



*On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

-- Matthew 2:11

Dear Beloved in Christ of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod,

When the Magi first saw the child Jesus, their first instinct was to *pay him homage*. The word translated “homage” comes from the Greek *proskynēō*—from *pros* (“toward”) and *kyneō* (“to kiss”). Their worship was literally a *kiss toward Jesus*—a gesture of love, humility, and devotion.

That image captures what we long to be about in Northwestern Minnesota. Our vision—to be “a people wholly devoted to Jesus and our neighbor in love”—is another way of saying that we want everything we do together to be a kiss toward Jesus: a homage to the gentle One who heals, forgives, and sends us out in love.

This past year, our shared ministry offered many such kisses toward Christ:

- We **welcomed 15 new Synod Authorized Ministers**, ensuring that Word and Sacrament continue to touch lives in every corner of our synod.
- We **entrusted 14 new candidates for ordination**, nurturing leaders who will teach and serve in the spirit of Jesus’ humble strength.
- We **walked with congregations in transition and conflict**, showing that reconciliation itself can be an act of homage.
- We **sparked renewal** in rural congregations through our *Rural Revival Journey*, breathing hope and fresh imagination into places where Christ’s light still shines bright.
- And through *Jeremiah 29* and *F.A.C.E.S. of Leadership*, we are **equipping 41 leaders** to guide their communities toward deeper devotion—a daily kiss toward Jesus.

Friends, thank you. Your prayers, offerings, and faithful witness make these stories possible. Every kindness shared in Jesus’ name, every act of generosity, is another kiss toward the Savior we adore.

And in a time when Jesus’ name is sometimes used to divide us from one another or demean vulnerable neighbors, let us be clear about the One we worship. We pay homage not to a Lord of domination or fear, but to the humble Christ who welcomes the stranger, lifts the poor, blesses our most vulnerable siblings and honors the image of God in every person. The world has seen that kind of power come and go. The Magi journeyed far to worship a *different* kind of king—the one who reigns through mercy, not might.

As this year draws to a close, I invite you to join me in one more act of homage—a gift that becomes a kiss toward Jesus. Your congregation’s support and your personal generosity sustain ministries that bear Christ’s love to every corner of Northwestern Minnesota.

May our every gift, and every act of love, be a kiss toward the One who reigns from a manger and calls us to follow him in humility, justice, and joy.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Tesch".

Bp. Bill Tesch  
Bishop of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA

# ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

## OPENING LITURGY

Confident in God's generosity and gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us praise God and give thanks...

God, we praise you and give thanks.  
**You are good, and your mercy endures forever.**

You gave us a garden with good food to eat.  
**We praise you for food that nourishes us.**

You rescued your people from slavery.  
**We praise you for freedom.**

You gave us prophets to correct, rebuke and encourage us.  
**We bless you for your justice and mercy.**

You gave us your Son, Jesus, to love, redeem and save us.

**We praise you for his death and resurrection.**

You gave us your Holy Spirit to be our Advocate and Comforter.

**We bless you for the gifts of every tribe and nation.**

Strengthen your church with every spiritual gift.

**and commission us again to be your servant people.**

Multiply in us the fruit of the spirit:  
**love, you, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**

Send us in your love and mercy,  
**that the world may know and praise you.**

### Now Thank We All Our God



1 Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices,  
2 Oh, may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,  
3 All praise and thanks to God the Fa - ther now be giv - en,  
  
who won - drous things has done, in whom this world re - joic - es;  
with ev - er joy - ful hearts and bless - ed peace to cheer us,  
the Son, and Spir - it blest, who reign in high - est heav - en,  
  
who, from our moth - ers' arms, has blest us on our way  
and keep us all in grace, and guide us when per - plexed,  
the one e - ter - nal God, whom earth and heav'n a - dore;  
  
with count - less gifts of love, and still is ours to - day.  
and free us from all harm in this world and the next.  
for thus it was, is now, and shall be ev - er - more.

Text: Martin Rinkhart, 1586–1649; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–1878  
Music: NUN DANKE ALLE GOTT, Johann Crüger, 1598–1662

Let us pray.

Gracious God, you are the giver of every good gift. Bless us with all that we need for ministry in your name, that we might be a blessing to others. In the name of the one who broke bread and fed the multitudes, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**Amen.**