



# First Lutheran Church

Called to proclaim and celebrate the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are nurtured, prepared, and sent to be the light of Christ in our world.

## *“Expedition to Emmanuel”*

During the weeks before Christmas we are all about making all kinds of preparations—from buying gifts to putting up decorations to sending cards to friends and loved ones. We may even find ourselves planning a trip to visit relatives, which can entail getting plane tickets, requesting time off work, getting a pet sitter, packing, and other arrangements as we get ready to travel. Is it any wonder then that during the season of Advent we hear all kinds of Scripture passages encouraging us to be prepared?

So, what is it we are preparing ourselves for during this special time of year? Well, as followers of Christ we understand that we are getting ourselves ready to celebrate the birth of Mary’s child, the one born in a manger who is Christ the Lord. But are we ready for the unexpected?

The story of Mary and Joseph is a great reminder to us all that we can’t always predict what God has in store for us. It also demonstrates that even in unusual situations God can do some astonishing things through us! Imagine the struggles the poor carpenter and his soon-to-be bride went through, as they dealt with an unexpected pregnancy and the disgrace it must have brought to their family’s reputation.

It was probably difficult not being able to tell people about the miracle that God would work through them. After all, who would believe that they were both visited by angels? Not to mention the fact that they would have to travel a great distance from Galilee to Bethlehem in order to take part in a Census. And just think about all the planning and preparation that must have been needed for Mary and Joseph to make that roughly 90-mile journey. In fact, as we contemplate that long trip the holy family took, perhaps all the things we do to prepare ourselves for Christmas can help us connect with this year’s advent theme at church: “Expedition to Emmanuel.”

I think this idea fits rather well with what we Christians are doing this time of year. An expedition is defined as a journey or voyage undertaken by a group of people with a particular purpose, especially that of exploration. And I would imagine that we can all agree that we are eager to explore our belief that God sent his son into the world to teach us about God’s unconditional love, to model for us what it means to follow God’s will, to save us from sin and death, and to be a tangible and visible form of Emmanuel (God with us).

Continues Pg. 2

*Called to proclaim and celebrate the Gospel of Jesus Christ...*

As you begin to make your own preparations for Christmas, I invite you to consider worshipping with us weekly as we light a candle on the advent wreath and hear Bible stories to prepare our hearts for receiving the Christ child. Perhaps you might think about joining Pastor Ryan as he explores an Advent devotional called, *Silent Night: 25 Devotions to Quiet the Soul* (keep reading the newsletter for more details about this). Maybe you can contemplate joining us for caroling and cookies on December 10<sup>th</sup> as we warm our hearts with songs and holiday treats? After all, Christmas helps us remember that just as God had a plan to save the world, he has a plan for our lives as well. And even though we can't always anticipate what God has in store for us, just as Mary and Joseph unexpectedly discovered, we know we will be blessed as they were.

May this season be filled with many blessings for you now, and in the New Year to come!

A blessed Advent and Merry Christmas,  
Pastor Ryan



## Carols, Cocoa, & Cookies

December 10th at 4pm we will gather together and sing some of our favorite Christmas carols. Join us in the fellowship hall, honoring the birth of our savior by making a joyful noise!



Join us for  
Our Holden Evening Prayer  
Service on Monday,  
Dec 11, 7 PM

You are invited to come early, at 6:30 for a time of fellowship & pizza. For many of us, this time of year can be a joyous experience as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. For others, especially those who have lost a loved one or are facing a specific life changing situation, the Holidays can be lonely, sad, or anxiety ridden. Whatever category you find yourself in, please consider taking a much needed break and join us for an evening of food, worship, and prayer.



## Christmas Eve Candlelight Services

Sunday, December 24th  
10 am & 5pm



*This year's Christmas outreach offering will be given to Lutheran World Relief. We will be using special LWR envelopes for our outreach offering.*

*We are nurtured, prepared...*

## Remember your survey!

A short survey was sent out to all members of First Lutheran, on Friday November 17th. The purpose of the survey is to help identify what our congregation believes are the strengths and weaknesses of our church., in order to better serve our community at large. First Lutheran is committed to keeping the survey anonymous, as the intent is simply to gather information, thoughts, and opinions. **Please prayerfully consider filling out the survey and returning it by this Sunday, December 3 (or sooner if possible).** Thank you for your support.



Our Men's group will meet on December 17th at 3pm at Temperate Habits in Mount Vernon.

