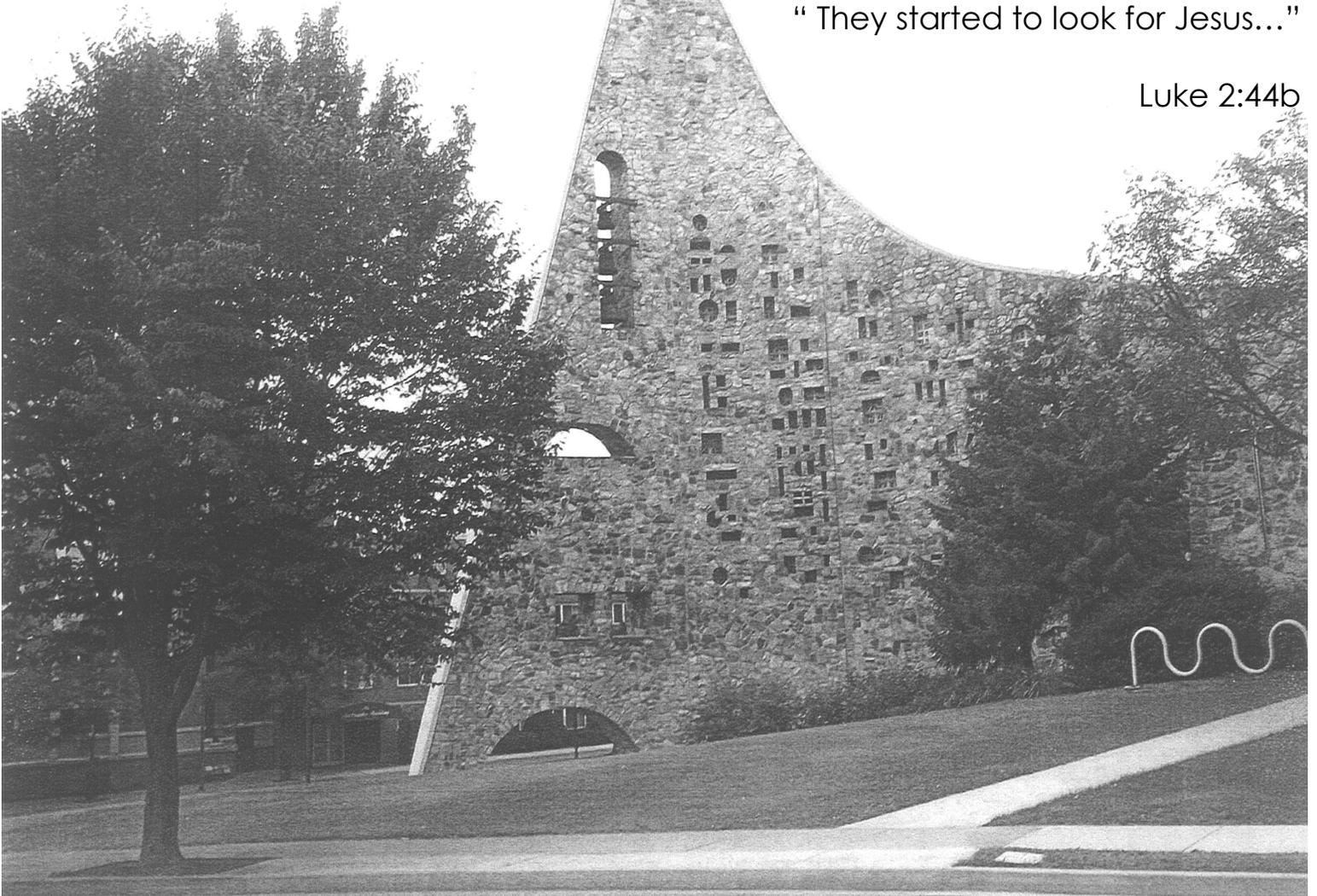


# Welcome to **GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH**

“ They started to look for Jesus...”

