who modeled lives of loving service (especially Wilhelm Loehe, whom we commemorate today). Lead us in your grace until, with all your saints, we enter the fullness of your glory. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Rejoicing in your Word made flesh among us, we commend these prayers to you, confident of your grace and love made known to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

A: Amen.

Blessing

May Christ, who by his incarnation has filled us with grace and truth, give you peace this Christmas and always. Almighty God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. **Amen.**