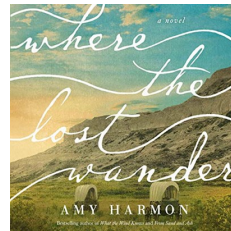
You are invited and you are always welcome to bring a friend.

## Confirmation

Just a friendly reminder that due to Christmas break there will be no Confirmation on December 20<sup>th</sup> or 27<sup>th</sup>! We will resume classes again on January 3<sup>rd</sup> at 6:30pm.

## Sunday School

Parents, please don't forget that there will be a Sunday school class on December 17<sup>th</sup> at 9am. Pastor Ryan will be teaching a lesson focused on Christmas and is hoping to have some special treats for the kids on that day as well.



## Our current book for discussion is...

**"Where the Lost Wander"**  
by Amy Harmon

Join us for a book discussion on January 18th at noon in the Chapel.

## Church Council Meeting Dec 21st @ 6pm

Our last Council Meeting of 2023 will be Dec 21st at 6:00 in the Fellowship Hall. We ask that council members from 2023 and the newly elected 2024 Council Members attend. Retiring Council Members, please remember to bring your Council notebook to pass along to the board member who will proceed you.

## An Advent Opportunity

You are invited to join Pastor Ryan on Friday mornings at 11am and share how your journey through the advent devotional *Silent Night: 25 Devotions to Quiet the Soul* by Rev. Kelsey Peterson Beebe has been going. Each week, beginning on December 8<sup>th</sup>, we will meet at *MV Haggan Market Place* for reflection and discussion.

If you are interested in participating in this faith practice to help us in our "Expedition to Emmanuel" please let the office or Pastor Ryan know and we will get you a copy of the devotional which will be available as a printed hard copy or a digital pdf. The first 10 people to respond will get a free copy, otherwise it can be purchased online for \$10.



## Annual Reports

It is time for committees and boards to prepare to write their annual report. The Annual Report will be presented by the council to the congregation at our February Semi-Annual Meeting. This is a great opportunity to share, not only the happenings of 2023 but also your hopes and dreams for 2024. Please e-mail reports to the church office no later than Sunday, January 14, so that there is plenty of time to compile, edit, and print the report for the congregation. Thank you.

## The Advent Challenge

These days people seem to like a challenge: things like the Ice Bucket Challenge, the Sriracha Challenge, the Hipster Challenge. What if during the season of Advent we challenge the people in our lives who don't attend worship, but say they believe in God, to actually commit to attend Sunday services for the month of December? I call it the Advent challenge! I don't know about you, but I find that my life is so much better when I regularly attend church. There is something spiritually refreshing and nourishing about hearing God's Word proclaimed, receiving Christ in bread and wine, and having fellowship with people who are broken and hurt just like me! In fact, I believe that if people were to give regular church attendance a chance, they may be surprised by what they encounter, especially if they actually put forth the effort to do so with an open heart and mind.

## Friendship House Meal

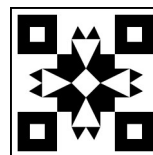
First Lutheran has consistent role in serving our neighbors who are experiencing food and home insecurity. Once per month, we gather supplies for a dinner to be served at both the Friendship House Cafe and now at Skagit First Step in Burlington...Thanks to your generosity!

Sign up to bring items for the Friendship House in the e news, or on the sign-up sheet on the refrigerator in the kitchen.



7 PM • FRIDAY DECEMBER 1 •  
BETHANY COVENANT CHURCH  
FREEWILL OFFERING FOR NEW EARTH RECOVERY.

WWW.NERECOVERY.ORG      WWW.NOELHARP.COM



## Fall 2023 Quilt Donations

Your Social Ministry Committee has decided to do things a little differently this year. Instead of putting stars on the Giving Tree requesting specific things for different organizations we are asking for the following items:

1. Warm hats - all sizes
2. Gloves and mittens - all sizes
3. Warm socks - all sizes
4. Warm scarves - adult size only

We request that all of these items be in new condition; they will be donated to Jefferson & Little Mountain elementary schools, First Steps, Community Action and Friendship House.

Donations will be accepted through Epiphany. Please place your gifts under the tree or in the boxes and bins provided.

As always, the committee thanks you for your donations as we help our less fortunate neighbors stay warm this winter.

## Newsletter Deadline

Our Next Newsletter will be our Lenten Newsletter. If you have information that you would like included, please e mail it to the church office by Jan 25th.

