

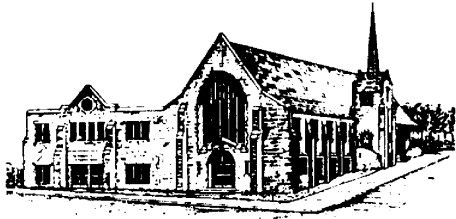
CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

405 Kennedy Avenue, Duquesne, PA 15110

Church telephone - 412-466-7773

Email - christluthduq@gmail.com

Website: www.christlutheranduk.org



A Partner in the ministry of Pittsburgh Lutheran United Ministries

Pastoral Team

Rev. John J. Gropp: 412-680-7867 Rev. Brenda Henry: 412-390-8005
Rev. Susan Devine: 412-496-4889 Rev. Alexander Sumo: 614-218-6730

January 2024 Volume 46 No. 1

We are the Church, gathered and equipped, sent and scattered, for faith in action.

Yes, it is still the Christmas Season!

CHRISTMAS IS THE SEASON OF GIVING – WHAT GIFT WILL YOU SHARE?

“Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we’re in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ. God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin.” Romans 3:24-25 (The Message)

The greatest gift you’ve ever been given wasn’t bought in a store. No cash exchanged hands. It wasn’t even wrapped. Yet it cost the Giver everything.

The Bible says God sent his Son to Earth to give you the greatest gift ever. He came to Earth to die—so that you could be made right with God. Romans 3:24-25 says, *“Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we’re in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ. God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin.”* (The Message)

So why did Jesus have to die? Let’s go back to the basics of peoples’ problem and God’s solution.

- **Nobody’s perfect.** I’ve never met a single person who has claimed to be perfect. I don’t measure up to my own expectations, much less God’s perfect standard. Neither do you or anyone else. We’ve all blown it. The Bible says, *“All of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory”* (Romans 3:23 CEV).
- **God is just.** God wants to be fair. When somebody breaks a law, there must be a penalty for it. When you break humanity’s laws, you pay humanity’s penalty. When you break God’s laws, you pay God’s penalty. The Bible says, *“The wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23 NIV).
- **Jesus paid the price for our sin.** The Bible says, *“God took the sinless Christ and poured into him our sins. Then, in exchange, he poured God’s goodness into us!”* (2 Corinthians 5:21 TLB). Jesus took on my sin and your sin and all the sin that has ever been committed. That’s the Good News, the Gospel. Jesus paid the price we could never pay for ourselves.
- **You must decide whether to accept God’s free gift.** God gave you a free gift of salvation when Jesus took your sin upon himself. But it’s a gift you must receive. The Bible says, *“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12 NIV).

Will you accept God’s gift of salvation? Have you accepted God’s free gift yet? Have you been baptized yet? It’s one thing to understand the basics of how to have a relationship with Jesus. It’s another to accept the gift. God’s free gift – Jesus Christ, is the greatest gift to humanity. He is our redemption and salvation. As THE GREATEST to us, we are also given the privilege to share Christ with our families, friends, neighbors and strangers. Will you

share Christ with your family and friends this Christmas? Will you give your family and friends God's redemptive gift this Christmas? Here's the promise of this marvelous gift:

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29 (ESV))

Redemption is when somebody pays for your sins so that you can be forgiven and walk away justified. They do your time. They pay your penalty. All the things you've done wrong are paid for by somebody else. That's what God did for humanity in His gift given to us in Christ Jesus on Christmas day. Jesus didn't just come to Earth at Christmas. He also lived a perfect life so that his sacrifice was enough to satisfy God's judgment. All of our sins were paid for on the cross. And that is the reason for this season!

Christmas comes with the best news ever—and a choice: What are you going to do with Jesus this Christmas?

My challenge for all PLUM families this Christmas is for us to share Christ with our families and friends. Pass on this GOOD NEWS of God's redemption and salvation to the world. Be the giver of the greatest gift and change lives forever.

Pastor Alexander Y. Sumo on behalf of the PLUM Pastoral Team



*Arise, shine,
for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD
has risen upon you.
Isaiah 60:1*

Epiphany Greetings

January 6 is Epiphany. The day we observe in remembrance of the Magi, the wise men, discovering the child Jesus. According to the Gospel of Matthew chapter 2, wise men traveled from the east in search of the child born king of the Jews, the Messiah. They followed a star which led them to the location of the child. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. They went into the home and saw Jesus with his mother. They paid homage to him.

