



St. John's

Ev. Lutheran Church

VOL. 149 No. 1 MONTHLY

JANUARY 2021

Repentance: Over the course of this Advent season, Pr. Bruss and I have sought to give Biblical answers to this global pandemic. One of the reasons is to call us to repentance—individually, as well as the nations. It is for us to repent of our collective rebellion in despising His Word and disobeying His Commandments. And the promise of God is, for those who repent, He will relent. You are familiar with 2 Chronicles 7.11-14, which states, “...if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” A faithful 2 Chronicles 7.14 prayer is the first part of Daniel 9, where Daniel, who is in exile in Babylon, repents for his sin and the sin of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Take a look at his prayer. Know that when disaster strikes, when calamity comes upon us the way that it has, the Scriptures tell us to repent. To humble ourselves, to consider our sin—your sin—to confess it, and to pray for God’s mercy.

Winnowing/Smelting: One of the things Lord does with evil and tragedy is to strengthen faith. St. James says that trials of various kinds test the mettle of faith and make it steadfast. St. Peter in his first letter says that Christians are grieved by various afflictions to affirm the genuineness of their trust in the Lord. There, Peter uses a very interesting image—the image of smelting. Afflictions “smelt” faith. They put it into the furnace and begin to turn faith into what it will be in heaven. And in that furnace they burn off every form of idolatry and unbelief. God does this to preserve the pure teaching and preaching of the Gospel, because it’s only through that that He makes Christians and keeps them in the faith.

You can almost read the history of the whole Old Testament as God using separation to preserve His promises and His faithful. That’s why He rescues from Egypt. That’s why He sends judges, then kings, then prophets. But if the people won’t listen to words, He sends plagues and pestilence, locusts and drought, famine and invading armies. But He always leaves a faithful remnant. He smelts the metal. The dross is cast out and the gold remains. He tosses the wheat into the air with His winnowing fork, the chaff is blown off, and the rich grains fall onto the threshing floor. But that separation of faith from unbelief, of the faithful from the faithless—that’s not what God’s really after. For He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. That’s what He’s doing right now with this pandemic. Even when it happens in *your* church remember what the Lord’s up to and remember His promises. The very gates of hell cannot and will not prevail against His Church. He will always preserve His faithful remnant. He smelts and winnows not to destroy but to build up.

Memento Mori: We are so fond of living, that we don’t want to consider the subject of Death. It’s unpleasant, depressing, a macabre thought, but Covid is forcing our hand. Every day we hear the latest bad news and see people wearing masks, afraid of each other. Every day we read of the national death toll or learn of someone else who has tested positive. That’s Covid stalking behind us, whispering in our ears—*memento mori*. We do not know when death will come for us, but it is coming. You may escape Covid, but Death still has an arrow in his quiver that will reach your heart at some point. Thus, a sincere meditation upon one’s death is healthy. It leads us to set our affections upon things above, and not upon the smoldering ruins of things below.

You practice *memento mori* each Ash Wednesday as ash is placed on your forehead, and you hear, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” There you remember that while other things are uncertain, Death is sure. Each Sunday you *memento mori* by singing the Nunc Dimittis and when you pray, “Thy kingdom come,” and “Deliver us from evil,” in the Lord’s Prayer. Whether you know it or not, have got a leg up on practicing *memento mori*.

But why must you die? Why has God fearfully and wonderfully made you, only to endure briefly before succumbing to death and crumbling back to the dust? You die because you sin. This is the penalty brought upon you on account of the transgression of Adam and Eve. However, there is another *memento mori* for you: it is the crucifix itself, standing before your eyes as a continual reminder of the One who died in your place. He was One who had no original sin from

Adam and Eve, and racked up no debts while living, though tempted in all ways as we are. He was handed over by His heavenly Father to the cross, abandoned there, and went willingly.

Yet at the same time, the crucifix serves as a continual reminder that His death was sufficient. And to prove to the world that His death was good for all, paying for all sin, and closing all accounts in God's eyes, God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. Death has a solution? It does! For on the third day Christ rose again and now lives and reigns for all eternity. The crucifix is a promise to all who cling to Christ crucified in faith, that death will not have the last word. Yes—Covid forces our hand to *memento mori* but we *memento Christi*! We remember Christ! For resurrection and eternal life have the last word, death does not. Jesus' words to you are the same ones He gave to Martha, "*He who lives and believes in Me will never die*" (John 11:26). This is the promise of the Gospel to take into your death.

+ Pr. Kerns +

SHROVE TUESDAY—16 FEBRUARY 2021

So ... what comes before Ash Wednesday? Mardi gras you say? Fat Tuesday?