Luke 2:44b



**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 30, 2018**  
**First Sunday of Christmas**

205 S. Garner St., State College, PA 16801

**phone:** 814-238-2478

**email:** [churchoffice@glcpa.org](mailto:churchoffice@glcpa.org)

**web address:** [www.glcpa.org](http://www.glcpa.org)

**9:00 and 10:30 a.m. worship service**

**Today's Hymns**

**#ELW 294**

**#ELW 269**

**#ELW 270**

**Distribution**

**#ELW 296**

**#ELW 292**



**Our Mission Statement:** *"Grace Lutheran Church is energized by the Holy Spirit and nurtured through God's Word and Sacrament to **gather, feed, and send** people in the name of Jesus Christ."*

**ABOUT TODAY'S THEME...**On the first Sunday of Christmas we find the boy Samuel and the boy Jesus, both in the temple, both growing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and humankind. We too have returned to the house of God "to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God," who has gifted us with a savior. As the festival continues, "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." It is Christmas, still.

**A WORD ON THE READINGS...****The First Lesson:** Having dedicated her son Samuel to God's service, Hannah visits him every year when she and her husband, Elkanah, come to the Lord's house to offer sacrifices. God grants Hannah more children, and Samuel himself gains favor in the sight of all. **The Second Lesson:** Just as newly baptized Christians in the early church were clothed with white robes upon arising from the baptismal waters, so all who have received God's gift of life in Jesus Christ are covered with the character of Christ. **The Gospel Lesson:** Jesus grew up in a family that went to the Passover festival each year. It was in this environment of faithful adherence to the law that Jesus grew into spiritual maturity and an understanding of his identity and mission.

Forgot your checks? Not carrying cash? No worries! You can still make an offering. Go to [www.glcpc.org](http://www.glcpc.org) and click the word "**GIVE**" on the far right to make an online credit card donation. Thank you!

### **MILESTONE MINISTRY AT GRACE**

At Grace we celebrate milestones. Milestones are designed to connect significant occasions in people's lives with their ongoing journey of faith. A Milestone Moment brings family, friends, and congregations together to mark a special time in their lives and acknowledge and affirm God's presence in their midst. It is a tool to connect home and church in the child's and family's faith life. In addition to naming (the occasion), blessing (the person) and gifting (the gift), we send along an "At Home" sheet to reinforce the milestone with caring conversation.

↑ = Please stand as you are able

↓ = Please be seated

## **Follow Grace on Social Media**

Facebook:  
[www.facebook.com/glcstatecollege](http://www.facebook.com/glcstatecollege)

Twitter:  
[@GraceLCPA](https://twitter.com/GraceLCPA)

# Welcome to Grace Lutheran Church - State College, Pennsylvania

PRELUDE *Une flambeau, Jeannette, Isabella*.....Uehlein

## WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Pastor: In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

↑ **Congregation: Amen.**

P: God of all mercy and consolation, come to the aid of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**C: Amen.**

P: Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

*Kneel/Sit*

P: Most merciful God,

↓ **C: We confess that we have turned from you and given ourselves into the power of sin. We are truly sorry and humbly repent. In your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things we have done and things we have failed to do. Turn us again to you, and uphold us by your Spirit, so that we may live and serve you in newness of life through Jesus Christ, your only Son our Lord. Amen.**

P: In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

## **GATHER**

*The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.*

PROCESSIONAL HYMN *In the Bleak Midwinter*.....ELW #294

↑ P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**C: And also with you.**

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

In peace, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mer - cy.**

For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mer - cy.**

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God,

and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mer - cy.**

For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise,

let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mer - cy.**

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gra - cious Lord. **A - men.**

# HYMN OF PRAISE

(ELW p. 140)

*Refrain*  
 This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al-le - lu - ia,  
 al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia. 1 Wor - thy is Christ, the Lamb  
 who was slain, whose blood set us free to be peo - ple of God.

*Refrain*  
 This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al-le - lu - ia,  
 al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia. 2 Pow - er, rich - es, wis - dom, and  
 strength, and hon - or, bless - ing, and glo - ry are his.

