

The Epistle

THE NEWSLETTER OF APOSTLES LUTHERAN CHURCH

Gloucester, Virginia

www.apostles-elca.org

December 2022

Our Mission is to be a Caring Inclusive Christian Community responding to God's grace through Worship, Service, and Sharing the Gospel

For The Congregation's Information

Pastor Jay Serafin has been recommended by the Virginia Synod to be a candidate for our Interim Pastor. Pastor Jay will be our supply pastor through the end of December. The Congregational Council will be meeting on Tuesday, December 12th, and will be discussing contracting with Pastor Jay to be our interim pastor. If you haven't had a chance to meet Pastor Jay and his wife, Jamie, please take a minute before and after worship to introduce yourself.

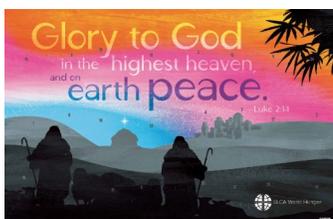
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World Hunger Advent Resources

Please help yourself to a World Hunger Bible study and/or World Hunger Advent calendar—they are on the table in the narthex. Also remember that the third Sunday of every month is World Hunger

Sunday—please remember your offering to help feed those in need. “Until all are fed!”



Opportunities for Worship in December



Advent Worship Services with Lighting the Advent Wreath—**December 4th, 11th and 18th at 10:00 AM**



Blue Christmas Service—A Service of Comfort, Remembrance and Hope—**Wednesday, December 21st at 7:00 PM**



Christmas Eve Candlelight Service with Holy Communion—**Saturday, December 24th at 7:00 PM**



First Sunday of Christmas—**Sunday, December 25th at 10:00 AM—A Service of Lessons and Carols**

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Decorating The Sanctuary for Christmas

Please make plans to stay after worship on **Sunday, December 18th**, to help put up the Christmas tree and decorate the sanctuary for Christmas!!



ISAIAH 11
By Pastor Jay Serafin



A shoot shall come forth
From the tree trunk of Jesse
A branch shall grow out of its root,
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord
His kindness for those destitute.

The spirit of Wisdom
The spirit of Truth
The spirit of Counsel and Might
The spirit of God now will rest upon him
To do what is holy and right.

He will never judge
By what his eyes see
Or decide by what his ears hear
So righteousness shall be his mantle and belt
Through which he will draw the world near.

The wolf then shall live
In peace with the lamb
The lion and fattling the same
And none shall be harmed on this holiest site
But have fullness of life in its name.

They will not hurt
Or destroy in this place
All earth then will know of the Lord
Like seas that roar loudly and blanket the earth
So too will the truth of his Word.

A child is born
Who will stand as a sign
For peoples from near and from far
In shepherds who gather and magi who seek
Called by angels, a song and a star.

A man and a woman
In makeshift arrange
A bed in a trough with some straw
The cattle are lowing the poor baby wakes
Both heaven and earth are in awe.

For God is at work
In this new child born
A child who's like you and like me
Yet evermore God who comes now in our flesh
To claim us and make us all free.

The spirit of Wisdom
The spirit of Truth
The spirit of Counsel and Might
The spirit of God now will rest upon him
To do what is holy and right.

Our eyes cannot see
Our ears cannot hear
Our thoughts cannot fully explain
The gift that is given by God's loving hand
A gift we could never attain.

But grace is a gift,
A strong loving act
From God who is truth, light and life
A promise that claims us by name every day
A freedom from death and from strife.

His presence is peaceful
His love ever sure
No matter what darkness ensues
For God entered time as a child is born
Through whose mission his promise pursues

No words could express
Nor thoughts could deduce
What God's Word born of Mary that day
Could give us in hope for a future renewed
With this child to show us the way.

So celebrate life
And celebrate light
And celebrate Christmas this year
The one who is Wisdom, Truth and Life has
come
To show that God's presence is near.

Remembering Opal Baker



Opal Baker died on Monday, November 21st—she was 103 years old. There will be a memorial service for Opal on **Saturday, January 7th, at 11:00 AM** at Apostles—there will be a reception held afterwards. Please keep Opal’s daughter, Judy Sowden, and their family in your prayers.



