

THE MESSENGER



From the Pastor's desk...



Light in the Darkness

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." Matthew 2:1-2

This year we were able to observe an astrological event that has not happened for 800 years. The "Christmas Star" was actually an especially bright planetary conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn and was visible in the night sky on Dec. 21. Astronomers have long held that there was a similar event at the time of Jesus's birth. Boy do we need a special light this year. It seems that now more than ever we need to hear the Good News that Jesus has come to bring light to a world in darkness.

Some of the darkness has been the reservation system we put in place for Christmas worship. Our worship and music committees contacted parish members in November to determine our needs for worship services. We concluded that we would not be able to accommodate everyone at the 4:00 service on Christmas Eve. We then asked members to make a reservation with the parish office. Some of you understood that your communication with the worship and music members was your reservation. I sincerely apologize for this confusion. It has led to some hard feelings.

Some of the darkness has been how politicized our public health guidelines have become. The evidence shows that this virus spreads rapidly in places where people encounter each other for extended periods of time. Masks and physical distance decrease, but do not totally prevent, the spread. In a study published by the journal *Nature* the researchers said, "On average across metro areas, full-service restaurants, gyms, hotels, cafes, religious organizations, and limited-service restaurants produced the largest predicted increases in infections when reopened." It seems to me that politicians are between a rock and a hard place right now. Limiting access to those places causes hardship for citizens, but not limiting that access likely causes the virus to spread more rapidly.

The church is in darkness about gathering for worship. Some of you believe that we should gather for worship no matter the circumstances. Some of you have requested that masks at worship be optional. I have heard some express great concern that we will continue to lose members to other churches where the guidelines are not being followed or enforced as closely as we are. Some are concerned that online worship offerings will encourage people to form new habits that will pull them away from worship even after the pandemic has subsided.

The greatest darkness right now is from the pandemic itself. Over 1.715 million people have died worldwide and 78 million have been infected since March. In Polk County there have been 46 deaths and 3,126 cases, as of December 21. There are people in our parish who have been infected but have not recovered completely, seemingly having long-term symptoms. Indeed, the darkness is deep. This Epiphany I invite you to pay attention to the light. Do some star gazing. Watch for something special.

We rejoice that vaccines have been tested, approved, and are starting to be distributed. We give thanks for Operation Warp Speed and President Trump who helped facilitate this process.

We rejoice that we have the technology and resources to gather in person and online to share the love of God. We give thanks for the Andrew Dahlen and those in our congregations that are helping to make our worship available to all.

We rejoice that we have public health and government officials that care about our health and our communities. We give thanks for their efforts to keep us safe from the virus and provide economic relief through legislation.

We rejoice that we were able to worship together for Christmas. We give thanks that the virus numbers are subsiding. We will begin to worship in person in the buildings again on January 10. I am thankful for all who are gracious and understanding about how we are trying to follow the public health guidelines. I am also thankful for the gift of forgiveness when their are hurt feelings.

We rejoice for light in the darkness. We give thanks for astronomers who point us to the skies. We rejoice in the Bethlehem Star that led the Maji to Jesus. May the light of Jesus' love give us light in the darkness this January and forever.

In Christ,

Pastor Karen

Preparing for a faith formation year like we have never experienced before has certainly been a challenge. We have been navigating through this unique time of COVID-19 while continuing to work with our Sunday school children on "catching faith and not a virus". We are grateful for the time that our Education Committee spent this summer preparing for and considering our programming options and safety protocols. God is and continues to be at work within us for certain, offering us the hope to *lead by faith and not by fear*. We are grateful that our physical space at the church allows for small but spaced groupings and that attendance by students and volunteer staff has been consistent.

