



St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church
New Ulm, MN
December, 2022 *Fortress*

DISPEL THE DARKNESS

The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. (Proverbs 4:18)

Advent is a season of hope. The blue paraments remind us of the color of the sky where we look in hope for the Lord's revelation. We place candles on a wreath, week by week adding the light of yet another candle each time we re-light the wreath in order to indicate the dispelling of the darkness until the day when we celebrate the fulfillment of the hope that is ours in God.

In many ways Advent depicts the life of the Christian. The writer of the book of Proverbs describes the life of the Christian in this way: **The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.** (Proverbs 4:18)

Not everything in the life of the Christian is easily understood, especially at first. We learn that there is right and wrong. We know that God hates wrong and loves good. Then we learn that we don't always do good, in fact, that we are not good enough to earn God's love and salvation.

But then we learn that God in his love sent a Savior to deliver us from our sin. Jesus Christ lived and died for you and me. We start out with the basic truth that Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. However, as we mature in our faith and grow in the knowledge of our Savior, our sensitivity to the law of God also becomes sharper as we become more aware of our sin. We are made ever more aware of our need for the Savior. As we find a deeper need for comfort, we are also led into a deeper understanding of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. We search the Bible in hope of greater consolation; and it is there -- the great hope which we seek. It is there where we find these comforting words from St. Paul who wrote in **Romans 5:20: Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.** That is to say, no matter how severe the sin, no matter how deep the sorrow, the joy of the Gospel surpasses it. No matter how dark the path under the valley of the shadow of death, the light of our heavenly hope in Christ will still be the light for our path. Therefore, the Christian walk is one in which we are always able to look beyond the pains and sorrows which confront us and find comfort in the greater hope that is always ours in Jesus Christ our Savior.

Therefore, this Advent season, let us remember that as the candles dispel the darkness in the church, even so, in Jesus Christ the darkness of sin and the ignorance about God's salvation plan for the world is dispelled by the message Christ's Advent. For in the Christmas proclamation that the

Savior has been born the light of heaven shines on us in the glorious hope of a better life beyond this one and the fulfillment the promise guaranteeing joy beyond all understanding.

Merry Christmas, one and all.

In Christ,
Pastor Jeffrey A. Bovee

December Sermon Texts

December 4	Isaiah 11:1-10	Be Surprised by the Branch!
December 7	Revelation 19:5-9	The Coming King Will Be Worshipped
December 11	Isaiah 35	Sing the Song of the Redeemed
December 14	Revelation 19:10-16	The Coming King Will Be Victorious
December 18	Isaiah 7:10-14	There is Hope! God is With Us!
December 24	St. Paul's School Christmas Service at 4 pm Candlelight Christmas Eve Service at 7 pm	
December 25	Isaiah 52:7-10	All the Ends of the Earth Will See the Salvation of God
December 31	Exodus 33:12-23	In the Presence of God

Bible Classes meet in the Church Basement

The class can also be found online at bit.ly/SJBibleClass

Sundays at 9:30 am December 4 & 11	Approaching Gender Identity & Sexuality with a Listening Heart	Brad Price
Thursdays at 10:30 am	Great Prayers of the Bible	Pastor Rob Guenther
Thursdays at 7 pm	Minor Prophets	Pastor Jeff Bovee
Fridays at 9:30 am	Women's Class: <i>The Screwtape Letters</i>	Pastor Rob Guenther

Council Digest

The St. John's Church Council met on November 15, 2022. A summary of reports and actions not reported elsewhere in the *Fortress* follows:

Ministrations

Transfers In

Mary Hoffman from Riverview, Appleton, WI
Christine Schindler; Heidi from St. Matthew's, Oconomowoc, WI

Adult Confirmation

Deb Koch

Pastoral Acts

Baptism

6 Nov Maverick William Hansen

Funerals

5 Nov Tim Koestler
12 Nov Sharon Leppla
14 Nov Ellie Stevenson

Deacon Brad Price reported October attendance numbers, including guests over the MN Lutheran teachers' conference weekend. The online attendance averaged 62.5 per week.

The **Elders** Board chair Jason Mohror informed the council of the Elders' plans to implement procedures for St. John's employee reviews in the 2023 calendar year.