Opal and Matthew Hautz, Jr. on the Matthew’s baptismal day
July 28, 2019

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Poinsettias for Christmas

Please take a minute to sign up to purchase a poinsettia to adorn our sanctuary during the season of Christmas—the cost is \$12.99 and the deadline to order is December 11th. If you have any questions, please contact Janet Gomez.

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Happy Birthday To . . .

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|------------------------|---------------|
| Taylor Badger | December 5th |
| Ellie Crocker | December 13th |
| Irene Albert | December 16th |
| Christina Allen Badger | December 30th |



Blue Christmas Service

Apostles will again hold a “Blue Christmas Service” on **Wednesday, December 21st, at 7:00 PM**. This is a service of remembrance, comfort and hope. We will be making luminaries to line the entrance into the church for

the service—please take a minute to write names of loved ones on a white bag—the display is on the table in the narthex. We also would like to give out prayer shawls to those attending the service—if you would like to help make them, please contact Janet Gomez for patterns and prayers.

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Worship Ministry Team Meeting

The Worship Ministry Team will be meeting on Tuesday, December 13th, at 7:00 PM. We will be planning for the season of Christmas and Epiphany. We would LOVE to have you join us!!

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All Lutheran Women’s Retreat—2022



A group 70+ women gathered the weekend of November 5th at beautiful Natural Bridge for the All Lutheran Women’s Retreat—2022. The retreat theme was “Bloom Where You Are

Planted” and the theme scripture was Jeremiah 17:7-8, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planed by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought.” There were 3 large group sessions—Thriving Amidst Change Within Ourselves, Thriving Amidst Change Within the Church and Thriving Amidst Change in the World. It was a wonderful event!! The next retreat will be in the Fall of 2024.

i VAMOS A GUATEMALA !



Apostles Lutheran Church is returning to Guatemala! After a 2 year hiatus because of COVID, we are heading back this coming March. We will once again be working with our brothers and sisters in Mazate and Xojola', providing medical care in their clinic and installing wood stoves in the village. There will be 9 of us traveling from Apostles including Ray Scholz, Janet Gomez, Linda Hodges, Barbara Runk, Donna, and Chase Ambrose, and Chris, Pete and Betsy Liljeberg. We will again be bringing health kits to pass out at the clinic, so you may begin to collect supplies at home. Each kit contains 1 towel, soap, 1 washcloth, toothbrush and paste, safety pins and Band-Aids. It works best when people collect supplies for an entire kit. We will let you know when to bring them to church for the packing party! Muchas gracias por su ayuda y sus oraciones!

Pete Liljeberg

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Happy Baptismal Anniversary to . .

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|-------------------------|---------------|
| CK and Chase Ambrose | December 1st |
| Linda Hodges | December 15th |
| Irene Albert | December 17th |
| Savannah and Kiera Anby | December 21st |
| Robert McMahan | December 23rd |
| Sue Turner | December 25th |

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Congregation Council Meeting

The Congregation Council meeting for December will be **Monday, December 12th at 7:00 PM**—anyone is welcome to attend.

Happy Anniversary To . .

Dan and Teresa Grantham December 16

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Please Keep In Your Prayers

Eddie Freeman, Manning Freeman, Don Garfield, Michael Schlemmer, George Thomas, Jewel Thomas, Sue and George Turner, and Jerry and Lena Woodlief.

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2023 Ministry Spending Plan Approved

A 2023 ministry spending plan of \$120,010 was approved by the congregation on November 20th. A BIG thank you to Tina Britt, our Treasurer!!

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First Sunday Potluck and ELCA Good Gifts Sunday, December 4th!

Please make plans to join us after worship on Sunday, December 4th, for our “First Sunday Potluck.” Please bring any dish to share. We will be kicking off a ELCA Good Gifts appeal that will run through Sunday, December 18th—we will have a short presentation and video and you will have the chance to enter a raffle by making a donation to ELCA Good Gifts. ELCA Good Gifts provides more than 50 different gift-giving options that grow the church, fight hunger and transform lives. These gifts, starting at just \$10, provide direct support for the churchwide ministries of the ELCA. This an easy (and fun!) way for your family, our congregation and our community to say “goodbye” to traditional gift-giving and “hello” to meaningful gifts that really make a difference in the world.