*Refrain*  
 This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al-le - lu - ia,  
 al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia. 3 Sing with all the peo - ple of  
 God, and join in the hymn of all cre - a - tion: Bless - ing, hon - or,  
 glo - ry, and might be to God and the Lamb for - ev - er. A - men.

*Refrain*  
 This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al-le - lu - ia,  
 al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia. 4 For the Lamb who was  
 slain has be - gun his reign. Al - le - lu - ia.

*Final refrain*  
 This is the feast of vic - to - ry for our God.  
 Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

P: Let us pray.

**C: Shine into our hearts the light of your wisdom, O God, and open our minds to the knowledge of your word, that in all things we may think and act according to your good will and may live continually in the light of your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

**FEED**

*God speaks to us in scripture reading,  
and feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.*

↓ (10:30) CHILDREN'S MESSAGE.....Darcy Houseknecht  
*We welcome everyone to worship and encourage children of all ages to participate fully in our service. Qualified nursery care is available as needed. The nursery is located in room 204.*

FIRST LESSON.....1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 (pew Bible p. 214)

<sup>18</sup>Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod. <sup>19</sup>His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. <sup>20</sup>Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "May the Lord repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the Lord"; and then they would return to their home.

<sup>26</sup>Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with the people.

PSALM 148—*Please sing responsively from the selected verses.*



Psalm tone reproduced from *Psalter for Worship Year C* © 2006 Augsburg Fortress.  
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**L:** Hallelujah! Praise the LORD | from the heavens;  
praise God | in the heights.

**C:** **mountains | and all hills,**  
**fruit trees | and all cedars;**

**L:** wild beasts | and all cattle,  
creeping things and | flying birds;

**C:** **sovereigns of the earth | and all peoples,**  
**princes and all rulers | of the world;**

**L:** young | men and maidens,  
old and | young together.

**C:** **Let them praise the name | of the LORD,**  
**whose name only is exalted, whose splendor is over | earth and heaven.**

SECOND LESSON.....Colossians 3:12-17 (pew Bible p. 958)

<sup>12</sup>As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds

everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.



Al - le - lu - ia. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the



words of e - ter - nal life. Al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (ELW p. 142a)  
 HOLY GOSPEL..... Luke 2:41-52(pew Bible p. 833)

L: The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke the 2nd chapter.

**C: Glory to you, O Lord. (spoken)**

<sup>41</sup>Now every year [Jesus'] parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup>And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. <sup>43</sup>When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. <sup>44</sup>Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup>When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. <sup>46</sup>After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>And all who

heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." <sup>49</sup>He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup>But they did not understand what he said to them. <sup>51</sup>Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

<sup>52</sup>And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: **Praise to you, O Christ.** (*spoken*)

SERMON.....Pastor Schul

↓ HYMN OF THE DAY *Once in Royal David's City*.....ELW #269

↑ APOSTLES' CREED

C: **I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.**

**Amen.**

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Response after each petition:

L: Lord, in your mercy

C: **Hear our prayer.**

WE SHARE THE LORD'S PEACE

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: **And also with you.**

OFFERTORY *Greensleeves*.....Vaughan Williams

OFFERTORY SONG Sung to: "*O Little Town of Bethlehem*" (*stanza 4*)

↓ C: **O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;**



**cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!**

**P:** Holy God, gracious and merciful, you bring forth food from the earth and nourish your whole creation. Turn our hearts toward those who hunger in any way, that all may know your care; and prepare us now to feast on the bread of life, Jesus Christ, your only Son our Lord.

**C: Amen.**

**GREAT THANKSGIVING**

(ELW p. 144)

**P:** It is indeed right, our duty and our joy that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise .... we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**P:** The Lord be with you. **C:** And al - so with you.

