

GABRIEL'S GAZETTE

FEBRUARY 2024



*"Loving, Sharing, Serving
Jesus with you."*

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The Crucifix

The church season of Lent is quickly coming upon us, February 14th to be precise. Yes, Valentine's Day is also Ash Wednesday this year. I bet that would make a good sermon...come and find out!

This would be a good time to talk about the cross, particularly the crucifix. The cross, plain or with the body of Jesus on it (a crucifix), is a powerful symbol of the redemption which Jesus won for us on Good Friday. The ancient world knew what crucifixions looked like. Romans frequently crucified rebels and violent criminals as a terrifying warning. You would find crosses outside most major cities in the Roman world. It, therefore, became a scandal when Christians boasted in their crucified Lord. That would be like preachers proclaiming the Lord having been hanged or killed by electric chair or lethal injection. Imagine hanging a symbol like that in your churches or around your neck!

But, the Apostle Paul wrote: "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are being called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:22-24).

Paul also wrote, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

And again, "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

The cross, therefore, is the Church's most important symbol, representing the central message of the Gospel, the means by

which Christ won our salvation. Either a cross with or without the body of Jesus serves as this symbol. One common misconception is that the empty cross reminds us that Jesus is risen. The fact is, the cross would be empty whether or not Jesus had remained in the grave! There are symbols for resurrection: an empty tomb, flowers, candles, butterflies, and even bunnies and chicks. The cross, however, is always a symbol of the crucifixion.

Another misconception about the crucifix is that it is a Roman Catholic thing. If you have visited historic Lutheran churches in America or Lutheran churches in Europe, you will know that this is not true. They all have crucifixes (unless they later removed them). In fact, the founding churches of the LCMS had (and many still have) crucifixes. However, after being influenced by American Protestants, who come from the tradition of not having them, Lutherans in America stopped using them for a while.

Why didn't American Protestants have crucifixes? Because they mostly came from the tradition of Ulrich Zwingli, a 16th century Reformed theologian, who viewed depictions of God and Jesus and other saints in art and statues and on crosses as being idolatry. Lutherans never thought this way, but appreciated any art which would contribute to the teaching and devotion of the church's worship.

What advantages might there be in having a crucifix? It serves as a vivid reminder of the one who died for us. Remember, it was not the wood of the cross that saved you, but the One who hung there with your sins. It also returns a bit more of the scandal of the cross.

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The Crucifix

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Even rappers and celebrities wear crosses for fashion. But a crucifix will show what the symbol is all about. The cross is not cleaned up for you. It shows the gravity of your sins and the weight of God’s love for you. Whether an empty cross or crucifix, may this symbol fix your eyes on Jesus now and always.

Pastor



Caring for My Neighbor

If any of the Ten Commandments might tempt us to think that keeping the Law is easy, it would be the Fifth Commandment. After all, how hard is it to get through life without murdering somebody? The vast majority of people can handle that!

But Jesus famously blows up this notion by pointing out that the command, “you shall not murder,” goes much deeper — down to the heart.

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, “You fool!” will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matt. 5:21-22)

Hatred and disdain come from the same sort of crookedness of heart as murder. With both murder and hatred, you look down on another person and think them of little worth.

In the Small Catechism, Luther also points out that every “do not” in the commandments also includes a “do this:” “We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body but help and support him in every physical need” (SC, Fifth Commandment, emphasis added).

We are not called merely to avoid evil; we must also do positive good.

So when Jesus drew near to us and became our neighbor by taking up our humanity, He came not only to avoid harming us, but He came to positively help us, bless us, and serve us.

We are now called to show the love to our neighbors that Christ showed to us. Your neighbor is yet another gift that God has given you that requires your stewardship. We are called to show mercy, to be kind, to love and serve our neighbor. One aspect of this stewardship is financial: our neighbors need us to support the church’s work so that they can hear the Gospel and come to faith. Our neighbors need the church’s alms and mercy work. Our neighbors need our faithful service in all we do in the name of Christ

YOU CAN CHANGE A LIFE!



American Red Cross

**The need is constant.
The gratification is instant.
Give blood.**

BLOOD DRIVE - Thursday, Feb. 8 2 p.m. – 6 p.m.

Immanuel Lutheran Church - Fellowship Hall
1237 E. Coolspring Ave. – Michigan City

The American Red Cross is struggling to keep hospital blood bank shelves full and hospitals are being forced to make difficult decisions every day about who should receive a transfusion. Every unit collected is critical!

Please register online at www.redcrossblood.org to make an appointment.

For each unit donated, three lives can be saved!
See Rebecca Klimek for more information.

Thanks to all who served in leadership positions for our congregation during 2023. The offering you gave of your time and talents has been greatly appreciated by us all.





**JOIN US FOR
MIDWEEK
WORSHIP SERVICES
DURING
THE LENTEN SEASON.**

**WEDNESDAY MORNINGS 11:00 AM
EVENINGS 6:30 PM**

**BEGINNING ASH WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 14**

Come early for supper at 5:30

**A LOOK AHEAD TO
LENTEN SUPPERS**



Lent is right around the corner, and we need four groups to supply supper on Wednesday nights during Lent. Please call the office at (219) 872-4419 and let us know which date you would like! Available dates are: Feb. 14, 28; March 6, 13.



Please join Lori Dobkins and Anita Henn in making Valentine's Day cards for our shut-ins and residents of Simeon Square. We will meet on **February 4th** in Fellowship Hall after the worship service.



VALENTINE TEA

**Saturday, February 10th
2:00 p.m.
in Fellowship Hall**

Ladies save the date! This will be the third annual Valentine's Tea. Ticket cost is \$10 per person. We will again be having the La Porte High School Swing Choir perform. All ladies in the congregation, of all ages, are invited! So, please come and enjoy some fellowship with other ladies of the congregation. Tickets can be purchased from members of Ladies Aid.