December Opportunities



The Virginia Choral Society will present “The Longest Nights” by Timothy Takach and other holiday favorites on **Saturday, December 17th,**

at 4:00 PM at Trinity Lutheran Church in Newport News, and **Sunday, December 18th, at 4:00 PM** at the Peebles Theater at CNU.

The Virginia Handbell Consort will perform a Christmas program at Reformation Lutheran Church in Newport News **Saturday, December 10th, at 7:00 PM**—the concert is free.



The Virginia Symphony will perform Handel’s Messiah at First Baptist Church in Newport News on **Friday, December 16th at 7:30 PM.**

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Dear Apostles Lutheran Church, As the season of gratitude and giving is upon us, ReconcilingWorks is reaching out to express our deepest gratitude for you and the ways you make the ministry of welcome, inclusion, celebration and advocacy for LGBTQIA+ people possible in the Lutheran Church as a Reconciling in Christ partner. You know first hand the importance of being a space where LGBTQIA+ people and their families can be seen and celebrated for who God lovingly and intentionally made them to be. Thank you for all you have done to ensure an impactful future for ReconcilingWorks.

Aubrey Thonvold, Executive Director

Human Trafficking

For three consecutive Thursday evenings in November, the Virginia Synod presented an on-line bible study and presentation on human trafficking. Lisa Kersey from the non-profit organization, Freekind, was the keynote speaker. The Virginia Synod Tapestry team has produced a video, The Basics of Human Trafficking, to help individuals and congregations learn about human trafficking and the impact it has on millions of people in the United States and around the world. The video not only shares the horrors of human trafficking but also highlights ways that you can get involved to help push back against this injustice. Believe it or not, there was a case of human trafficking a couple of years ago in Mathews. The video can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/772199865>.

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Climate Care

Acting upon a request from several sources, in November 2021 the ELCA Church Council authorized the development of an ELCA social message on climate care. Social messages are ELCA teaching documents that address a focused social topic. Drawing from existing social teaching, they provide theological rationale and social analysis to foster discernment and engagement on a relatively narrow social issue. This project was authorized in light of the grim contemporary situation affecting our global home and the need for fresh action on the part of this church. The draft social message is now available for public feedback! You can read the social message draft and respond to a survey at <https://elca.org/climatecare>. Your input is due by Friday, December 2, 2022. The draft will be edited, guided by the feedback, and presented to the ELCA Church Council to be voted on this coming spring.



Christmas Gifts That Make A Difference

Here is a list of Christmas gifts that can make a difference:

+ **\$10** can buy (1) a supply of magic markers or crayons for enCircle (formerly Lutheran Family Services) Minnick School students, (2) 52 pounds of food for the Bread for Life Food Pantry or (3) purchase a hygiene kit for a GUEST homeless shelter client

+ **\$25** can provide (1) supplies for a Paint Night Party for 4-6 resident of one of enCircle's group homes, (2) 130 pounds of food for the Bread for Life Food Pantry or (3) new work shoes and/or pants for a GUEST client for new employment

+ **\$50** can purchase (1) a Family Pizza party for a new foster family to start building happy memories and positive emotional ties, (2) 260 pounds of food for the Bread for Life Food Pantry or (3) a rental application fee to help someone move into housing from GUEST.

+ **\$100** can provide (1) sanitation supplies and PPE to enCircle Minnick schools and group homes, (2) a week of meals and snacks for a GUEST family of 4.

Donations can be made on these websites:

 **enCircle** www.encircleall.org

 **BREAD FOR LIFE** www.breadforlifepantry.com

 **GUEST** www.guestshelter.org

You can't do everything, but you can do something!!

Save the Date!!

