

Lutheran Church of the Ascension

OUR VISION: To Worship the Lord, Live by His Example, and
Reach out Through His Love

OUR MISSION: To Know and Share the Good News of Jesus Christ



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Reflections on the Season of Epiphany

Christmas passes by all too quickly. This is especially true in a liturgical church that follows the lectionary. Four Sundays of Advent prepare us for the celebration of Christmas. Twelve days later we celebrate Epiphany. This celebration marks the events recorded in the Gospel of Matthew where the magi are guided to Bethlehem by a star. There they offer their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Epiphany celebrates the understanding that God's gift of Jesus is not just a local event. God's gift is a gift to all nations and all people.

Epiphany means "manifestation", the act of something made known or revealed. Throughout the season of Epiphany, the mission and ministry of Jesus is made known. Baptized by John in the waters of the Jordan River, God claims Jesus as his beloved son (Luke 3:15-17, 21-22). At a wedding in Cana, water is turned into wine (John 2:1-11). In a Synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus makes a radical claim that he is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Luke 4:14-21). After this claim, many religious leaders begin to view Jesus as a threat (Luke 4:21-30). On the shores of Lake Gennesaret, Jesus begins to gather the disciples who will share in his ministry (5:1-11). On the top of a mountain, some of these disciples see Jesus in a new light in an experience that connects the ministry of Jesus to Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:28-36).

As we take this liturgical journey through Epiphany, it is a good time to look within ourselves and ask two questions. The first is to ask, "How is Jesus being manifested in our lives today?" In other words, how is the Gospel touching you or speaking to you in new ways? The second question is this, "In what ways am I making Christ known to others?"

It all comes down to the words spoken to us at the time of our baptism:

"Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Blessings to you in this Season of Epiphany!

Dennis Kelly

Pastor

Worship Notes

Happy New Year! We are grateful for the celebrations that have recently taken place and for everyone who participated in them. The Advent/Christmas concert, "Voices from Heaven," was a particular joy. Nearly 30 children, 30 adult choir members, 15 orchestra members and a host of other participants were involved in making this event memorable. Special thanks go out to:

Choir members for your constant devotion to learning the difficult music and meeting additional times to rehearse. Your dedication resulted in a performance that was truly heavenly.

Children's choir and Sunday School choir for your hard work and wonderful attention during rehearsals. You all took a much larger role than in the past, and I especially loved the enthusiasm that shone from your faces during the performance.

Praise team for your beautiful singing and playing, which added a refreshing variety of styles to the evening. I also thank you for the ongoing role you play in the spiritual life of this church.

Bell choir for your unique role in supporting both the children's choir and senior choir. The sound of the bells coming from the rafters at key moments lent a magic to the evening that was indescribable.

Additionally, we wish to thank:

Angela Erland and Beth and Greg Peterson for taking responsibility for the kids' portion of this concert. It was literally life-saving for me personally. Thanks to Sunday School teachers for their help as well.

Kriss Bebee for her wonderful slide presentation.

Diane and Harry Carlson and our sexton, Tom, for putting the staging together and all those who worked with them to tear everything down afterwards. Thanks also go to Harry and Peter Erland for serving as ushers.

Eric Gibson for providing much-needed visual assistance in the organ loft and to Holland Gibson for his audio expertise.

Chris Casey for recording practice tracks to aid the choir.

Finally, thanks to all who helped with decorations and refreshments, especially, Jill Reid, Janice Greenwald, Jan Funk, Peg Sickeler, Linda Clinton, Helen Costello, Don Gordon, Brenda Husfeldt, Kevin and Colin Hanus and Caryl Scott.

Some upcoming dates of note include:

January 10 - first Sunday in Epiphany

March 6 - Tentative (but almost certain) date for our next concert series event, which features the talents of cellist Nicholas Photinos of the acclaimed chamber group, Eighth Blackbird, and his wife and accomplished pianist, Yasuko Oura, who enjoys a full schedule of accompanying at Roosevelt and the Chicago Lyric Opera.

Peace,

Mischa & Minkyoo

YOUTH MINISTRY

HAPPY NEW YEAR! I hope you were able to spend some restful and fun time with family and friends over the holidays, and that all Ascension youth are looking forward to a great 2010 year of youth activities!!