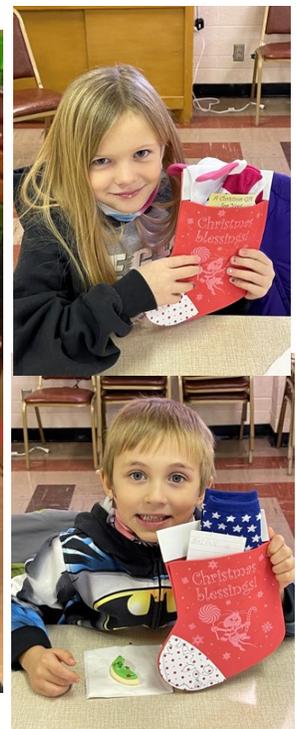
In September we opened our doors with Rally Sunday and which included a special blessing of the backpacks and devices during worship. Our volunteer teachers all met for orientation and training on safety protocols. Our teachers were installed the following week at worship and our students began meeting in person in small groups. Preschool and kindergarten classes worked on studying "My Lutheran Church and My Book About Jesus;" second graders worked on studying "Why We Worship;" third and fourth graders worked on studying "Meeting Martin Luther and the Apostles Creed;" and fifth graders worked on studying "Exploring Worship."

October brought a continuation of studies and Bible presentations during monthly worship for our preschooler, Brian Wurden, and our third graders, Hayes Thorson and Owen Traub. The students also participated in our "October Challenge" where they were asked to bring a shoe box to support Operation Christmas Child, a shoebox of daily necessities to support the Northlands Rescue Mission, and a non-perishable food item to donate to the East Grand Forks Food Shelf. Our month ended with a "Power Up with Jesus" event celebrating all of the students' hard work in learning the given curriculum and for participating whole heartedly in our October Challenge. During this event the children learned that Jesus is the one true source of real power and that with faith in his forgiveness, we are renewed, recharged, and ready to face the day ~ powered by our Savior. Our October Challenge items were presented to the congregation for prayer and were brought to their designated sites by our students/families.

The months of November and early December brought us a new challenge of creating Christmas programming lessons with the potential of a recorded program to share with our families. Again, the students rose to the occasion as they learned the lyrics to an adaption of the "12 Days of Christmas." Each "day" provided a lesson including crafts, games, reflections, and object lessons in which each student got to experience the Christmas message and how the prophecies were fulfilled in a very hands-on way. During the month of November, the students collected coins in their ELCA Good Gifts Piggy Banks and were able to purchase 5 sets of chicks to donate this year to grow the church, fight hunger, and transform lives. After finishing our Christmas programming, we again were able to celebrate the students hard work with a "Fa La La La Lights" festivities event which included Bible time, a scavenger hunt, a service project in which the students made and filled stockings with socks to donate to a local care center, crafts, and a snack. This event was focused on Jesus, the real "Light of Christmas." Jesus entered our sin-darkened world on the

very first Christmas and came to be our Savior. Jesus lights up our lives with his love, forgiveness, and peace. Happy Birthday Jesus!

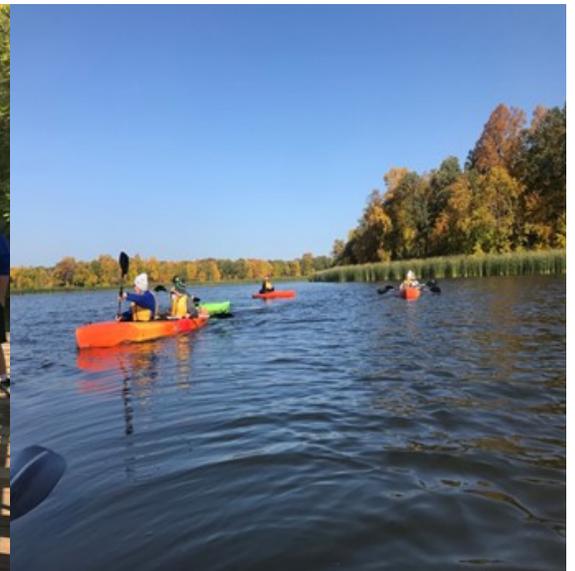




Bygland Lutheran Church Youth Group News

"So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ~ Romans 12:5"

The youth group here at Bygland continues to be active and involved in our church community. On God's Work, Our Hands Sunday, the youth, their families, and fellow congregational members participated in Adopt-a-Highway, working to keep God's creation beautiful. The group then got together and had some fun in late September for kayaking, hiking, and biking at Icelandic State Park. The group had a wonderful day of being together outdoors. A huge thank you to Jeff Millar and Kent & Holly Wavra for chaperoning the group. Most recently the middle school youth group members participated virtually in the NWMN Synod Middle School Youth Event *"Connected in Christ"* during their December confirmation classes. Those that attended all three sessions, received a hand-delivered "goodie bag" (from the Education Committee) including an event t-shirt and some evangelism activities to share with their families and/or our community.