Well, actually ... that day has also historically be known in the church as "Shrove Tuesday." That funny word "shrove" is from an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning "write" (you get a hint of that idea in our word "scribe," closely related to "shrove"). On that day, if you hadn't been "shriven" (written down) in the parish register as having made confession or been examined in the faith or, as Lutherans have recently talked about it, "announced for communion," since the last "Shrove Tuesday," well, here was your chance. And so, in fact, the historical practice of the Western Church—and therefore also Lutherans—was to use Shrove Tuesday not as a day of unbridled submission to the lusts of the flesh (the Mardi Gras tradition), but for penitential introspection to prepare to enter Lent and receive the Sacrament on Ash Wednesday. ("Against You, You only have I sinned, and done what is evil in Your sight," says the psalmist (Ps 51)).

We'd like to make that opportunity available personally to "announce for communion" face to face with one of the pastors in short 5 to 10 minute appointments this coming Shrove Tuesday—if needed, we'll add more opportunities on Ash Wednesday. Selfishly we'd appreciate the opportunity to interact pastorally with you, pray with you and for you, and offer the counsel of God's Word. You can even use the opportunity for Private Confession and Absolution. The rite of Private Confession and Absolution is in *Lutheran Service Book* on pp. 292-293 if you want to study up on it. The penitent comes to the pastor and says, "Pastor, please hear my confession and pronounce forgiveness in order to fulfill God's will." God's will is, of course, that "all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4)—and He brings the salvation He won on His holy cross through the Word of forgiveness spoken over a penitent sinner.

The rite then proceeds with a standard written confession that is quite general—a confession of one's sinful nature and a general confession of one's sins of omission and commission—like you do every Sunday. It's only after that general confession that the penitent, "if [s/he] wishes to confess specific sins that trouble [him/her]," may continue and say, "What troubles me particularly is that ...," and then confess those conscience-plaguing sins. In other words, the rite doesn't even *require* confession of specific sins—although it's always a good thing. After all, when David sinned with Bathsheba he didn't "generally sin," he committed adultery; and it's that sin that he confessed.

As you give prayerful consideration to making a personal and private pastoral appointment on Shrove Tuesday, it's important to bear in mind what's called the "seal of the confessional." Basically, we pastors are bound by our ordination vows *never* to divulge what is shared with us in private, especially sins—it's not even shared "professionally" pastor to pastor. All such communication remains where it's made—and as for the sins, when the Absolution is pronounced they're buried in Christ's grave, dead and gone, and you leave with the assurance that God doesn't look at you askance for your sins but forgives them.

Once the Absolution has been pronounced, after a brief additional word of comfort on the part of the pastor, the penitent receives a blessing, and pastor and penitent depart.

Of course, the appointment you make with the pastor doesn't *need* to go in that direction. Private Confession and Absolution isn't a *requirement*. It's a blessing for those who are especially burdened by their sin. If that's the direction

The Augsburg Confession on private confession:
*Of Confession our churches teach that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible according to the Psalm: 'Who can understand his errors?' Psalm 19:12. Read more, too, in *The Small Catechism* [here](#).*

the conversation goes, well and good; if not, we hope you'll regard Shrove Tuesday as a wonderful opportunity for you to converse with the pastor about things with eternal consequence and value.

More information about our Shrove Tuesday plans (spilling into Ash Wednesday if necessary) will be forthcoming in the February Newsletter.

If you have never taken advantage of this historic, continuing practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, we encourage you to do so, especially in such a time as this, when circumstances—Covid—practically beg nothing but that “the whole life of believers should be repentance” (*95 Theses*). Shrove Tuesday, 16 February, is an excellent occasion to begin. Mark your calendars now.



Senior Pastor - Rev. J. S. Bruss, ext. 104

Associate Pastor – Rev. D. M. Kerns, ext. 101

Kantor - Bethany M. Johnson

TLS Teachers – Erin Grass, Josh Grass, Andrea Kosmicki

ONGOING SAFETY PRECAUTIONS AT ST. JOHN'S

- Congregants and pastors are masked
- Communion ware is sanitized after every use
- Pastors wash their hands in rubbing alcohol immediately before administering communion
- Seating observes social distancing
- Seating in nave is staggered from one Divine Service to the next to reduce surface contamination; seating in courtyard is sanitized between uses
- The hymnbook you use in the Divine Service you attend hasn't been touched for an entire week; COVID dies after 72 hours
- Courtyard also uses hymnals. The hymns are set on a table and not used for an entire week
- SignUpGenius and multiple Divine Services ensure attendance at each Divine Service at or below social-distancing maximum
- Divine Service is shortened
- Ingress and egress is expedited—no gathering in confined spaces

By God's providential grace, these measures have prevented a single instance of the spread of COVID at St. John's. God be praised!