Evangelism Board chair Jesse Zahrt updated the council members on outreach into the community. John & Paul Ministries Trunk or Treat events connected with 750 people, yet the concern is that with several other organizations now holding a similar event, it may become just another trick or treating event - rather than a "come join us at St. Paul's school" for a JPM event.

The Evangelism Board is continuing to provide opportunities for congregation members to continue connections into the community.

November 25 - Parade of Lights at 6 pm St. Johns members made connections into the community with smiles and invitations to Advent and Christmas services. Watch for guests this holiday season and introduce yourself to a new face. Either way, it is someone who will benefit from a Gospel-motivated introduction.

November 26 - The new Christmas banners go up in the entryway arches and remain up through Advent and Christmas as a talking point to share with others as an opportunity to share the joyful gift of our Savior, Jesus.

The **Stewardship** Board reported the formation of a subcommittee to look at Future Finances. The subcommittee's goals include:

- a. Assessing the status of the progress of several committees working on current and future projects at St. John's
- b. Projecting financial implications of each committee's work
- c. Determining and collating probable timelines for the projects
- d. Checking the current financial status for each project and other financial sources
- e. Providing information for the Stewardship Board to recommend a prioritized list for congregational approval

The **Trustees** outlined the current maintenance of St. John's properties. Work is also being organized for the kitchen project approved by the voters in October.

This project will provide data to see what type of appeal St. John's can handle. A foundational principle of the project is that updates, like appliances, can also be used in future expansion efforts. Work has begun with the contractor and tradespeople on the timetable for the project. Concept drawings and pictures can be viewed electronically at bit.ly/SJkitchen2023. Gifts for this project are currently being received by writing "**Kitchen Project**" on offering envelopes or check memo lines. Most importantly, we pray for Jesus' blessings that this project will benefit our ministry.

The council was also updated on a small group meeting with representative leadership from each congregation. The group discussed questions about the proposed **school agreement** to support St. John's students and the ministry of St. Paul's Lutheran School. The small group found common ground and identified the next steps. The next steps are

- a) for St. John's to provide input into the financial reporting of St. Paul's Lutheran School.
- b) St. Paul's will incorporate the input into the school's financial reporting.

Following these steps, the small group plans to meet in early December to discuss the avenues of communicating school information and financing so that we have a trusting foundation for a St. Paul's and St. John's partnership that supports St. Paul's Lutheran School.

The council also reviewed the list of nominations for the various 2023 St. John's boards and committees. Time was taken to identify people with God-given gifts and abilities that would benefit the group's work. Invitations are being sent to identified individuals.

The next **voters' meeting** is on Monday, Dec. 19, at 7 pm, with holiday refreshments. We will overview the current discussions/position on St. John's expansion and hold our annual elections.

Future meetings:

Next regular voters' meeting, elections - December 19, 2022, at 7 pm

Next regular council meeting - December 20, 2022, at 7 pm

Submitted by Jon Schaefer,
Congregational President

Staff Minister

Online Church Directory – Many of the pictures that are in the January 2022 Edition are fine to use again in the coming 2023 Edition which will print in February. However, there are some families whose children have grown or even increased in number this year. Members who were not pictured in the 2022 edition received an email and a note in their church mailboxes requesting pictures. I hope you will consider adding your picture to the directory. Any member can submit an updated picture via email to sm.dretske@stjohnsnewulm.com or look for me before or after services to take your picture.

If anyone has a changed address, phone number, or have children now in college or military, please fill out and update information on sheets available in the new narthex and drop it off in the office. Thank you!

Church Board Brochures – Did you ever wonder about how everything works at St. John's? Or wonder about which board has the responsibility of a certain aspect of the church? Our church leaders have been working to put information together to give to members, via Board Brochures, a quick look at what each board does and develop organizational charts that show the various related functions of each. I have had the privilege to work with these leaders throughout the year and put together these brochures for you. Look for these colorful, new brochures coming soon in the church narthex.

Visiting the Homebound - I continue to have the privilege of joining the pastors in visits to members who are homebound—sharing the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. If you are not on our list to be visited but would like to be included, please call the church office or me at **507-217-7604** to get on the list.

Six volunteers from St. John's help out every other week to bring residents to the chapel service at **Oak Hills Living Center** and return them to their rooms after. If you are available from 3:30 until 5:00 on Tuesdays, consider adding your name to the list of helpers. Thank you, Oak Hills Volunteers for your help!

