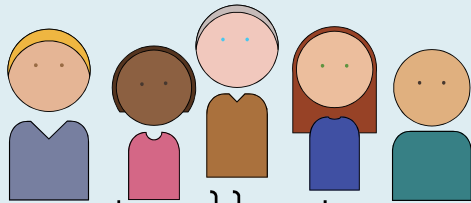


REFLECTIONS

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Installation of Officers

Board of Directors

The Rite of Installation of Officers will be held on Sunday, January 14, at both morning services. These officers include Cameron Lee, John Hartwig, Rick Hilst, Joanne Hilst, Dan Gehring, Marsha Carden, Susann Gehring, Stephanie Lee, Phil Bridges, Linda Hirschbuehler, Bobbie Scroggins, Betty Fischer.

A publication of Ascension Lutheran Church

Worship Opportunity Schedule

Sundays

8:00 & 10:45 AM - Worship with Communion
 9:30 AM - Bible Classes & Sunday School
 9:45 AM - Regency Missional Outreach

Mondays

6:00 PM - Worship with Communion

Tuesdays

10:00 AM - Women's Bible Study on Tuesdays

4th Saturdays

8:30 AM - Men's Prayer Breakfast

Missional Outreach Schedule

January 4	Regency	10:45 AM (4 th Floor)
January 10	HHR	10:15 AM
January 18	Regency	10:45 AM
January 24	HHR	10:15 AM

January 7, 14, 21, 28 Regency 9:45 AM

Board of Elders

Rick Hilst, Todd Ballentine, Jimmy Damron, Ed Myszka, Tim Yopek, Phil Fraley, Robert Smith, Mike Peebles, Burneal A. Fick, Burneal W. Fick, Lee Kenny



THE YEAR OF THE LORD

The new year is always a good time to pause for a moment and take stock of things. Many people use the opportunity to make new year's resolutions, ways they can strive to improve their lives, reach new goals, break bad habits, and so forth. But it's also a good time to reflect on the past year.

Psalm 90 prays, *"Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom,"* and this is even built into our calendar, in a way: this year is 2024 AD, which stands for *Anno Domini*, the Year of the Lord. We enter the Year of Our Lord 2024, leaving the Year of Our Lord 2023 – a reminder that all things belong to Him, and even time itself is one of His creations – and so we consider what this particular Lord's year has brought us.



Psalm 90:12

From the Pastor

Rev. Derek Waffel

For me personally, 2023 has been a momentous time. The biggest event was, of course, leaving Mississippi and arriving here at Ascension, still in the process of getting settled and getting to know all of you. I want to say yet again how thankful Eve and I are for the support we received from everyone here, in your prayers, kind words, and generosity. From the moment we arrived in Huntsville, we have been blessed by this church family. As Jesus said in John 13, *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,"* I know that He has many disciples here.

For some of you, it's been a good year; for others, it's held hard times, loss, and tragedy. For some, maybe it's been some of both. 2023 has brought a lot of things for our nation; it feels like the social and political divisions are only deepening, the news getting more depressing: we need as much as ever to be representatives of Christ's peace and reconciliation. Every day is full of reminders to turn to the Lord and rely on Him: in thanks and praise for the good, and for comfort and relief in the bad.



Though we never know what the next day will hold, Jesus encourages us not to worry about tomorrow because He provides for today, every day: we pray *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* and we can faithfully say along with the psalmist, *"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it"* (Ps. 118:24).

If we are to number our days so as to get a heart of wisdom, it will be because we trust in the One who creates us and sustains us day in and day out, year in and year out. It makes me think of Luther's Evening and Morning Prayers; as they're a good way to end a day and begin another, they are appropriate to end and begin the year, as well, if I can paraphrase it a bit:

"I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this year; and I pray that you would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me in the coming new year. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen."

From Stewardship

Bobbie Scroggins

HOPE

*“Let Your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,
even as we hope in You.”*

“Hope,” a striking painting by Frederick Watts, hangs in the Tate Gallery in London. A beautiful, blind-folded woman sitting on top of a globe. In her hand, she holds a lute. All but one of the strings are broken. She touches the one string with her finger and bends forward, listening. She is filled with hope – believing the best in the worst possible circumstances.