JR. LUTHERANS AND RHYTHM OF FAITH CHOIR MAKE THEIR RETURN STARTING 13 JANUARY

In our ongoing effort to build back from all the schedule changes, postponements, and cancellations brought about by the pandemic, we will be re-launching Jr. Lutherans and Rhythm of Faith Choir on Wednesday evening, 13 January. Jr. Lutherans and Rhythm of Faith are for children ages 4 through the start of formal catechesis in 6th grade. Jr. Lutherans teaches children the basics of the Faith through a fast-paced quiz game; those who complete the entire Jr. Lutherans program won't even be aware that by the end of it they'll have learned hundreds of Bible and Lutheran history facts, hundreds of Bible passages, and the entire Small Catechism, preparing them all the better to benefit from formal catechesis in the 6th through 8th grades. Their education, through music, continues in Rhythm of Faith Choir, where children not only learn how to use their voices and play musical instruments, but also key hymns and parts of the liturgy that they'll use throughout life, just like what they learn in Jr. Lutherans.

Starting Wednesday, 13 January, Jr. Lutherans will meet from 5:15 till 5:45. An evening snack will be served the Jr. Lutherans from 5:45 till 6:10. And from 6:10 till Evening Prayer at 7:00 Rhythm of Faith Choir will meet.

Parents, keep your eyes on the mail. Anyone with children who will turn four between now and the end of the school year up through the 5th grade will be receiving more information. Take advantage of these ways for your children not

only to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, but also to have fun with their peers at church. We look forward to seeing them all. For more information please write jbruss@stjlcms.org, dkerns@stjlcms.org, or bjohnson@stjlcms.org.

HYMN OF THE MONTH FOR JANUARY

By Bethany Johnson

“Arise and Shine in Splendor” (LSB 396)

During the season of Epiphany we learn about the ways in which God continues to manifest Himself to the world and to shine forth His light of salvation to those sitting in darkness. One of the great Epiphany hymns in our hymnal, “Arise and Shine in Splendor” (LSB 396), describes this light of God’s glory that appears in His work of salvation for us. This hymn is based on Isaiah 60, which points to the Lord as our “everlasting light” and the future glory of Israel when He will appear in His full Epiphany in heaven. Each stanza is a paraphrase of a respective verse of Isaiah 60:1-6.

Martin Opitz wrote this hymn for the feast of Epiphany. Like Philip Nicolai, he lived through the struggles of the Thirty Years’ War and chaos of that age. They lamented over the sin and strife all around them. We, too, lament over the chaos of our age and over our own sufferings that we endure in this Christian life. The hymn, “Arise and Shine in Splendor” is comforting for the Church, who is in need of this light (God’s salvation for sinners) and who, being in Christ, shine forth this light of Christ to others.

The first stanza describes the day as “beaming” with light in its “matchless beauty gleaming.” This particular light is more than the brightness of the sun; it is the glory of the Lord who has overcome the darkness. Stanza 2 describes this darkness of hopelessness, gloom, and death. The hope we have as Christians is our “Lord of heaven” who is our life and salvation.

God’s light of the Gospel shines to the whole world, and He desires all men to be saved and to receive Him in faith. Just as God brought light into darkness at creation, so He has also brought restoration through the Gospel since the fall into sin. This restoration by His life and death sets us free from sin and eternal death. Stanzas 3 & 4 describe the nations gathering and coming to this light of Christ that has healed them from sin.

As Christians we are evermore eager of the full Epiphany when we will see Christ, our “Morning Star” in heaven. His light will continue throughout all eternity with all the saints from near and far who have come from “realms of sadness,” from sin and death, to be with their Savior. While we still experience this joy and splendor of God’s light through His grace and mercy, strengthened by Word and Sacrament here on earth, we look forward to the full glory that will be revealed when we will arise to meet our Lord in heaven.

2021 MISSIONS FESTIVAL

On Sunday 31 January we will celebrate our annual Missions Festival. In the Gospel for that day (Matt 20:1-16), the relentless mercy of the master of a house (God the Father) continually gathers workers (sinners made saints through faith in Christ) into His vineyard (His holy church)—giving to each the same (eternal life).