**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 9th
7:00 p.m.
Fellowship Hall**

Trivia night is back! This year's version is being billed as the **Super Valentine's Lenten Bowl Trivia Night**. We will celebrate things from Valentine's Day, the Super Bowl, and others. This contest will be held on Friday, February 9th. Doors open at 6 p.m., trivia starts at 7 p.m., cost is still \$10 per player. Bring your own team, drinks, snacks, and enthusiasm. Compete for the cheeseballs and the deluxe trophy awarded to the winners. Proceeds to benefit the youth *Higher Things* trip. Come join us!





Shepherds & Lambs The Sunday School Newsletter February 2024

We are planning some Lenten activities to help us walk through the weeks before Easter. Stay tuned!



Our children did a great job sharing the Christmas story, THE STAR OF LOVE.

There were 18 of our students that participated. Thank you to those who donated treats for the Stockings that were given to each student after the program.



In Christ's Service,

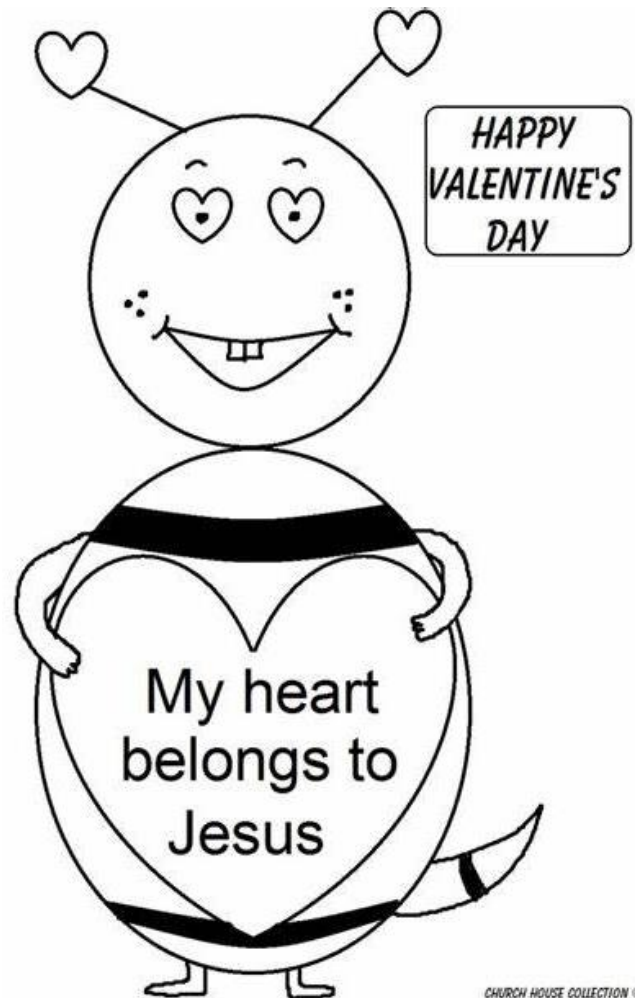
Lynette Johnston-Martin
Superintendent



During the Advent season, families were encouraged to hide Mary and Joseph, similar to the elf on the shelf. I hope it helped the children anticipate the arrival of our Savior.

COLOR ME!

We are planning a Valentine Party for students on Saturday, Feb. 3, 10 a.m.-12 noon, in Fellowship Hall. We will be decorating around the church and making a little gift box for our shut-ins and those in need of a little loving uplift of their spirits. A couple of games, and "of course," some sweet treats are in order! We hope to see you all!!



CHRISTIAN PARENTING WITH SUCCESS:



February celebrates and concentrates on things of love. Primary thinking is God's amazing love for us by sending His Son to us to die for us. "Children are a gift of the Lord," Psalm 127:3. Each child bears the image of God and therefore carries immense worth. God expects us to be good stewards of these precious gifts.

Each child is precious to the Lord, whether in or out of the womb. When we appear before Jesus in judgement, we will be held responsible for how we raised our children. "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it," Proverbs 22:6. Training up a child involves bringing your child to Christ by setting up a Biblical foundation. Aiding in this is Sunday School and church attendance, home devotion, and praying together. Exemplifying Godly character will also put that Godly "footprint" onto their lives. Commit to leading your child to Christ. Prayerfully, with the Holy Spirit's help, this guidance will follow them throughout their lives. Next month we will offer a few more suggestions. The eternal life of our children is at stake!



2024 Men's Gathering

A Martyr's Death, the Hero's Life

Join other men in Christian fellowship on **April 4-7** at Lakeview Villages in Seymour, IN as Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller teaches us about what Martin Luther called the "pattern of the true Christian life." The martyrs of the early church still preach to us with their lives, their lips, and their blood – encouraging us to live a life of witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Get away and enjoy God's great creation, eat like a king at our hog roast, join in good-natured brotherly competition and much more. Visit www.mensgathering.us for info and registration.

Also, a special extended retreat is available this year as the full solar eclipse will be passing right over Camp Lakeview on Monday, April 8th. Sign up to stay Sunday and Monday to view this once-in-a-lifetime event!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS !

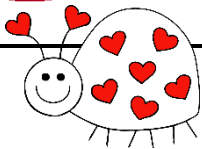


The dates have been set for this year's Vacation Bible School:

June 17-21

Program details will be shared as they develop, but mark it on your calendar now and save the dates.

You won't want to miss it!



PLEASE NOTE: The deadline for submitting items for the March *Gazette* is **Monday, Feb. 5.**