Several exciting youth events took place at the end of November and the first few weeks of December that didn't happen in time to be shared in the December Witness, so to recap: Ascension confirmation youth went up to Lutherdale from November 20th to 22nd for the Junior High 'Found and Lost and Found' Retreat, and had a great time!! The youth got the chance to meet several other youth from churches all over northern IL and southeastern WI, spend multiple sessions in small group Bible study and discussion on the retreat theme, and participate in many fun outdoor activities including the ropes course and a giant game of ultimate Frisbee! During the past few weeks high school youth participated in a November installment of LYFE Sunset Cinema, ice skating in downtown Chicago's Millennium Park a few days before Christmas (pics to come in February!), as well as having adopted and purchased gifts for our Bethel Christmas Family. A HUGE thanks to all youth who purchased gifts for our Bethel Families - both high school and confirmation! Also a word of thanks to all confirmation youth - as well as Sunday School kids, awesome parents, and Beth & Greg! - who helped make the Santa Lucia Day presentation possible on December 13th. This is a great tradition that we're looking forward to continuing for a 3rd year in 2010, so thank you for being involved and making it a memorable part of our holiday season at Ascension!

Here are some key dates to make a note of for the month of January!

- > **Friday, January 8th from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. - Confirmation Mid-Year Family Social Activity!** Last year it was 2 intense/awesome(!) Ascension-only games of laser tag at LaserQuest, and this past fall it was fun times while bowling at Pinstripes... Stay tuned for more info about what our next family social outing will be, to be shared via email and postcards leading up to the 8th!

- > **Confirmation class will meet four times during the month of January: the 10th, 17th, 24th and 31st. Tuesday, January 26th from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. is our confirmation 'Service Night' for the month, and we'll be focusing on local and national hunger ministries!** Not only will we be learning more about the nearby Northfield Township Food Pantry, we'll be finding out how we contribute to national and international efforts to combat hunger. The 'Food Pantry Scavenger Hunt' competition will take place on this evening, so all confirmation youth should bring \$10 and their 'game face'(!) to contribute to the hunt!

- > **Monday, January 18th from 9:00 to 4:00 p.m. (tentatively), Ascension youth are invited and encouraged to participate in the MLK Day of Service!** Last year a major emphasis was put on this being a national day of service, and we will again be getting involved in the surrounding community by serving others on this day to recognize a man who did MUCH to serve the needs of others. We'll again have the opportunity to get involved with IRIM on this day (please see further mention of this on p. 7 of *The Witness*), and I'll be sure to share more info about projects, times and locations as we approach this date!

There are several ideas and plans coming together as we continue to work with our neighbor churches Holy Trinity and St. James (among others!) for monthly and summer-specific youth activities in the coming weeks and months, so all Ascension youth should be excited about another great year ahead! There is no *youth* ministry without Y-O-U, so please bring a friend and join us for an activity at Ascension this month!

Peace,

Vanessa

Adult Spiritual Growth

Adult Library

Recommended for starting out the new year 2010 is Mitch Albom's Have a Little Faith, a book about losing belief and finding it again, life's purpose, and about the divine spark within us all.

This is Albom's first non-fiction book since Tuesdays with Morrie, and offers a beautifully written story of an eight-year journey between two worlds that will captivate and inspire readers.

Have a Little Faith begins with an unusual request: an eighty-two-year-old rabbi from Albom's old hometown asks him to deliver his eulogy. Barely knowing the man, Albom insists on understanding him better, which throws him back into a world of faith he'd left years before. Meanwhile, Albom has become involved with a Detroit pastor - a reformed drug dealer and convict - who preaches to the poor and homeless in a decayed old church.

Moving between their two different worlds, Albom observes how these very different men employ faith similarly in fighting for survival: the older, suburban rabbi embracing it as death approaches; the younger, inner-city pastor relying on it to keep himself and his church afloat.

As America struggles with hard times, Albom and these two men of God explore issues that perplex modern men: how to endure when difficult things happen; what heaven is; intermarriage; forgiveness; doubting God; and the enduring importance of faith. Albom comes to recognize a striking unity between these two different worlds. Albom writes the eulogy. And he comes to understand what both men had been teaching: the profound comfort of believing in something greater than yourself.

This book is cataloged under "Q -Inspirational", and can be found currently displayed at the checkout stand just inside the Augustana Room, and is available for check-out.