Streamed/Recorded Services – You can access our **St. John's Lutheran Church YouTube** page quickly by entering bit.ly/SJyoutube in your online browser either on computer or on your phone. If you are watching our church services on YouTube, please hit **SUBSCRIBE**. You will not need to pay a monthly fee. It only means that our St. John's New Ulm "Channel" will show up under your Subscribed Channels in the YouTube App to access it easily.

If you have watched an online service and feel that the video or sound had issues that could be fixed that would improve people's experience in watching our services, please send me a message via email so that I can address these issues. We would like all visitors to our online services to have an enjoyable experience. You could fill out a **Quick Response Survey** online to let us know how we are doing and leave a comment.

Go to: <https://bit.ly/SJRecord-Stream>

Other activities: 1) Updated the look of our online YouTube Channel for St. John's, 2) Finished power washing the lower parts of the church building during the warm days at the end of October and early November. Think about helping to get the higher parts of the church power washed next summer when warm weather returns – contact me or our Trustee chairman, Scott Deters at Trustees@stjohnsnewulm.com

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Dretske

St. Paul's School

St. Paul's Lutheran School just finished its first quarter, and I've completed my first quarter as Student Learning Coordinator! Many of you are unfamiliar with my title and wondering, "What does a Student Learning Coordinator do?"

Teach: One-third of my school day is designated to teaching in grades 7-8. I teach three sections of American History (Civil War-Present) and one section of Pre-Algebra.

Screen/Assess: Grades 3-8 use MAPS testing as their universal screener, but nothing is used for grades K-2. We implemented a new universal screening process for grades K-2 (FASTbridges). These assessments are given three times a year. The gathered data helps us identify students who may be struggling. These students receive the intervention(s).

Organize Interventions: These are direct, explicit instructions based on the missing skills identified by parents, teachers, or the screening assessments. They are taught in small groups, and their progress is monitored.

Communicate: A portion of our students receive special services through New Ulm Public School. I assist with the scheduling and logistics required to work effectively within that partnership. I support the classroom teacher when a student is going through the process of qualifying for special education services.

Paraprofessionals: We are blessed with 8 paraprofessionals that work in K-8. I coordinate their schedules as needed, train for screening, offer support, and say "Thank you" to them a lot! What a blessing to serve in this capacity! Thank you for your prayers and support.

Respectfully Submitted by Mrs. Amber Brown

Youth Group

Thank you to all who helped with our Leaf Raking event in November. We had the privilege to serve 10 of our members with this event. At the end of the day, we were also able to have some fun and fellowship at Pizza Ranch.

Also, in November we had a fun-filled Game Night at St. John's. Devotion, games, snacks, laughs and Christmas Music were enjoyed by all.

Coming up in December, the Youth Group will once again be hosting Christmas for Kids on December 3. A morning of crafts, games, music, snacks and fun for all as we celebrate our Savior's birth. Also, keep an eye out for another fun event or two during the holiday season.

Merry Christmas to all of you at St. John's. May Our Savior's Birth fill your hearts with Joy this coming season!

St. John's Youth Group

In Loving Memory

<i>Carl & Cleo Melendy</i>	Kitchen Fund	\$555
<i>Timothy Koestler</i>	Undesignated Endowment Fund	\$385 \$50
<i>Sharon Leppla</i>	Kitchen Fund Endowment Fund	\$85 \$50

Church Library

Christmas is coming, let earth receive her King. The church library has many books for children that can help you explain the Nativity story to your loved ones. Even some DVD's. Check them out!

This month we have two fiction and no-fiction books to introduce. The two fiction books are by the same author, Francine Rivers. "Redeeming Love" is a novelization of the story of Hosea, from the Bible. He is told by the Lord to stick to his wife even though she is unfaithful, as Jesus sticks to us. The "Echo in Darkness" is the third book in my favorite trilogy, called "Mark of the Lion." It is the story of a rich Roman, who loved a Jewish slave, and thought that she had died in the colosseum with the lions, because she was a Christian. But she is hiding under a cloak that covers all of her, while she helps a doctor treats patients, and while using God's love.