FISHER NEWS

FISHER LUTHERAN SUNDAY SCHOOL

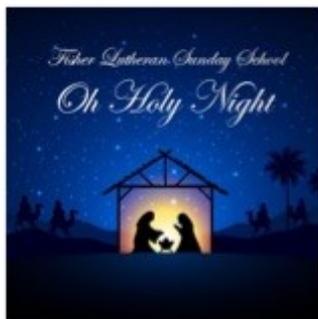
The Fisher Lutheran Sunday School is **ALL ABOARD WITH JESUS!**

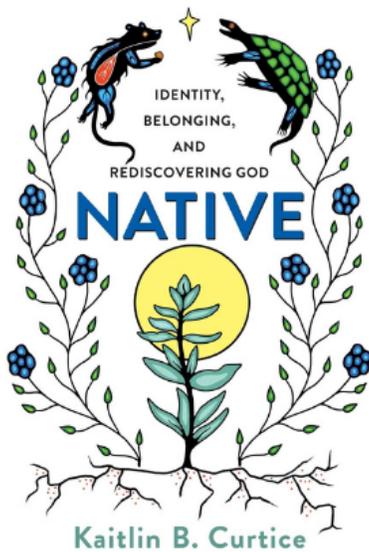
While maintaining social distancing due to the COVID 19 outbreak, the FLC Board of Education's goal has been to continue to follow the mission of our church...*to journey with us as we worship, grow in faith and serve in Jesus' name.*

With in-person Sunday School classes currently suspended, we continue to share Sunday School lesson materials and activities weekly so that families can continue their Bible discovery and exploration. Zoom sessions are held the first Sunday of each month at 10 am so that the students can stay connected with their classmates. The sessions include messages from Pastor Karen, singing, games, recognition of Baptismal anniversaries and celebrating Jesus's love!

Although 2020 was anything but traditional, Fisher Lutheran Church Sunday School wanted to find a way to still incorporate an element of our customary celebration of Christmas with our church family! Therefore, we created a socially distanced video celebrating the joy of Christmas and the gift of Jesus' birth! A special THANK YOU to all of the Sunday Schoolers and their families who helped in the creation of the video by sending their pictures and video recordings!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMK3CWsl_Zo





Five-Week Epiphany Book Study
Sundays @ 7:00-8:30pm starting January 10th

Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God **by Kaitlin B Curtice**

**Sponsored by the NWMN Synod's Native Neighbors Table
and the Commission for Racial Equity and Justice**

Join us this coming Epiphany season for a book study on "Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God" by Kaitlin B. Curtice led by Collen Hankins Bernu.

To learn more about the book, Watch a 1 minute video on YouTube– Native, by Kaitlin Curtice. from the author Kaitlin B. Curtice.

Register at nwmnsynod.regfox.com/native-identity-belonging-and-rediscovering-god-book-study
There is a \$10 suggested registration donation, this does not include the cost of the book, the registration money will go towards supporting the ministry of Peoples Church and The Way.

We encourage you to purchase the book from local bookstores.

Here is an non-exhaustive list of bookstores in our state that either have the book available or has the means to order it in a timely fashion.

[Birchbark Books](#): *Good books, Native arts, Jewelry, and Community Events* - Minneapolis

[Moonpalace Books](#) - Minneapolis

[Beagle and Wolf Books and Bindery](#) - Park Rapids

Cherry Street Books - Alexandria call 320-763-9400

Lundeen's - Fergus Falls call 218-237-2665 (ask for the bookstore) or email paul@victorlundeens.com

The Synod Office purchased a set of books from Birchbark Books and would like to send the book to any Indigenous participants, please indicate on the registration.

If the cost of the book is prohibitive of you being able to participate, please indicate on the registration page and we will send you a copy of the book.