If you have questions about the library, or suggestions for its content or operations, see John Vonnegut, or leave a message for him in the Library box in the Church office.



Adult Education will resume on January 17, after the holidays and a congregation meeting on January 10. Join us in the Augustana Room at 10:30 a.m.

January 17th Statements of Faith: The creeds and their Origins - Part I
Brent Laytham, PhD

January 24th Congregation Meeting
No Adult Education

January 31st Statements of Faith: The creeds and their Origins - Part II
Brent Laytham, PhD

Visions of birds, beasts and Babylon! No wonder so many people either approach the Revelation of John and its perplexing imagery with obsessive speculation or avoid it all together. Yet, more than anything else, John's vision is a revelation about Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb who is also the victorious Lion. This final book of the Bible brings into focus the age-old struggle between good and evil and inspires us to anticipate the HOPE of the final outcome.



Join the Men's Bible Study, beginning at 7:00 p.m. Tuesday, January 19th, when Pastor Kelly will present a two-week introduction to the book of Revelation prior to our beginning a 13-week study. All men are welcome. No experience necessary. All you need is a desire to grow on your spiritual journey. Study guides are available for \$6.00.

Questions? Contact John West @ 847-729-0609 or e-mail jwestx2@sbcglobal.net.

Reach Out Through God's Love

Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service

Monday, January 18, 2010

Make it a Day On... Not a Day Off!

During his lifetime, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. worked tirelessly toward equality. He believed in a nation of freedom and justice for all, and encouraged all citizens to live up to the purpose and potential of America by applying the principles of non-violence to make this country a better place to live.

For several years Ascension people have been taking part in the Martin Luther King Day of Service. Ascension's Service Ministry Team encourages your participation in one of many opportunities to learn and serve in our communities that weekend .

Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Ministries (IRIM) will host a celebration of multiculturalism for refugee clients and volunteers **Monday, January 18, noon to 3 p.m.** at United Church of Rogers Park auditorium. We will commemorate Dr. King's legacy with a brief presentation on his work and multiculturalism in the United States. Dancing, potluck lunch and art projects will follow. Child care will be available. Volunteers are to arrive at 11 a.m. to help set up the space and meet one another before the clients arrive. Assignments will range from child care to coat checks to helping with an arts project. Contact Gail Price at church to sign up.

Temple Jeremiah in Northfield will show the film "Banished: How Whites Drove Blacks Out of Town in America" on **Sunday, January 17, 1:00 p.m.** at 937 Happ Road, Northfield. The film looks at three U.S. towns which, at the turn of the 19th century, forced the exodus of their entire African-American population and explores what can be done now to repair this injustice. A discussion follows the movie, facilitated by two civil rights advocates, Dino Robinson and Doria Johnson, the great-great-granddaughter of Anthony Crawford, who was lynched in South Carolina in 1916. The program is suitable for audiences **ages 13 and up**. For more information: Phyllis Burg, phyllisburg@templejeremiah.org, 847.441.5760 x 110.

The St. Paul AME Church, 336 Washington Street, Glencoe, will hold its annual Martin Luther King Day celebration **Sunday, January 17, 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.** A reception follows the service. For more information, please call the AME Church at 847-835-4421.

Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs and The Volunteer Center invite people of all ages to a day of service and inspiration honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The multi-faceted, multi-faith program will take place from **9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Am Shalom**, 840 Vernon Avenue in Glencoe.

Beginning at 9 a.m. participants are asked to bring two yards of fleece fabric and scissors to make no-sew blankets, scarves and pet toys to benefit The Night Ministry, Project Linus and Orphans of the Storm. Additional activities on-site will benefit Good News Partners.

Between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., concurrent with the service projects, comedian Aaron Freeman will moderate an inspiring program. Featured special guests include: The Soul Children of Chicago Choir; The Reverend Calvin S. Morris; and Storyteller Susan O'Halloran. The day will culminate with The Writers' Theatre performance "*The MLK Project: The Fight for Civil Rights*" for those aged 12 and older. The event is free of charge and no reservations are required. Lunch will be available for purchase. A donation of laundry detergent is also requested to benefit the New Trier Township Food Pantry. For more information, email VCHelps@aol.com or phone 847- 501-5760.

If you're looking for other opportunities to serve on the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, find a volunteer opportunity through www.Serve.gov.