As long as hope is alive, life cannot get us down. We will not snap under the weight of our problems and afflictions. God is able to turn the worse situations around. Where hope exists, no night can be completely dark. Hope fills our hearts with joy, even when our hearts are breaking. It is hope that gives us an invincible spirit. This sinful world only knows about a hopeless end; the Christian knows an endless hope!



Psalms 130:7

Romans 8:24-25: *“For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”*

In Romans, Paul presents the idea that salvation is past, present and future. It is past because we were saved the moment we believed in Jesus Christ as Savior; our new life (eternal life) begins at that moment. It is present because we are being saved; this is the process of sanctification. But at the same time, we have not

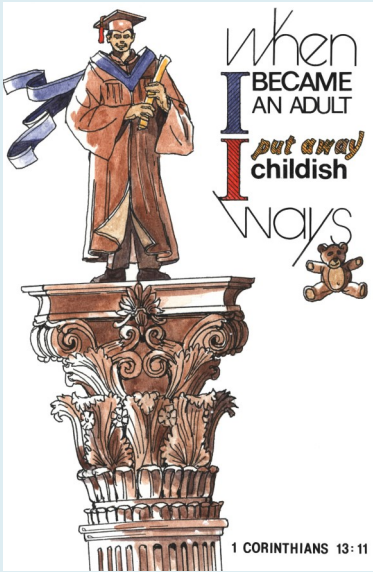
fully received all the benefits and blessings of salvation that will be ours when Christ’s new kingdom is completely established. That is our future salvation. While we can be confident of our salvation, we

still look ahead with hope and trust toward that complete change of body and personality that is beyond this life, when we will be like Christ.

It’s not easy to be hopeful when the world is set against us, when our dreams are derided and our efforts seem to have no effect. But hope, by its nature, cannot be for something we already have. We hope instead for what will be.

Galatians 3:25-29: *“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”*

The supervision of the law is like the supervision given by a tutor to a young child. We no longer need that kind of supervision. The law teaches us the need for salvation; God’s grace gives us that salvation. God reveals His nature, His will for humanity, His moral laws and His guidelines for living. But we cannot be saved by keeping that law, we must trust in Christ.



In Roman society, a youth coming of age laid aside the robe of childhood and put on a new toga. This represented his move into adult citizenship with full rights and responsibilities of the more mature. Paul was saying that they had laid aside the old clothes of the law and were putting on Christ's new robe of righteousness. Some Jewish males greeted each new day by praying, "Lord, I thank you that I am not a Gentile, a slave or a woman." The role of a woman was enhanced by Christianity. Faith in Christ transcends these differences and makes all believers one in Christ. We should take care not to impose upon others the distinctions that Christ has removed. Because all believers are His heirs, no one is more privileged than or superior to anyone else.

It is our natural inclination to feel uncomfortable around people who are different from us and to gravitate toward those who are similar to us.

From Stewardship (Continued)

But when we allow our differences to separate us from our fellow believers, we are disregarding clear Biblical teaching. We should instead make it a point to seek out and appreciate people who are not just like us and our friends. We may find we have a lot in common with them.

Psalms 71:1-16:

*In you, O LORD, do I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame!
In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me, and save me!
Be to me a rock of refuge,
to which I may continually come;
you have given the command to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.
Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man.
For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O LORD, from my youth.
Upon you I have leaned from before my birth;
you are he who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.
I have been as a portent to many,
but you are my strong refuge.
My mouth is filled with your praise,
and with your glory all the day.
Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
forsake me not when my strength is spent.
For my enemies speak concerning me;
those who watch for my life consult together
and say, "God has forsaken him;
pursue and seize him,
for there is none to deliver him."
O God, be not far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!
May my accusers be put to shame and consumed;
with scorn and disgrace may they be covered
who seek my hurt.
But I will hope continually
and will praise you yet more and more.
My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,
of your deeds of salvation all the day,
for their number is past my knowledge.
With the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD I will come;
I will remind them of your righteousness, yours alone.*

As we face the sunset years, we recognize that God has been our constant help in the past. As physical powers wane, we need God, and we realize He is still our constant help. We must never despair, but keep on expecting His help no matter how severe our limitations.