The first non-fiction book is "Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus" by Nabeel Qureshi. A devout Muslim from birth, he had studied and memorized the Koran, even as an American. A Muslim belief that Jesus was a prophet like Mohammed let him, with help from Christian friends, to read all of the Bible and encounter Christianity. He received several degrees along the way. His path to Christianity teaches the reader much about Islam and Jesus. Sadly the author died from cancer soon after the book was published.

We pray that you have a blessed Christmas, and New Year, celebrating our Savior's birth 2,000 years ago, and his love that is still with us.

LeiLani Rahn,
Church Librarian

Women of St. John's

Join the women of St. John's for the annual Christmas party at 7 pm on Tuesday, December 6.

In place of a gift exchange, please bring a gift to help support the Martin Luther Food Bank for married students.

Ideas include gift cards for Walmart, Cashwise, HyVee, Kwik Trip or other local stores.

Snacks will be provided. Come and enjoy some holiday fun and fellowship!

Volunteers Needed

Thank you to all the St. John's member volunteers who offered their time and talent this past year to help out at the NU Emergency Food Shelf for 2022. We have another opportunity to volunteer at the Food Shelf, 1305 S. Valley St., on the 3rd Monday of each month from 11:45 am - 3 pm. Two to three volunteers are needed for the dates referenced below. High school and college students are welcome to volunteer.

March 20	June 19	September 18	December 18
April 17	July 17	October 16	
May 15	August 21	November 20	

Please consider signing up for a Monday or two. High school and college students are welcome.

Please contact Rita Walters via phone or text at 507-351-8603 or email at rmwalters@hotmail.com to sign up.

Our Synod at Work

Highlights from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Spotlight

A few weeks back the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary sent out their Spotlight, which contained recent news about the Seminary. In this month's column we will take a look at some of the information that was contained in this flyer.

The seminary saw an increase in enrollment. The school year began with 148 students enrolled in the seminary. That is the highest enrollment since the fall of 2010. The on-campus enrollment of 130 students is the highest since the fall of 2007, and the junior class has 49 students, which is the largest junior class since the fall of 2006.

The seminary's governing board, in conjunction with WELS Joint Mission Council, is in the process of calling a new director of the Pastoral Studies Institute. The new director will replace Professor Jon Bare, who accepted the Lord's call to serve as president of Asia Lutheran Seminary. Also, the governing board, in its February meeting, will be extending a call for a new professor, which will address a vacancy resulting from Professor Paul Wendland's decision to retire at the end of the

2022-23 school year. When he retires, he will have served 22 at the seminary (with 15 of those years as President).

During the past year, a committee worked with HGA to develop a master site plan. A primary feature of that plan is an educational center that will provide six new classrooms. The plans also call for a new gathering space attached to the auditorium/gymnasium. The old classrooms would then be converted into faculty offices to facilitate collaboration between professors and encourage more regular interaction between students and faculty. The seminary will conduct a feasibility study sometime during this school year to determine if, and when, a building project might be undertaken.

The seminary faculty is actively working on a self-study as part of the process of seeking accreditation from the Association of Theological Schools. The accrediting agency does not insist that institutions have certain policies, procedures, or practices in place, but they have established standards that individual schools can fulfill in different ways (depending on the institution's mission). The self-study provides an opportunity to consider how the seminary can better carry out its mission of forming pastors to proclaim God's praise.

Students at the seminary receive assistance from their home congregations, from Salem Foundation, from other groups, and from the seminary's financial aid funds. On average, students receive support that exceeds the cost of tuition for the year, but students must still provide for their living expenses.

Over the past ten years, Pastor Partners has served recently graduated pastors by pairing them with a mentor pastor within their district. Grow in Grace provides training to mentor pastors in key areas where mentees can benefit the most, including time management/family (which was the primary focus for 2022).

Gerald Woodley

2022 Advent and Christmas Schedule

Midweek Advent

Wednesday, November 30, December 7 & 14
11 am, 4 and 6:30 pm

Sunday School Christmas

Sunday, December 18 at 11 am (no Communion)

Christmas Eve

Saturday, December 24
4 pm St. Paul's School Christmas Service
7 pm Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

Christmas Day

Sunday, December 25 at 8 & 9:30 am

New Year's Eve

Saturday, December 31 at 6:30 pm

New Year's Day

Sunday, January 1, 2023 at 8 & 9:30 am