

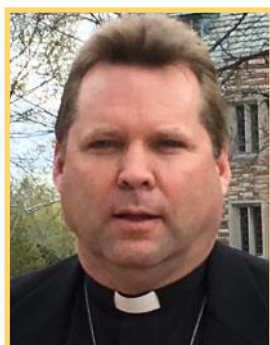


Bethlehem Lutheran Church



Bethlehem News

January



Dear Friends in Christ,

The ancient Babylonians are said to have been the first people to make New Year's resolutions, some 4,000 years ago. They were also the first to hold recorded celebrations in honor of the new year – though for them the year began not in January but in mid-March, when the crops were planted. During a massive 12-day religious festival known as Akitu, the Babylonians crowned a new king or reaffirmed their loyalty to the reigning king. They also made promises to the gods to pay their debts and return any objects they had borrowed. These promises could be considered the forerunners of our New Year's resolutions. If the Babylonians kept to their word, their (pagan) gods would bestow favor on them for the coming year. If not, they would fall out of the gods' favor – a place no one wanted to be.

A similar practice occurred in ancient Rome, after the reform-minded emperor Julius Caesar tinkered with the calendar and established January 1 as the beginning of the new year circa 46 B.C. Named for Janus, the two-faced god whose spirit inhabited doorways and arches, January had special significance for the Romans. Believing that Janus symbolically looked backwards into the previous year and ahead into the future, the Romans offered sacrifices to the deity and made promises of good conduct for the coming year.

For early Christians, the first day of the new year became the traditional occasion for thinking about one's past mistakes and resolving to do and be better in the future. In 1740, the English clergyman John Wesley, founder of Methodism, created the Covenant Renewal Service, most commonly held on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day. Also known as watch night services, they included readings from Scriptures and hymn singing, and served as a spiritual alternative to the raucous celebrations normally held to celebrate the coming of the new year. Now popular within evangelical Protestant churches, especially African American denominations and congregations, watch night services held on New Year's Eve are often spent praying and making resolutions for the coming year.

Despite the tradition's religious roots, New Year's resolutions today are a mostly secular practice. Instead of making promises to the gods, most people make resolutions only to themselves, and focus purely on self-improvement (which may explain why such resolutions seem so hard to follow through on). According to recent research, while as many as 45 percent of Americans say they usually make New Year's resolutions, only 8 percent are successful in achieving their goals. But that dismal record probably won't stop people from making resolutions anytime soon – after all, we've had about 4,000 years of practice.

For us the New Year gives us an opportunity to continue the practice of resolutions but with a little twist. As a Christian we are to live a life faithful to Christ. Hearing His word often and receiving His gifts of Forgiveness life and salvation.

Unlike the Babylonians we should daily affirm our loyalty to our King Jesus. We can and should daily remember our baptism into Christ and search ourselves daily to do God's will. Failing as we do we can go to Jesus knowing He has taken the punishment for us. Philippians 3:14. "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." You and I know we have faced many challenges in this life so we must press onward. We press onward like a runner in a marathon straining forward to win the prize. And when you are tired rest in Jesus. Let Him strengthen you by hearing His word and receiving the sacrament regularly. Jesus said come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest.

Happy New Year

Pastor Karl



News and Updates

Our Voters' meeting will be held on January 28th after the worship service . Each church board will present their plans for 2024. Please plan to attend.



Thank you to the children for sharing the Christmas story on Christmas Eve.

They worked hard and did a wonderful job. (See picture below)

Bible studies will continue on Wednesdays and after worship on Sundays. Make a New Year's resolution and join one.

Youth group will continue in January and we will choose a place for a field trip soon.

Planning for our big project and outreach of the year, Vacation Bible School, will begin early in the new year. I pray for workers to fill our needs for success.

Have a happy, healthy, blessed New Year.
Yearn to learn. Sandy



Our Ladies Guild meeting for January is scheduled for Monday, January 8th at 1 pm.

All ladies are welcome to join us and help with all activities and interests.

We love to discuss any ideas and suggestions for the coming months!

Thank you !

Pam Rugenstein



Many thanks to Thrivent Insurance holders that signed up for Action Teams in 2023. We have

had 18 projects in which Thrivent paid us \$250.00 each for a total of \$4,500 to get them started. Thanks to the volunteers that worked on these projects to make them successful.

If anyone wants to see the projects that we accomplished, see *Betty Willis*.



A big thank you to all the people who helped this year with the food drive for Buckingham Exceptional School. Each family received either a turkey or a ham and two large grocery bags full on nonperishable food items. Thanks to all who contributed food, money or time loading the bags with food. Thanks also to all who helped deliver the food to the school. The generosity of our members is amazing!

Thanks also to all who donated a poinsettia for the beautification of the church at Christmas time. The church looked great with the sea of red in front of the kneeling rail. If you haven't taken home your poinsettia yet, please do so. If you are interested in taking one home, please do. We need to find some happy homes for them.

Don't forget to sign up to help with our next dinner on January 11. This should be one of our bigger dinners since we are now in season. We will need lots of help as well as lots of desserts. We really appreciate how many of the members pitch in and help during these dinners. It takes a lot of help to make them successful.


Paul Rugenstein

HAPPY
New Year

May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us...
PSALM 90:17a



JANUARY 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 New Years Day	2	3 10:30 Bible Study	4	5	6  Epiphany
7 10:30 Worship 11:30 Bible Study; Sunday School	8 1:00 LWML	9	10 10:30 Bible Study	11 4-7 Church Dinner	12	13
14 10:30 Worship 11:30 Bible Study; Sunday School	15	16	17 10:30 Bible Study	18	19	20
21 10:30 Worship 11:30 Bible Study; Sunday School	22	23	24 10:30 Bible Study	25	26	27
28 10:30 Worship 11:30 Voters' Meeting	29	30	31 10:30 Bible Study			

	JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES
5	Karen & Edison Johnson
17	Debbie & Frank Jackow
22	Gale and Melvin Smith

May God Bless Each One of You As
We Celebrate Your Special Day!



Jessica, Sarah, and Sophia Smith celebrated their baptism on Dec. 17th

	JANUARY BIRTHDAYS
3	Steve Hempel
5	Rollin Duckwitz
6	Gary Schaeffer
15	Edison Johnson
20	Linda Kirsch
23	Kathy Brown
26	Janice Bradtmiller
28	Caydance Albert
29	Chip Rinehart
31	Linda Hedrick



The Rugensteins and Grages pack the Christmas goody bags for the congregation. (Sandy took the photo)



Bethlehem Lutheran Church Website:
Phone: 239-694-3878 www.bethlehemlutheranfortmyers.org
Email: bethlehemlc@gmail.com

Prayer Chain Needs

Do you know that Bethlehem has a prayer chain that prays for the sick, dying and hurting needs of our church family?

Call or email Linda at (239) 693-5026 or

jlirsch3@comcast.net

Your needs will be taken to the Lord!

Sunday Worship

10:30 AM Worship Service

Rev. Karl Glander

pastorkarlglender@gmail.com

239-293-1489

Organist: **Holly Bell**

Church Secretary: **Linda Kirsch**



Buckingham Exceptional School Christmas Program

Pictured above: Pastor and congregation members who attended the program.

Pictured below: The finale of this heartwarming program.