From Stewardship (Continued)

Hope in Him helps us to keep going, to keep serving Him.

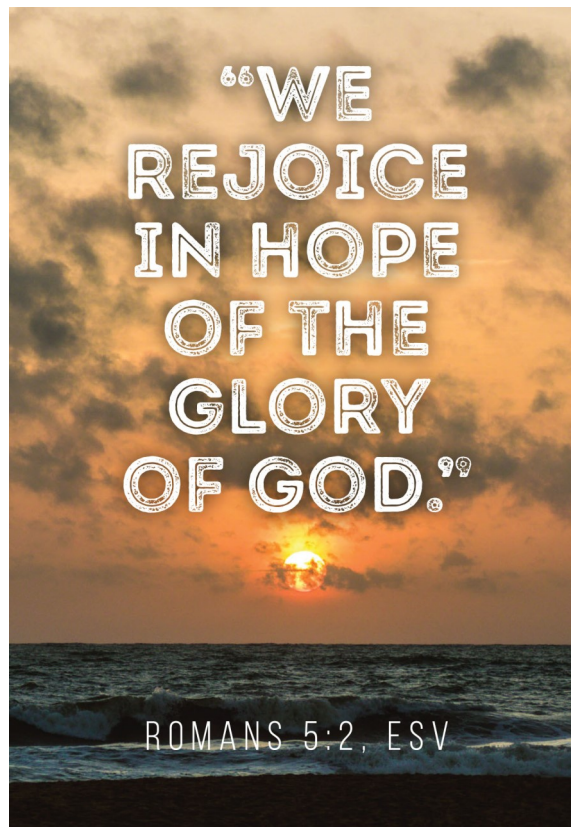
Romans 5:2-5: *“Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*

Therefore, we do not need to hope for this Savior – He has already come! He lived, died, triumphed over death and ascended into Heaven. Instead of hoping, we have faith that what we are told is true, that Christ’s saving work for us is true.

So, are we now no longer hopeful? Certainly not! We still hope to see all people treat one another as brothers and sisters. Most of all, we hope for our heavenly reward. And in this, hope and faith intermingle. For by what God has already done in Christ, faith makes our hopes certain.

A new year, like a new day, is a gift from You, heavenly Father. Today is a day to look back and see Your blessings, grace and guiding hand throughout the past year. We also look forward to what this year will bring. Through days of joy or days of sickness, days of sadness or days of rest, walk with us, Lord. Let us always feel Your presence beside us. Give us faith and hope to trust You.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Faith comes from hearing
THE MESSAGE,
 and the message
 is heard through the
WORD OF CHRIST.
Romans 10:17, NIV



Readings

January 7 - Epiphany

- Isaiah 60:1-6
- Ephesians 3:1-12
- Matthew 2:1-12

January 14 (2nd Sunday a. Epiphany)

- 1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20)
- 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
- John 1:43-51

January 21 (3rd Sunday a. Epiphany)

- Jonah 3:1-5, 10
- 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 (32-35)
- Mark 1:14-20

January 28 (4th Sunday a. Epiphany)

- Deuteronomy 18:15-20
- 1 Corinthians 8:1-13
- Mark 1:21-28

Kids' Corner

Puzzle!