Sunday, February 21

The saying goes there is no greater gift than the gift of life, and that can be applied in so many ways. Until eight years ago I donated blood almost every eight weeks, until one time I was rejected and was subsequently diagnosed with leukemia.

The chemotherapy for leukemia is so toxic, destroying my body's ability to make any type of blood cells, that I could not have survived without the gift of countless pints of donated blood and platelets. When my blood levels plummeted, up went the call to the blood bank, and down came the life-saving pints; I was the grateful recipient of those numerous generous gifts.

Due to my illness, I am no longer able to donate blood, but instead of one member of my family donating blood on a regular basis, I am now replaced by two. My two oldest children began donating this gift of life as soon as they turned sixteen. They now go together to donate, and will one day hopefully be joined by their two younger siblings who are not yet sixteen.

I am only here today because of God's Grace, and the life-saving gift of blood from unknown individuals. Join my children and consider making donating blood a part of your family's traditions. I, and all other recipients, thank you.

Debbie Gill

Christmas for the Children of Englewood Messiah Head Start

Ascension people can be counted upon to respond when need is identified, and the toys you placed under the Christmas tree for the children of LSSI's Englewood Messiah Head Start program further confirm your generosity. Thank you for this partnership.

Nancy Nagel

Habitat for Humanity



Builder Bob is going on vacation and will return to start Ascension's regular work schedule in April. He looks forward to all your great support then. Thanks to Barbara Ford, Dave Krone, Kristen Merrill, Julie Oimoen, John West, Mark Swenson, Jon Reid, Norma Taylor, Daniel Gill, Vanessa Young, Donna Peterson, Caron Hoffman and the many non-members who participated on work crews this year. With your help Habitat was able to complete 8 houses for deserving families. Construction continues over the winter and if you would like to reach out the Habitat folks would love to have you.

Builder Bob Reid

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Thanksgiving Food Drive

Thank you to all who brought in bags of food for our Thanksgiving food drive. The Lakeview Pantry and Elijah Pantry were the beneficiaries of all your generous giving.

Sandy Veith

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Bethel Family Sharing

Many thanks to everyone who adopted a Bethel family this Christmas! Over 150 people were able to share in the joy of Christmas this year because of your generous donations. Thanks to the Glen Anderson, Beebe, Borgstrom, Cain, Harry Carlson, Chester, Clinton, Collinsworth, Ford, Gill, Gordon, Greenwald, Kelly, Kinnaird, Kollmann, Kosnik, Krafft, Kreuzfeldt, Leverenz, Lump, McClung, McCune, Nagel, Carol Mueller, Nahrwold, Nathaus, Newman, Otis, Jeanne Peterson, Piraro, Price, Reid, Reilly, Schwab, Caryl Scott, Stevenson, Veith, Kurt Vining, Charles Ward, Willason, and Young families, all of the Confirmation and High School youth, and everyone who lent a hand. Special thanks to Ann and Don Gordon, Dale McCleary, Charlie Price, and Jill and Bob Reid for driving packages down to Bethel.

Focus on Health

Staying Away from Fad Diets

With all the focus on weight in our society, it isn't surprising that millions of people fall prey to fad diets and bogus weight-loss products. Conflicting claims, testimonials and hype by so-called "experts" can confuse even the most informed consumers. The bottom line is simple: If a diet or product sounds too good to be true, it probably is. There are no foods or pills that magically burn fat. No super foods will alter your genetic code. No products will miraculously melt fat while you watch TV or sleep. Some ingredients in supplements and herbal products can be dangerous and even deadly for some people.

Steer clear of any diet plans, pills and products that make the following claims:

Rapid Weight Loss—Slow, steady weight loss is more likely to last than dramatic weight changes. Healthy plans aim for a loss of no more than ½ pound to 1 pound per week. If you lose weight quickly, you'll lose muscle, bone and water. You also will be more likely to regain the pounds quickly afterwards.

Quantities and Limitations—Ditch diets that allow unlimited quantities of any food, such as grapefruit and cabbage soup. It's boring to eat the same thing over and over and hard to stick with monotonous plans. Avoid any diet that eliminates or severely restricts entire food groups, such as carbohydrates. Even if you take a multivitamin, you'll still miss some critical nutrients.

Specific Food Combinations—There is no evidence that combining certain foods or eating foods at specific times of day will help with weight loss. Eating the "wrong" combinations of food doesn't cause them to turn to fat immediately or to produce toxins in your intestines, as some plans claim.