Starting on 10 January pledge cards for supporting International Missions will be available. Please complete them and place them in the offering plate on or before 31 January. Our missions offerings support the precious work of Pastor Vance and Linda Becker in Matongo, Kenya; Pastors Furs and Panchu in Saratov, Russia; Pastor James Krikava in the Czech Republic, and Pastor Wilhelm Weber in Wittenberg. St. John’s generously supports each of those missionaries with an annual gift of \$3600 to \$4000 for a total of nearly \$16,000. It’s a great pleasure to report that in 2019 our congregation raised over \$20,000 above and beyond the budget for the support of our missionaries. As of this writing we are on track to do the same in COVID year 2020. Praise be to God!

Since we have for two years in a row successfully cleared the hurdle of maintaining the vigorous support of our individual missionaries, the Board of Missions and Evangelism has determined that *gifts received in excess of our obligation will go to support the endowment of the Lutheran seminary in Novosibirsk*. That endowment supports confessional Lutheran theological education for future Russian pastors. You can hardly imagine how precious that work is: pastors who bring the light of Christ to those who sit in the darkness of a deep unbelief, the sad inheritance of nearly a century of official atheism in the former Soviet Union. Imagine discovering for the first time that God’s own Son died for your sins—and from a pastor sent by the risen Christ Himself!

We pray that you will bear in mind these considerable needs and opportunities as you give prayerful consideration to your gift for 2021 in support of international missions.

Our 2021 Missions Festival will feature Kristine Bruss of our own congregation as speaker during the Bible Study hour. Kris serves on the LCMS Board for International Mission, which develops and oversees the implementation of policies in support of the international mission and ministry activities of our Synod.

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY: On 18 January the LCMS will begin “Missions Unpacked,” a 4-week, self-paced, virtual introduction to mission work in the LCMS. The program is described as follows:

Embark on a global mission experience and unpack how LCMS International Mission works without ever having to dig out your suitcase. Learn, sing, eat and pray with missionaries and local church members in Africa, Asia, Eurasia and Latin America & the Caribbean. Experience fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ from the comfort of your own home.

During each week of Missions Unpacked, you can explore life in a different place, interact with an LCMS missionary in a live presentation, and discover how you can be part of God’s mission around the world.

Registration for this FREE event is now open at: <https://calendar.lcms.org/event/missions-unpacked-jan2021/>.

—The Board of Missions and Evangelism

ST. JOHN’S FINANCIAL REPORT THRU NOVEMBER 2020

	<u>Budgeted</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Difference</u>
YTD Income	\$666,951	\$653,122	-\$13,829
YTD Expense	\$683,270	\$657,279	-\$25,991
YTD Income-Expense (\$16,319)		(\$15,903)	

A SPECIAL “THANK YOU” FROM THE STAFF

Each member of the called staff and the support staff wish to thank the congregation for the thoughtful and generous Christmas gifts. We are most grateful for the support, love, and care each of us receives from you throughout the year. May God in His mercy continue to bless the Body of Christ in this place with His Presence and His work in us and through us to the praise of His glory.

OUR SINCEREST THANKS TO ALL OF OUR VOLUNTEERS

We give thanks to our gracious God for His continued gifts of the means of grace through which He establishes and nurtures our faith and life. We also give thanks to God for all the support of the mission and ministry of St. John’s by our members of all ages, in both financial and time devoted ways. Without the willing hands and hearts of our members, much work would go undone that is vital for the efficiency of the congregation’s ministry. Once again, we express our appreciation to all volunteers in the numerous capacities in which they serve.

THANK YOU’S

Thank you for your prayers, concern, and support in our time of need.

Kay Anderson, Chase & Jessi Briggs and family, Shirley Nolting, Martha Underwood

We thank you for the kindness and generous gift of the beautiful poinsettias.

Joyce Lohmann, Marge Gehrt, Don & Lynn Traylor, Aurella Heine

We thank you for the generous gift card during this Christmas season.

Kerry Howell and family, Jodi Fay and family, Amy Fuhrman, Josh & Ashley Brandmahl

2021 CONTRIBUTION ENVELOPES

Contribution envelopes are available to be picked up in Luther Hall. Your envelope number may have changed for 2021. Please use the instructions on the clipboard located on the tables with the contribution boxes to locate your box of envelopes. If you did not receive a contribution box or if you have any questions regarding contribution boxes/envelopes, please speak with Yvonne Berry in the church office. Thank you!

2021 FLOWER CALENDAR

The 2021 Flower Calendar is now up. Please check the Calendar on the bulletin board outside of the church offices. If you would like to provide flowers for a particular service this coming year, sign your name and phone number by the date of your choice. You may pick the flowers up after the late service that day, or at the latest, Thursday morning of the following week. You will be reminded the week before your date.