Full Communion Partners

Full communion is when two denominations develop a relationship based on a common confessing of the Christian faith and a mutual recognition of Baptism and sharing of the Lord's Supper. This does not mean the two denominations merge; rather, in reaching agreements, denominations also respect differences. These denominations worship together, may exchange clergy and also share a commitment to evangelism, witness and service in the world. Each entity agrees that even with differences, there is nothing that is church-dividing.

A central document to Lutherans is the *Augsburg Confession*. Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession* states that "the true unity of the church" is present where the gospel is rightly preached and sacraments rightly administered. The ELCA is committed to this model of full communion as an authentic expression of Christian unity.

Characteristics of full communion

For the ELCA, the characteristics of full communion are theological and missiological implications of the gospel that allow variety and flexibility. These characteristics stress that the church act ecumenically for the sake of the world, not for itself alone. They will include at least the following, some of which exist at earlier stages:

- common confessing of the Christian faith
- mutual recognition of Baptism and a sharing of the Lord's Supper, allowing for joint worship and an exchangeability of members
- mutual recognition and availability of ordained ministers to the service of all, subject to the disciplinary regulations of other denominations
- common commitment to evangelism, witness and service
- means of common decision-making on critical common issues of faith and life
- mutual lifting of any condemnations that exist between denominations.

Full Communion partners are:

Presbyterian Church(USA). Full Communion partner since 1997.

Reformed Church in America. Full Communion partner since 1997.

United Church of Christ. Full Communion partner since 1997.

The Episcopal Church. Full Communion partner since 1999.

The Moravian Church. Full Communion partner since 1999.

United Methodist Church. Full Communion partner since 2009.

Council Highlights

Bygland November 11, 2020

There were nine members present.

Devotions were led by Pastor Karen based on I Thessalonians

Reports were received from the Secretary, Treasurer, and Pastor.

Building maintenance and repair was discussed.

Lutefisk dinner postponement announcements were discussed.

Covid-19 concerns were raised including recommendations from the Synod legal counsel.

PPP loan forgiveness paperwork is in place

Pastor Karen's laptop computer was replaced

The copier in the parish office will need to be replaced in the coming year.

Correspondence from Pathways and Valley Senior Living was reviewed.

The joint Council meeting was reviewed, compensation for pastor and staff was discussed.

HB Sound and Light has been contacted for technology upgrades.

A deep cleaning of the building was discussed. There was a recommendation to hire a service for a monthly deep cleaning.

The meeting closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Fisher November 18, 2020

Ten members were present for the meeting.

Devotions were led by Pastor Karen

Synod Mission Interpreter Barb Erickson joined us via Zoom.

Reports were received from the Secretary, Treasurer, Financial Secretary, and Pastor.

Correspondence was reviewed.

The Worship and Music Committee is working on Christmas worship plans.

The parsonage committee will discuss replacing outlets.

Fisher Council voted to suspend in person worship services through December 6 if the Bygland Council's is in agreement.

Handicap parking signs need replacing.

Parish budget and compensation for the pastor and staff was reviewed following the joint Council meeting.

The copy machine in the parish office will need to be replaced.

Ideas were shared about how to connect with members of the congregation during these Covid times.

The meeting adjourned with the Lord's Prayer.

SUMMER IS COMING!

REGISTRATION WILL BE OPEN JANUARY 18TH 2021

PATHWAYS IS PLANNING FOR SUMMER 2021 AND WILL HAVE SAFETY PROTOCOLS PUT IN PLACE FOR A GREAT SUMMER EXPERIENCE.

TEMPERATURE CHECKS AND SANITIZING

WE WILL BE FOLLOWING CDC GUIDELINES FROM OUR AREA TO MAKE OUR CAMPER'S EXPERIENCE SAFE

PICK UP AND DROP OFF REGISTRATION

SAFE CABIN GROUPS

REGISTER ABOVE AFTER THE 18TH OR CALL 218-227-5107 OR EMAIL PATHWAYS@PATHWAYSBIBLECAMPS.ORG FOR MORE INFORMATION

Annual Meetings

Fisher: 12:00 PM Jan. 31st

Bygland: 12:00 PM Feb. 7th

ANNUAL MEETING



A zoom link will be available for those that can't attend in person.