This narrative is a wonderful image and reminder of travelers, sojourners discovering that their faith and trust in following a star had led them to a moment they would never forget. An encounter with the Messiah had been promised for years in the writing of the ancient scrolls. Did they know upon setting out this would be the outcome of their journey? How long was the journey? How many had started on that journey? How many had become discouraged along the way when the journey proved to be longer than they had expected? How many were lost to health concerns and hardship as they traveled? So often we retell this story with only three wise men, however Matthew does not name the number of magi. We know that three types of gifts were presented - gold, frankincense, and myrrh - which has led to the assumption of three. The actual writing states "opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh." How many chests of each? By how many magi?

It is so easy to become distracted either by adding our own interpretation to a story or becoming so rigid in the retelling that we fail to leave room for the expansive grace of God. However, the details of this narrative do not change the essential meaning behind the story. Trusting in faith, the wise men followed a star, they arrived at the appointed location, and they paid homage - public allegiance and reverence - to the child king. Their role in the story was not to decide the validity of the instruction or determine if the child and parents were deserving. Their role was to trust in the Spirit's guidance and to profess their obedience. Like Mary, they said YES! They trusted and followed.

Saying yes and following without a clear plan or path is so challenging in our world today. At the start of this new year, we will be inundated with messages of developing New Year resolutions and establishing goals. This practical guidance is indeed helpful; however, have we lost sight of the

simplicity of trust? We are called to trust God's guidance and move forward without knowing the exact steps, knowing only that the light of Christ shines upon us and illuminates our path. We are not to sit idly waiting; we are to act. We are to move forward believing that God will guide us through the obstacles (the Herods) who attempt to stop us along the way. We are to proclaim the majestic unfolding of God's promise revealed in the everyday encounter of Immanuel – God with us.

Ah, but that is indeed the difficulty and invitation, trust is not so simple. In a world where we can no longer "trust" news reports or social media, and relationships are becoming strained, the tendency is to begin to see the world through our jaded human eyes. And we can so often miss what God is doing in, through and around us. How wonderful that this Epiphany narrative serves as a reminder, a resetting if you will, at the start of the year: pointing us to the faith and trust of traveling our journey with the assurance of God's light leading that path. The prophet Isaiah's message to the people is both encouragement for the present moment and proclaiming what was yet to come. Siblings in Christ, I encourage all of us in the words of Isaiah, *Arise, shine, for your light [Jesus within us] has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you [us]*. May we step out with courage and confidence on the path that God is illuminating for us, our congregations, our communities, and our world.

Blessed Epiphany and Happy New Year!
Pr. Brenda on behalf of PLUM pastors



This Epiphany season, please join PLUM for a study on

Affirmation of Baptism

Thursdays

January 11, 18, 25 and February 1 and 8

7:00 pm on Zoom

Sessions include:

The Covenant God Made with You in Holy Baptism

To Live Among God's Faithful People, Hearing the Word of God and Sharing in the Lord's Supper.

To Proclaim the Good News of God in Christ through Word and Deed

To Serve All People, Following the Example of Jesus

To Strive for Justice and Peace in All the Earth

I Do, and I ask God to Help and Guide Me

We will be using the materials of Craig L. Nesson, Wartburg Theological Seminary:
"An Intergenerational Curriculum Based on Affirmation of Baptism," A Book of Faith/Life of Faith Resource



PLUM (Pittsburgh Lutheran United Ministries) includes:

Bethany Lutheran, Dormont
Christ Lutheran, Duquesne
East Liberty Lutheran
Hope Lutheran Church, Forest Hills
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Irwin
Lutheran Church of Our Saviour, North Huntingdon
Messiah Lutheran, Munhall
Prince of Peace, Pleasant Hills
Resurrection Lutheran, Oakdale
St. Andrew Lutheran, East Carnegie

The next PLUM Board Meeting is 7 PM on Monday, **January 29, 2024**, on Zoom.

PLUM's afternoon worship services are on Zoom on **Sundays at 3 PM. All are welcome!** Bulletins for worship services on zoom are always available on the PLUM website, www.plumofpa.com.

The call-in line for worship, Bible Study, and Meetings:

Zoom online: <https://zoom.us/j/401596541>

Zoom by phone: **+1 646 876 9923 Meeting ID: 401 596 541#**

It is PLUM's mission to be LIVING CHRIST'S LIGHT OF HOPE IN OUR COMMUNITIES. PLUM will:

- ❖ Provide stability of Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care.
- ❖ Foster opportunities for connectivity among individuals, congregations, and communities.
- ❖ Develop lay leadership for sharing the Gospel.
- ❖ Encourage freedom to care for neighbors.