DOORSTEP NEWS

Doorstep has felt very blessed during the year with the volunteers who were comfortable coming in to help the staff provide services, and sort donations... and there were many donations with people being home! They also felt very blessed, and supported by all of their donors, and the community as a whole, who helped keep their food shelves stocked throughout the year, the monetary donations which kept its doors open, and services being provided.

Doorstep will start 2021 operating the same way they have been in 2020, with phone intakes for services, and appointments for the clothing room. They adopted the usual 260 households from the Christmas Bureau. This is over 800 individuals who will receive food, gift cards, blankets and health kits. They appreciate everyone who sent monetary donations to help with the increased budget to provide the gift cards this year; and, those who donated blankets, towels and hygiene items.

There will be no Operation Soup Line this year as their Board could not figure out a Covid safe, fundraising positive, way to carry out the event. Doorstep is asking its regular sponsors to still donate the funds and basically 'sponsor Doorstep' instead of the event this year as to not lose quite so much money by not having the fundraiser.

They will still proceed with SouperBowl Sunday, February 7 with the collection of soup and crackers to help stock our pantry! Please collect these items to bring to St. John's or to Doorstep. They are very thankful and blessed to be so supported during this difficult time as Doorstep continues to help our neighbors in need the best way possible.

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A VOTING MEMBER?

Our constitution defines "voting member" as a communicant member who has reached the age of 18 years and been received as a voting member upon application for such privilege upon approval of the voters of the assembly. **We encourage all eligible St. John's members to join the voters assembly.** You can contact the office, a pastor, or your elders to get instructions on how you can become a voter.

Campaign Newsletter January 2021



Growing God's Children
for generations to come
Topeka Lutheran School

A PRAYER

Lord God, whose we are and Whom we serve. You have redeemed us with the blood of your Son, Jesus Christ and know that You continue to watch over all that we say and do. We pray that You would richly bless our school, the principal and teachers, the support staff and especially our children that You have given to us to bring up in the knowledge of You and the saving work that Your Son, Jesus Christ has done for all of us. As we enter a new year this month, we thank You for keeping us safe this past year and ask that you would guard, direct and guide all our doings as we live now here on earth, but look forward to being with You in heaven at the end of our lives. All this we ask in Christ's Holy Name, Amen.

SUPPORT TOPEKA LUTHERAN TODAY! CLICK TO DONATE.

<https://www.topek Lutheran.org/pledge-tracker>

TOTAL COMMITMENTS

Capital Campaign (GGC) Fund

Total Amount Committed: \$831,413

Total Pledged Gifts Received: \$503,505

New Donors + New Gifts: 7

DOUBLE OUR DONORS

Our goal is to increase the number of pledged gifts to 238 or more by Spring 2021. Any amount of gift is welcome! Make your gift on-line for your convenience! Goto www.topek Lutheran.org/capital campaign tab to learn more!

STAY UP-TO-DATE WITH TOPEKA LUTHERAN

Did you know that TLS has a very active Facebook page? Check it regularly to enjoy online events, fundraisers and images of student life throughout the year.

TLS Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Topeka-Lutheran-School-324452917757164/> ChristmasMusic

- Concerts from TLS straight to your living room. Each classroom was highlighted with a video of each grade celebrating the birth of Jesus in a live concert!
- Enjoy chapel every Wednesday morning at 8:10 a.m. via Facebook Live.

SHOWING OUR APPRECIATION

Thank you everyone - thank you so much!

- Thank you to those who participated in the recent Prayer Vigil. Thank you to Mr. Isaac Taylor for making the on-line option available for those who preferred to remain in their homes.
- Thank you to those who recently responded with gifts to the Giving Tuesday and Double Our Donor campaigns and with special gifts, totalling \$24,515 in new gifts and/or pledges.
- Thank you to the anonymous donors who shared gifts for the new outdoor TLS sign expenses. Thank you to Mr. Grass for his work on sanding and repainting the cross.
- And thank you to those who shared gifts (to date \$2500) to help with expenses for the new Outdoor Wildcat Lab (OWL). Thank you to Mr. Zach Snethen for leading this project.



901 SW Fillmore, Topeka, KS 66606-1445

Time To Come Back To Church!



THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19–20a)

So that we may obtain faith in Christ, God instituted the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. Through the gospel and sacraments, as through means, God gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when He wills, in those who hear the gospel. (*Augsburg Confession*, Article 5)