+ **Monday, January 30th–Wednesday, February 1st–Mid-Winter Power In The Spirit**—details will be forthcoming

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Dollars for Scholars Support for Papua New Guinea

Did you know that the Virginia Synod has a companion synod in Papua New Guinea? The Virginia Synod has treasured its relationship with our companion synod, the New Guinea Islands District of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea. Over the years, we have held each other in constant prayer, sent representatives to visit one another, and supported each other in mission. One of the ways that we in Virginia offer support is through a scholarship program. Originally designed to support the Gospel ministry by helping educate pastors' children, generous giving by congregations and individual church members has allowed us to help seminarians and other people preparing for a life of service to the church. As the Papua New Guinea Government has changed some of its education policies, we and our partners in the ECPNG have started to reassess how best to continue this work. We did not provide as many scholarships in 2022, but fully expect to resume this outreach in a meaningful way, with somewhat different guidelines, in 2023 – that is, with your help! Please consider a year-end gift to the PNG Dollars for Scholars program. Mail a check to the Synod Office (in the memo, include PNG Dollars for Scholars) or give online.

Dollars for Scholars



(Editor's note—a former member of our church, Danielle Martin (now Heaney) visited Papua New Guinea.)

A Message from Our Presiding Bishop



In September I had the beautiful privilege of preaching at a combined meeting of the Conference of Bishops and the inaugural gathering of the 2022-23 Fund for Leaders class. It was an amazing meeting of those beginning their call to public ministry and those who have served for decades—and, in some instances, were ready to retire. All have said yes to God’s call—whether it was over 40 years ago or just this year.

What on earth would compel someone to say yes to this call or even to stake one’s life on the seemingly preposterous claims of the gospel—that there is a God who is greater than us, greater than the universe; that this God created all that exists out of love and for love; that this God has infinite care for all of creation and knows each atom intimately; that this God is not far off but entered human life as one of us and spared nothing in order to bring us back into the joy of this relationship of love? Paul charged Timothy to “hold to the standard of sound teaching.” Sound teaching, hmm ... what does this mean? Is this some sort of inert deposit that needs to be guarded and protected? Is it a disembodied theory? Is it lifeless? Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy explicitly declares that this sound teaching—or in Greek, these “healthy words”—is decidedly not static, inert, theoretical or lifeless. This is the transmission of a living faith filled with the power of God revealed in Jesus “who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light” (2 Timothy 1:10). These are the healthful words of life. This is the promise that Lois transmitted to her grandson and Eunice transmitted to her son because they wanted the absolute best for their dear boy. Theories and sound moral teaching do not have the power to save and change lives. Paul called Timothy—and all of us who read this letter—to a bold and living faith. “For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you ... for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). And just as this sound teaching is a living gift, it is also dynamic. It is poured into us by God and flows through us to the world God so loves. It is not a treasure to be

hoarded, but a gift freely given that we may freely give. Portions of 2 Timothy are always read at the installation of a bishop. It was poignant to recall these words at the combined meeting of the Conference of Bishops and Fund for Leaders scholars. Fall is the season of bishop installations, and Paul’s charge to Timothy was read at each one. It is safe to say that the average age of ELCA bishops is older than the average age of seminarians. It is also safe to say that bishops have many more years of public ministry than seminarians who are at the beginning of their careers in the church. Some of the bishops are close to retirement; seminarians are just getting started. But all of us heed Paul’s words and pray that the Spirit rekindle the gift of God that is within us. I imagine that the seminarians who were with us this fall thought of the bishops as sage, utterly confident, self-sufficient Christians. Not true. Actually, no Christian is self-sufficient. We are all dependent on God for everything, for life itself. And we are all the children and grandchildren of our spiritual mothers and grandmothers in whom the living faith lived, just as Lois and Eunice passed on the living faith to Timothy. It is for the gospel that we have been appointed heralds and apostles and teachers so that all may be filled with new life in Christ.

The Reverend Elizabeth Eaton

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Happy Hanukkah

This year the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah begins at sundown on Sunday, December 18th. The feast celebrates a victory of the Jewish people over the Greeks in the years around 165 BCE. At that time, the Jewish people had to rededicate their Temple in Jerusalem and needed to be able to burn their sacred Menorah to do so. They knew the job of rededicating the Temple would take several days and nights, and they only had enough oil for one night. But they prayed and then set to work. Miraculously, the oil lasted eight nights, and the festival was birthed. There will be a special display in the narthex—help yourself to a cookie and a “dreidl” - a spinning top game commonly played during Hanukkah.