**P:** Lift up your hearts. **C:** We lift them to the Lord.

**P:** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**C:** It is right to give our thanks and praise.

**C: *Joy to the World* (stanzas 2 & 4)**

**2. Joy to the world, the Savior reigns! Let all their songs employ, while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.**

**4. He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love, and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.**

P: Holy One, the beginning and the end, the giver of life: Blessed are you for the birth of creation. Blessed are you in the darkness and in the light. Blessed are you for your promise to your people. Blessed are you in the prophets' hopes and dreams. Blessed are you for Mary's openness to your will. Blessed are you for your Son Jesus, the Word made flesh.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

With this bread and cup we remember our Lord's Passover from death to life, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

**C: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

P: God of salvation and resurrection, pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine. Send us forth, burning with justice, peace, and grace. And to you, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be praise and honor, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

**C: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass**

against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.  
Amen.

P: The gifts of God for the people of God. Come, the meal is ready.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

### COMMUNION DISTRIBUTION

*All who are baptized are invited to join the congregation in receiving the Savior's Body and Blood. Children not yet receiving Communion are invited forward for a blessing. Rice wafers and grape juice are available for those who have sensitivities to wheat or alcohol. An acolyte has a special tray with these alternative communion elements.*

**Instructions:** Upon receiving the bread, move to the chalice and dip the bread in the consecrated wine.

C: (ELW p.146)

### COMMUNION HYMNS:

ELW #296 -- *What Child Is This*

ELW #292 -- *Love Has Come*

Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; have  
mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the  
world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the  
sin of the world; grant us peace.

P: The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

C: **Amen.**

Angels, from the Realms of Glory.....ELW #275

**Angels, from the realms of glory, wing your flight o'er all the earth; once you sang creation's story, now proclaim Messiah's birth: Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the newborn king.**

P: O God, we give you thanks that you have set before us this feast, the body and blood of your Son. By your Spirit strengthen us to serve all in need and to give ourselves away as bread for the hungry, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**C: Amen.**

**SEND**

*God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.*

P: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

**C: Amen.**

HYMN *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*.....ELW #270

A: Go in peace; serve the Lord.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

POSTLUDE *Postlude on Mendelssohn*.....Willcocks



The Rev. Scott E. Schul, Senior Pastor.....pastorschul@glcpa.org  
Cindy Fritz,& Peter Horn, Faith Formation.....faithformation@glcpa.org  
Laurel Sanders, Music & Arts Ministry Coordinator.....lsanders@glcpa.org  
Jayne Glocke.....Adult Choir Director  
Erik Clayton .....Organist  
Pat Lloyd & June Miller.....Pianists  
Joan Kovalchik.....Flute  
Anna Carol Buffington.....The Bells of Grace Director

The Rev P. Stevens Lynn.....Pastor Emeritus

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# Grace Lutheran

## Announcements for the Week of Sunday, December 31, 2018

**A FRIENDLY GREETING TO ALL...**who have joined us today to worship and praise our Lord & Savior. May this time of worship bless us to be a blessing to others. If you are a guest this morning please complete the beige contact card in the pew pocket where you are seated and place it in the offering plate. Thank you.

**ACOLYTES NEEDED...**We are looking to expand our roster of acolytes for all services. The commitment is typically one service per month and we work around your family schedule. It is also a great way to involve kids in the worship service. Please contact Stephanie Fozard at [steph@fozards.com](mailto:steph@fozards.com) if interested.

**LECTORS...**The January & February sign-up sheets are in the narthex. Thanks to those who have served as lectors in the past. Veterans and **new** readers of all ages are also encouraged to sign up!

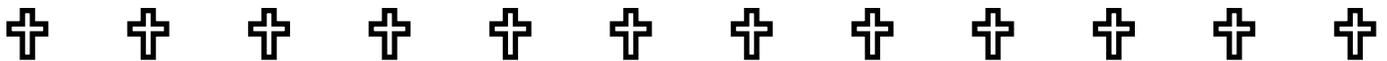
**GARDEN OF READIN'S** next meeting is on Tuesday, January 15 at 10:30 am in the Stinson Library and 6:00 pm in Fireside. The book selection is *My Jesus Year: A Rabbi's Son Wanders the Bible Belt on Search of His Own Faith* by Benyamin Cohen. The meeting will be facilitated by Cindy Keith.