At Home Prayer Service

Wednesday, January 3, 2024

7:00 pm on Zoom

*Taizé is a contemplative style of Christian worship characterized by the repetitive singing of simple harmonized tunes, interspersed with readings and prayers. **All are welcome!***

PLUM Survey: You and your views matter

Members of PLUM congregations are asked to complete a survey each year to find ways to improve; we want your thoughtful opinion.

Please answer these questions in an online survey in January:

<https://survey.zohopublic.com/zs/XJCUFg>

For those without internet access, paper copies of the PLUM Survey are available at the church.

PLUM Pastoral Team:

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Rev. Dr. Alex Sumo@plumofpa.com 614-218-6730

2023 PLUM Pastors' Report

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?"
Ecclesiastes 4: 9-11

Blessings to you siblings in Christ of PLUM. Thank you for everything you have done to extend the love of Christ to each other, to our communities, and to the world. We cannot possibly name everything that was done in this past year by our congregations, individuals and your pastors, but listed below are some highlights of the ways that we have all been witnesses of God's love in the world.

- We are better together. That was the theme of this year's synod assembly. Thank you to those of you who attended the assembly on behalf of your congregation. Our pastoral team was honored to serve as chaplains during the assembly.
- We have members and pastors who serve on various synod committees. These include synod council, conference of deans, synod stewardship committee, the Authentic Diversity and Justice team, Camp Agape Board and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.
- We again participated in Rise Against Hunger. We are grateful for each congregations' monetary contribution. Additionally, most of our congregations participated in the Saturday packaging of about 14,000 meals. Thank you to all who participated in this event.
- We held three Summer Picnics at Dormont Park, Settler's Ridge Park and White Oak Park. In addition to our fellowship time of good food and conversation we closed each event with a prayer service.
- Four students were confirmed as members of Christ, Duquesne.
- The pastoral team participated in Synod Monthly Ministerium meetings, Continuing Education opportunities and Convocation.
- The pastoral team presided at Funerals, Weddings, Confirmations, Baptisms, hospital visits and home visits. We also had the privilege to accompany the various ministries offered by each congregation such as: Blessed Bundles (LCOS), Halloween Gatherings (CLC, ELLC, ILC, SAL), Pet Blessings (HLC, MLC, SAL, SPLC), Resurrection's Anniversary, and Bethany's Thanksgiving Basket Ministry.

- The PLUM Board held bi-monthly meetings throughout the year. In November, the officers of the PLUM Board were re-elected for another term.
- We say goodbye to our siblings in Christ at St. Paul's, Canonsburg and welcome new siblings from Prince of Peace, Pleasant Hills.

Our prayer for each of you is what Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians:

³I thank my God for every remembrance of you, ⁴always in every one of my prayers for all of you, praying with joy ⁵for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart, for all of you are my partners in God's grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the tender affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what really matters, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:3-11

God has begun a good work in us and will continue to complete it in 2024. May we move forward with confidence, trusting in our Lord to lead and guide us on our journey.

Special Communication from Christ Lutheran Church Council

Dear siblings in Christ,

It has come to the attention of Church Council that during the second week of December 2023 some members of Christ Lutheran Church (and some former members) have received a mailing from the "Biblical Integrity Committee." This is not an approved communication from Church Council, Christ Lutheran Church, or the PLUM Pastoral Team, nor do we have any affiliation with this group. Unfortunately, we do not know who all received this mailing, or how peoples' addresses were obtained. Until this mailing, this group had only been communicating with the Pastors and Church Council. If you have any questions, or need support, please feel free to reach out to any member of Church Council, email christluthduq@gmail.com, or call the church at 412-466-7773.

Yours in Christ,

Church Council:

Keri Eckert, Kalee George, Ray George,
Mary Anne Novak, Carlene Oskin,
Marissa Paule, Casey Surmick, Katie Surmick,
Pastor John Gropp, Pastor Brenda Henry,
Pastor Sue Devine and Pastor Alex Sumo



January

5 - Emily Kilar (1994)
11 - Melissa Kandcer (1979)
26 - Willow Surmick (2017)

February

1 - Marianne Hantz (1937)
2 - Peyton Baker (1998)
2 - Lisa Kogler (1977)
3 - Logan Barva-Hamlin
6 - Tammy Thomas (1970)
11 - Gunner Morrison (2022)
14 - Kevin Knudsen
16 - Barb Wabrick
22 - Abbey Morrison (1990)