Rigid Menus—Life is already complicated enough. Limiting food choices or following rigid meal plans can be an overwhelming, distasteful task. With any new diet, always ask yourself: "Can I eat this way for the rest of my life?" If the answer is no, the plan is not for you.

No Need to Exercise—Regular physical activity is essential for good health and healthy weight management. The key to success is to find physical activities that you enjoy and then to aim for 30 to 60 minutes of activity on most days of the week.

If you want to maintain a healthy weight, build muscle and lose fat, the best path is a lifelong combination of eating smarter and moving more.

Linda Clinton

Epiphany greetings in the name of Jesus. As we begin a new year, we often make commitments to ourselves to adopt practices that are good for us and to set aside those which have the potential to harm us. Many of us return to the health club or an exercise class and undertake new eating plans in January. We re-engage in Bible studies and prayer groups and seek to be more intentionally grateful for our many blessings. In a spiritual sense, we recommit to being good stewards of the lives God has given to us. Whatever your re-commitment, here are some suggestions for making New Year's resolutions 'fail proof.'

Keep goals realistic. Set goals you are confident you can reach. Don't set yourself up for failure.

Be specific about your goals. Try saying "I will lose one pound per week until I reach my goal" or "I will read one chapter in the Bible each day."

Develop a plan. Think carefully about your resources, limits and reasons for past failures. Write down strategies to help you reach your goals. Include resources such as prayer, Bible studies and working with others.

Find a partner. Moral support can be a big help in reaching your goals. Jesus is an excellent support.

Keep track of your progress. You will see progress and identify barriers to reaching your goals.

Think of each day as a new beginning. You don't need to keep your resolutions for 365 consecutive days, but just one day at a time. Appreciate the newness that each day brings!

Do your best; the rest, leave to God. The Lord is your partner and he will bless your efforts at growth. Enjoy the knowledge that all things are in the hands of our loving Lord.

Yoga Monday Mornings 9:00 a.m. beginning January 4

Treat yourself kindly by beginning the week with certified yoga instructor Pat Constabileo. The class is geared to beginning students, and people of all experience levels are welcome. Yoga helps us to feel younger by promoting flexibility, coordination and balance. Cost is \$10 per session and scholarships are available. Invite friends to join you, then bring a towel or yoga mat, wear comfortable clothing, and meet in the confirmation room K-L in the education wing. You may enter through the north door.

May you know God's blessing of wholeness in body, mind and spirit.

Gail Price

Stewardship

You will recall that on November 8th we celebrated Commitment Sunday, when we were asked to make a financial commitment to Ascension for 2010. Since that time we've continued to receive additional pledges for next year. To date, 117 households have made a 2010 commitment, an increase of 27 households since our last Witness update. This total brings us close to the total number of households that pledged last year (124).

Again, if you have already made a commitment, thank you so much for helping to carry out the important ministries at Ascension. If you have not yet pledged, please prayerfully consider making a commitment for 2010.

Blessings,

Your Stewardship Team

Property

We have decided to change cleaning services. After several conversations with our current service and not seeing any change in their work, we have decided to try a different service. Our goal is to establish a quality ongoing cleaning schedule with occasional "deep cleaning" in all areas as we see the need.

A proposal has been submitted to the Council to replace the boiler. We recently requested bids from four contractors and after reviewing their offers with our engineering consultant, interviewing the contractors and referencing their prior work, we have focused on one proposal for two small high-efficiency boilers. We also submitted to council a proposal for asbestos abatement when we found that there is a small amount of asbestos in the boiler room. Council approved its removal and that work has been completed.

We continue to have discussion about plans for 2010. Some early projects may include paint and a new floor for the women's restroom and tile for the men's restroom.

Kurt Vining

Fellowship

Ascension Women's Luncheon

Thursday, January 7

The next Ascension Women's Luncheon will be held at 12:00 noon on Thursday, January 7th at Hackneys on Lake Avenue. Our speaker will be Terri Gens, Senior Director of Development at Lutheran Social Services. She will give us an update and more information about Lifebooks and speak about LSSI's Headstart Program in Englewood, both of which our congregation has supported with gifts and monetary donations. All women are invited to come and bring a friend. Terri Gens is a delightful and enthusiastic speaker so you won't miss to miss this opportunity to hear her.