**HELP WANTED.....**Meals on Wheels is looking for a Meal Coordinator. Responsible for activities that support the successful preparation, packaging, and delivery of daily meals. Work activities include: the organization and cleanliness of kitchen and other work areas, daily meal counts, cold meals preparation, meal supplies inventory, operation of Meal Lines, dishwashing, and assistance to the Cook. Although the position is part-time, it has the potential to become full-time. We operate Monday through Friday. Please email resume to [scmealsonwheels@gmail.com](mailto:scmealsonwheels@gmail.com).

**SPONSORSHIP SIGN-UP CHARTS...**for radio broadcasts, altar flowers, and bulletins are now in the Narthex. Costs are the same as last year - \$165 for one sponsor or two people can share \$82.50 each for broadcast, \$75 for altar flowers and still \$25 for bulletins and can be dedicated to honor or memorialize someone or to the Glory of God. Explanation sheets and reminder envelopes are also with the charts. Thank you very much for your support.

## Worship Assistants for Sunday, December 31, 2018

	8:00 A.M.	9:00 A.M.	10:30 A.M.
<b>Lectors</b>	Nancy Reinert	Angie Hardyk	Barbara Vogler
<b>Greeters</b>	Martha Musser		Don & Gina Leon
<b>Acolytes</b>	Ryan Pencek	Ethan Hardyk Spencer Hardyk	Sophia Bills Mirabella Bills
<b>Deacons</b>	Don Widener	Carl Bankert Sally Keiser-Bankert	Rich & Sharon Rivell
<b>Worship Assistant</b>	George Weigand	Ken Shafranko	
<b>Cantor</b>		Terry Roof	Betsy Hunter
<b>Ushers</b>		Erin Kauffman Shawn Kauffman Martha Musser Carol Findley Gorman Findley	Brian Bills Jeya Chandra Beth Shafranko Ken Shafranko Dave Heatwole Troy Heatwole
<b>Radio Ministry; Sound</b>			Karl Hosterman
<b>Coffee Hour Hosts 10:00-10:30 a.m.</b>			Les & Cathy Cutter
<b>Welcome Center Hosts</b>			Sharon Rivell



The *altar flowers* are sponsored by Lucy Alton  
Dedicated to the honor of Miss Frankie B. Dimm and Mr. L. Miles Bower wedding  
anniversary

This morning's *bulletin* is sponsored by Brenda & John Palmgren  
Dedicated to the Glory of God

Today's *radio broadcast* on WRSC - 1390 AM is sponsored by Jim & Ellen  
Campbell  
Dedicated in memory of Lydia & Eugene Herman

**PRAYER CONCERNS for December 31, 2018**

All Military & Nat'l Guard and those serving in war-torn Countries	Dick Houtz Ruth Kistler Larry Kuhns	Kyle Steffens college roommate of Laurel Sanders Ken Shultz
Susan Antle Celeste Barnes & family of Ed Jenkins	Ryan Louder Tuckey Louder Phil Lucas	William D. Snape Sr. brother of Phyllis Favorite Jack Sylves and family and grandparents Tom and Marj Eakin
Scott Cocolin Marion & Winnie Deppen Sherri Ebeling & family daughter of Elaine Ebeling	Danielle McHenry Jo Anne Miller Maryann Newcomb Chuck Noel	Lisa Thomas, Sally & Carl's friend Karen Tupman, Cousin of Phyllis Favorite
Vicki Garvin Donna Pedersen Hershey niece of Gina Leon Sharron & Carl Hintosh	Robert Schlegel Craig Peery Margie Prothro sister of Ed Jenkins	

**Members in the hospital**



**Weekly Prayer Letter of Encouragement**

*"Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it. A person is powerful on their knees." ~ Corrie ten Boom*

We at Grace strive to be a people of prayer. Each week in our bulletin we list Grace members or people connected to our Grace family who are in need of our prayers. Each week, one person is selected to receive a special letter of encouragement. Please sign the letter in the Upper Commons or Narthex and pray for that person this week.