## End of Year Giving

You may be receiving lots of mail from a variety of charities asking for "end of year" gifts. If that is a ritual in your household, we invite you to consider First Lutheran Church and many of its designated funds as a possible recipient of that generosity. Some suggestions include: First Lutheran General Fund and the Lutherwood Scholarship Fund.

Your gifts are appreciated!

The church quilters completed 55 twin size quilts and 1 baby quilt from May 2023 through October 2023. The quilts were blessed on October 22 and packed for delivery.

The following agencies were given quilts:

Family Promise 10 plus 1 baby  
First Steps Center 7  
Kendall Court Homes 5  
Lutheran World Relief 9  
Martha's Place 14  
New Earth Recovery 4  
Teen Oasis 6  
TOTAL 55 plus 1

Anyone is welcome to join us on the second and fourth Thursdays to help finish the quilts. We are called the church quilters but no complicated sewing is involved on Thursdays; if you can tie a simple knot you possess all the qualifications needed. (If you really enjoy piecing quilt tops we have wonderful donated fabric to take, and at home create a 60"x80" quilt top for us.) Please consider helping in this worthwhile ministry of providing warm quilts for various agencies in our valley as well as contributing to Lutheran World Relief.

## Cleaning Your Linen Closet? Donations Requested

The church quilters are in need of flat sheets to use for the backs of the quilts we make each month. Do you have gently worn, stain free flat sheets, twin size or larger, that you no longer use? Any color or print is acceptable! Not to be choosy, but fitted sheets, unless they are king size do not work for our use. Also, it is difficult to use the microfiber sheets, our preference is cotton or cotton/polyester blends. Donations will be gratefully accepted and they can be placed in the quilters storage room at the far end of Fellowship Hall. If you would like acknowledgement of the donation please attach a note



On Sunday, the Congregation passed a budget that was not fully funded. As you are most likely aware, our budget provides money to pay our staff (pastor, parish administrator, piano accompanist, choir director, and janitor), but also provides money of equal importance for church maintenance, utilities, and many mission items (Josephine, Neighbors in Need, Community Action, and Friendship House), and of course our Synod.

I believe, as many of us do, that everything we have belongs to God. During the early Church this was demonstrated in Acts 2: verse 44. “And all who believed were together and hand things in common, and they sold their possessions and distributed to all, as any had need.”

To give God’s gift back to him is a blessing. What should be asked of any member of our Congregation is to pray about your giving and let the Holy Spirit guide you in your giving. It may be that your present giving is all you can afford to give, and it truly is a blessing. Thank you for your stewardship and financial assistance. If through prayer and the Spirit you decide to give more than you are giving now, it will most certainly be a blessing to you and it could help First Lutheran prosper.

God bless,

Donn Hollenbeck

If using offering envelopes is important to your personal stewardship practice, the church will happily provide them for your use. We are not requesting worshippers to use envelopes, order them only if you find them helpful. Giving statement are provided, by request at the end of the calendar year. Offering envelopes will be available, by request, please email the church office [office@firstlutheranmv.org](mailto:office@firstlutheranmv.org) to make a request. If you place an order for offering envelopes, they will be available for pick up at the church in late Dec. or early Jan. Thank you for supporting the Ministries of First Lutheran!

**FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH**

2015 E. Blackburn Rd.  
Mount Vernon WA 98274  
Mailing: PO Box 777

**Worship Services**

Sunday Worship 10:00 am

**Church Office**-[office@firstlutheranmv.org](mailto:office@firstlutheranmv.org)

Website w/calendar [www.firstlutheranmv.org](http://www.firstlutheranmv.org)  
Church Phone: 360 424-6832  
Direct number for Pastor Ryan Rouse- 360 603-6379

**To reach our Staff:**

**Pastor- Pastor Ryan Rouse**  
[Pastorryan@firstlutheranmv.org](mailto:Pastorryan@firstlutheranmv.org)

**Holly Oliver,**  
Parish Administrator-[office@firstlutheranmv.org](mailto:office@firstlutheranmv.org)

**Pete Olson,**  
Worship Accompanist-[peterdonne@yahoo.com](mailto:peterdonne@yahoo.com)



**First Lutheran**

**Our Congregational Leaders**

**President**– Donn Hollenbeck

**Vice President**– Bob Ramborger

**Secretary**– Yvonne Carter, Sandy Simon

**Treasurer**– Brad Pickett

**Trustees**

Jeff May, Brad Clifton, Bob Ramborger

**Deacons**

Heather Romano, Bud Fish, Doug Carter

**Parish Activities**

Ann May, Jana Svendsen, Sue Holmes