Prayer Requests

Ruth Baker, Gordon Boyd, Lenroy Bright, Andy Cerpani, Betty Ciglar, Ian Cogley, Charlayne & Denise DeCecco, Veronica Faulkner, Gregory Ferencz, Rico Ferencz, Robbie Ferencz, Pastor John Gropp, Beryl Gundy, Lucy H., Marianne Hantz, Richard Jackson, Charlie Johnson, Kelly Keech, Pastor Paul Koch, Bev Kogler, Lisa Kogler, Ethel Kotrady, Maryanne Lasko, Jeff Moss, Haydn Oskin, Leonard Oskin, David Pederson, Justin Pederson, Donna Reyes, Zach Schmude, Jessie Seliga, Angel Shepherd Grzyb, Harriette Shepherd, George Simo, Kpannah Sumo, Jonella Terek, Tammy Thomas, Lois Tubbs; Children's Hosp: Ozzie Rankin

To have your name/birthday/anniversary listed in future newsletters, or to make a change to the prayer list, please contact Deann at christluthduq@gmail.com or 412-466-7773

Tithes and Offerings

Thanks to all who bring or mail offerings to the church or use PayPal! Your continuing support and faithfulness are greatly appreciated and keep the Lord's ministry at Christ Lutheran church alive! **Together, we are the church!**

2023 Personal Records of Financial Giving to Christ Lutheran Church will be mailed by January 31. If you do not receive your statement by February 15, or if you have any questions about your statement, please call Elsie Ferencz, Christ Lutheran Financial Secretary at 412-466-2219.

2024 OFFERING ENVELOPES are available in the back of the church. If you do not receive your packet by January 21, and would like one, please call the church office (412-466-7773) or email christluthduq@gmail.com.



Purposeful Giving

Surely if You Love Someone – You'll Give Them More

Christmas is upon us and once again we try and outdo what we did the previous year in terms of giving gifts. More is better; and if you love someone surely more is better than less.

This year in our house we decided to intentionally cut back and that would include on everyone. It was a conscious decision, and we did do better than last year, and no one walked away feeling cheated or loved any less. That didn't mean if we spent more on those people we love, there was more left to spend on us personally to fulfill our heart's desires. It meant we were in charge of the consumerism that hits us all during this time of year. Each of us could have given more financially but chose not to, or we decided to give more to those who had far less.

When Jesus was in his rambunctious toddler years, the wisemen paid the family a visit and offered gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh which were very valuable resources at that time (and still are) to give a child. They were gifts worthy of royalty, and the Bible never states what became of these gifts. We can make assumptions, but we may not be 100% sure. Theologians have wrestled with the symbolism behind these gifts, but not how they were actually used. When the three wisemen who came from various parts of the east visited Herod, he slyly assured the wisemen he too would like to pay homage to the new king. Since they never reported back to Herod of Christ's exact location, an edict by the infamous king suggested that all males under the age of two would be killed so as to protect his worldly position. God's warning to Joseph through an angel about Herod's plan helped facilitate an escape. So that gold could have been used to fund the long journey to Egypt to protect Jesus from Herod. In that case, was it such an extravagant gift that ultimately protected the Savior of the World? The gifts from the wisemen were not numerous but their value was much like the socks and t-shirts that were given for homeless veterans at Jesus' birthday party this year. Both the wisemen's and the socks and t-shirts served a purpose. They were not randomly selected on a whim.

Is there a purpose in giving when we are fueled by consumerism? Is more necessarily better? Is there meaning behind our giving? It is too late for this holiday season, but maybe we can rethink things for next year and the years to come.

Mary Anne Novak, Stewardship Committee

What are the 12 days of Christmas?

*This article originally ran in **Living Lutheran** on Dec. 27, 2019.*

Christmas, according to the liturgical calendar, isn't just a day, but a season. Many Christians know the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" or recall that Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is about the last night of Christmas. But what defines the Christmas season?

The 12 days of Christmas are a reversal of the season of Advent. Traditionally, Christians have fasted during Advent as we await the celebration of the birth of our Savior. The period from Christmas Day to the day before Epiphany (the celebration of the magi visiting Jesus, the baptism of Jesus and the beginning of his earthly ministry) is a period of daily feasting. This is surprising, given the reason for celebrating several of the days.

The first day of Christmas, the Feast of the Nativity, is obvious enough as a reason to celebrate. The Messiah has been born into the world! The next day, however, is the feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who was killed under the authority of Saul of Tarsus/Paul (Acts 8:1). The emotional whiplash of celebrating the birth of the Savior and then the next day celebrating the life and martyrdom of the first person to die for Christ is stunning. However, tradition calls for a joyful feast to celebrate the faithfulness of Stephen, even unto death.