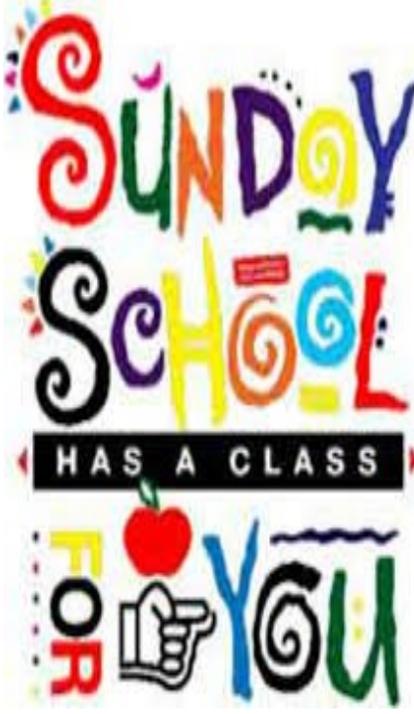
**This week the Prayer Letter will be sent to Betty Shirk.**



Prayer is a powerful gift and tool God gives to us. *Please pray for the request each day of the week during your daily prayer time. Just think how powerful it would be if all our members prayed for the same thing each day.*

*Pray that God might help you establish a regular and consistent time of daily prayer.*

**ONLINE GIVING AVAILABLE NOW VIA OUR WEBSITE** – In response to member requests and societal preferences, we now have online giving options on our website. This is envisioned as a place for members, guests and visitors to make donations for bucket collections (such as for Out of the Cold, which you can do now) or extra donations to our General Fund (for programs and outreach) or our Building Fund to pay off the wonderful additions to our property and facilities. Visit [www.glcpa.org](http://www.glcpa.org) and look for the GIVE button on the upper right-hand side at the top. Set up an account with Tithe.ly (our provider, serving more than 6,000 churches worldwide with secure online gift processing), enter your credit card information (Visa, MasterCard, American Express, JCB, Discover, or Diners Club), and you're ready to go!



**SUNDAY SCHOOL, FOR ALL AGES,**

If you are new to Sunday School and would like more information, please contact Cindy Fritz or Peter Horn for more information ([faithformation@glcpa.org](mailto:faithformation@glcpa.org)).

**Room assignments are as follows:**

- Ages 3 & 4: Room #201
- Kindergarten: Room #200
- Grades 1 & 2: Room #103
- Grades 3, 4, & 5: Room #105
- Middle School: Youth Room in the Miller Center
- High School: Meet in the Narthex and walk to Starbucks

We are still looking for teachers to help with Preschool, Kindergarten, and Grades 3, 4, & 5. Please contact Cindy or Peter if you are available to help.

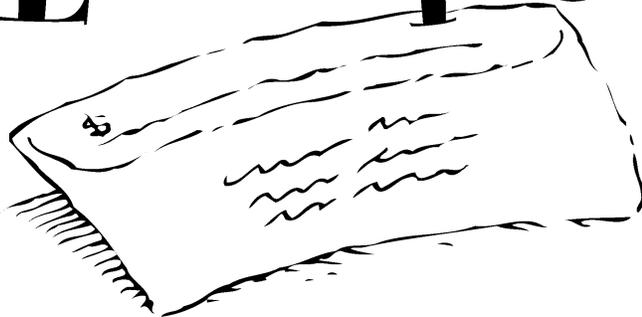
## Sunday morning sponsorships

*Thank you* to all who have signed up to sponsor the altar flowers, bulletins or radio broadcast. To help you and the church office keep track of your payment for the sponsorships, please take an envelope located in the niche at the sign up sheets to remind you of the date you selected and the amount due Grace Lutheran by your sponsorship date. A new procedure was implemented effective July 1, 2018 that if payment has not been received by the church office by the sponsorship date, a friendly reminder will be sent the following week to the person(s) who signed up to be a sponsor. If you feel you have received the friendly reminder in error, please by all means contact the church office (238-2478; [churchoffice@glcpa.org](mailto:churchoffice@glcpa.org)) so we can straighten out the matter. *Thank you*

***No Super Wednesday activities till January 9th. Please have a joyous Christmas and a safe and Happy New Year.***

***Happy  
New  
Year!***

## **Offering Envelopes**



### **2019 OFFERING ENVELOPES**

As we start a new church year, each of us must ask, "What are our priorities? Where are we placing our treasure?" The envelopes are on the tables in the narthex. Prayerfully ponder your priorities for the coming year, and use your offering envelopes to help direct them.