The next day, the third of the 12, celebrates the life of St. John the Apostle. He was, traditionally, the only disciple who wasn't martyred. Tradition holds that John took care of Mary, the mother of Jesus, made disciples, grew old and finally died a natural death in Ephesus.

The fourth day of Christmas is the most shocking. The Feast of the Holy Innocents commemorates the death of all boys in Bethlehem, aged 2 and under, at the hands of Herod the Great's soldiers (Matthew 2:16-18). Again, we feel the emotional rollercoaster, as we're reminded that the Christian life isn't simply one of sweetness and joy, but also of pain, hardship and injustice. Nevertheless, the fourth day of Christmas is the *Feast of the Holy Innocents*, rather than a fast, because we celebrate the One who has conquered sin and death and doesn't surrender these precious little ones, or any others, to the grave forever.

The following days celebrate Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket's resistance to injustice; the holy family; Pope Sylvester, who resisted the Donatist and Arian controversies (in many Germanic-speaking countries, New Year's Eve is still called "Sylvester"); the circumcision of Jesus; St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen, who defended the doctrine of the Trinity; Jesus' presentation and naming in the Jerusalem temple; the hermitage of St. Simon on the pillar; and even two American saints: Elizabeth Ann Seton and John Neumann.

These 12 days help Christians remember that the life of faith is full of challenges and hardships but also contains plenty of reasons to celebrate as we remember the heroes and heroines of the church, and most importantly, our Lord and Savior.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<div>Altar Guild: Marissa Paule, Carlene Oskin</div> <div>Usher: Harvey Oskin</div>		Church Council Meeting 7 PM				EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD
NEW YEAR'S DAY		Taizé Service 7 PM on Zoom				
WORSHIP-9:15 AM 7 LA-Kathy Hays A-Logan Barva-Hamlin; Harriette Shepherd SUNDAY SCHOOL – 10:30 AM 3 PM Worship via zoom <i>Baptism of Our Lord</i> White	8	9	10	11	12	13
WORSHIP-9:15 AM 14 LA-Mary Anne Novak A-Logan Barva-Hamlin; Madison Eckert SUNDAY SCHOOL – 10:30 AM 3 PM Worship via zoom <i>2nd Sunday after Epiphany</i> Green	15	16	17	18	19	20
3 PM Worship via zoom MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR DAY		PLUM <i>What's Next</i> Committee 7 PM on Zoom	<i>Affirmation of Baptism</i> Bible Study at 7 PM on Zoom			
WORSHIP-9:15 AM 21 LA- Kalee George A-Nikolai Sumnick; Harriette Shepherd HOSPITALITY after Worship SUNDAY SCHOOL after Hospitality 3 PM Worship via zoom <i>3rd Sunday after Epiphany</i> Green	22	23	24	25	26	27
WORSHIP-9:15 AM 28 LA- Marissa Paule A-Madison Eckert, Harriette Shepherd SUNDAY SCHOOL – 10:30 AM 3 PM Worship via zoom <i>4th Sunday after Epiphany</i> Green	29	30	31			
	PLUM Board Meeting 7 PM on zoom				The call-in line for worship, Bible Study, and Meetings Zoom online: https://Zoom.us/j/401596541 Zoom by phone: +1 646 876 9923 Meeting ID: 401 596 541#	

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

405 Kennedy Ave.
Duquesne, PA 15110

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Pittsburgh, PA

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Time sensitive material

This is Christ's church.

There is a place for you here.

We are the church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace. Liberated by our faith, we embrace you as a whole person-- questions, complexities and all.

**Join us as we do God's work
in Christ's name
for the life of the world.**

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

*Gather for Strength,
Scatter with Love!*



During worship on December 17, we had an all-congregation "Instant Christmas Pageant" with the cutest animals and most angelic angels, all there adoring Jesus! After worship we gathered in Rike Hall for a Birthday Party for Jesus. Thanks to all who brought socks and t-shirts that will be donated to homeless veterans. ***We continue to collect gloves, hats and scarves and non-perishable food items for school children in our area.*** These items will be placed in our "Bob N'at" box outside the church building for distribution.

Look inside this newsletter for photos from December 17 as well as our December 16 Christmas Dance Party, December 9 "Duquesne Celebrating Christmas Together" Carol Service and free Dinner at Christ Lutheran, Christmas Eve, and more. Additional photos and reels are available on Facebook and our website, christlutheranduq.org