When picking up your 2018 envelopes, please confirm that the envelope number on the top label of the box matches the number in the little window on the front left side of the box. If they do not match, please let the office know immediately and please do not use those envelopes.

Christmas comes at a descending time. The old year is coming to an end, the new year is not yet here. It is too late to accomplish goals set on the previous New Year's Day, and just enough time to realize that whatever shape or state you are in will be the shape or state in which you end the year. There is a hefty dose of "what-might-have-been."

In the Northern Hemisphere the trees are bare, fields are barren, birds have migrated, animals are hibernating, the days are short and the nights are long. The earth's colors are muted, and when there is snow the world becomes silent. Sometimes during these short days and long nights I find myself thinking about the brevity of life. This conflicts with my tendency to believe that the possibility of self-improvement and renewal is limitless: there is always another day, more time, another chance. I remember watching our first child as she slept in her cradle, thinking about the future before her and, at the same time, the reality that there would be an end. The Ash Wednesday declaration, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return," became more pointed and more poignant. The cradle-to-grave progression is our path; the inevitable decline of our strength.

"As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more" (Psalm 103:15).

Maybe this is why the Christmas season can be so fraught. Of course, there is anticipation and celebration, but there is also pressure and stress. Perhaps we are trying to greet the Lord's birth with our best efforts (when I was a girl, Christmas preparations were not complete until the silver was polished, and that job fell to me), but desperation can creep into the urgency to get Christmas right, to hold back the night. "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight" (ELW, 279). This is freight that Christmas can't carry when Christmas depends on us.

But Christmas also comes at an opportune time. God did not come to us that first Christmas when we were at the top of our game or when the world was perfect. Even the circumstances of Jesus' birth were a sharp reminder that all was not well – forced migration to Bethlehem, no room for the young family, born in a stall. Emmanuel – God with us – came to us and comes to us precisely at the time when our need is greatest. Our attempts to bring about perfection actually get in the way of receiving the gift. When we try to fit into an unrealistic ideal of who we ought to be instead of welcoming God into our real self, no matter how messy, then what is left on the 13th day of Christmas? Fatigue, certainly, but also the dull acceptance that life moves from cradle to grave.

On Christmas, God has reversed the cradle to grave progression. The angel announced to the shepherds:

*"I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: for to you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."*

Here is the new reality. Here is the truth. Our lives are not a meaningless trudge from cradle to grave, but a joyful journey – true and lasting joy – from grave to cradle. All our brokenness and death meet life and healing and hope in the child in the manger. His cradle defeats the grave. We are loved. We are alive. Now we are free to greet this holy season.

*Merry Christmas, dear church.*

*Elizabeth A. Eaton*

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.



**Sunday, December 30  
No Sunday School**

- 8:00 a.m.....Worship with Holy Communion, Sanctuary
- 9:00 a.m.....Worship with Holy Communion
- 10:30 a.m.....Worship with Holy Communion
- 4:00 p.m.....Psalm 151 Rehearsal, Sanctuary
- 6:00 p.m.....Casual Worship w/ Holy Communion, Sanctuary

**Monday, December 31  
GLPK no school  
Church office closed  
No church calendar events**

**Tuesday, January 1  
GLPK no school  
Church office closed  
No church calendar events**

**Wednesday, January 2  
GLPK no school  
No church calendar events**

**Thursday, January 3  
GLPK no school**

- 7:00 a.m.....Women’s Breakfast Prayer Group, Waffle Shop North

**Friday, January 4  
GLPK no school  
No church calendar events**

**Saturday, January 5  
No church calendar events**