NEW YEAR'S NOISE-MAKERS

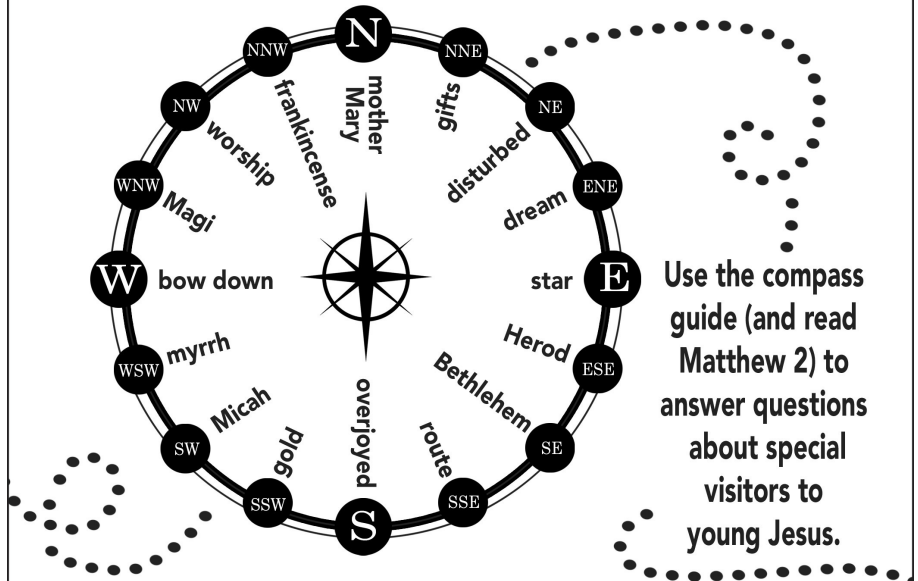
Ring in the New Year with these fun noisemakers!

What you need:

- Wooden craft sticks
- Metallic paint (gold and silver)
- Paint brushes
- Jingle bells (gold and silver)
- Hot glue gun
- Metallic ribbon
- Scissors
- Adult help

What you do:

1. Paint half the sticks gold and half silver. Let dry.
2. Glue three bells to each stick.
3. Cut a six-inch piece of ribbon for each stick. Tie a bow and glue it to the noisemaker. Celebrate!



Use the compass guide (and read Matthew 2) to answer questions about special visitors to young Jesus.

1. Who was king at the time of Jesus' birth? _____ (ESE)
2. Who came from the East to worship the one born king of the Jews? _____ (WNW)
3. How did King Herod feel about Jesus' birth? _____ (NE)
4. Which prophet did the chief priests and teachers of the law quote when King Herod asked where the Christ would be born? _____ (SW)
5. In what city would Christ be born? _____ (SE)
6. King Herod lied to the wise men, telling them to search and report back so he, too, could do what to Christ? _____ (NW)
7. What did the Magi see in the east and follow to find Jesus? _____ (E)
8. When the star stopped, how did the Magi feel? _____ (S)
9. Who else did the Magi see with Jesus? His _____ (N)
10. Before they worshiped the child, what did the Magi do? _____ (W)
11. Name the three treasures the Magi brought for Jesus.
_____ (SSW) _____ (NNW) _____ (WSW)
12. These three treasures were all brought for Jesus as _____ (NNE)
13. What warned the Magi not to return to Herod? A _____ (ENE)
14. The Magi had to return to their country by another _____ (SSE)

From the Elder

Rick Hilst

MY OLDER BROTHER

"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."
Philippians 1:21

My older brother Rusty, fourteen years my senior, is suffering from ALS. Although he is fighting valiantly, courageously even, the disease is slowly taking its toll. His ability to speak is becoming more and more difficult and his strength is declining. The strong, older brother I always looked up to is losing a battle to an awful disease. While his weekly chronicle of events reflects the positive, inspirational attitude he has maintained throughout his struggles, the unfortunate truth is that this is a war he cannot win.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they condemned all of mankind to death. As a result, our time on this earth is limited. Then we die. All of us. No one escapes. This is our future, at least on this planet. While no one likes to dwell on death and dying, it is inevitable.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they not only condemned man to physical death, but also to spiritual death. They severed the perfect union they had previously enjoyed with God. They traded the beauties of the Garden of Eden for the realities of a harsh, sin-filled world. The fellowship they shared, not only with God, but also with all His creatures was destroyed. Their idyllic life became anything but. Struggles and suffering replaced joy and freedom. Even worse, the righteous punishment for their terrible act of rebellion was eternal separation from God, eternal suffering for their mistakes, eternal spiritual death.

Although Adam and Eve may have started it, we are no better. We have all rebelled against God too many times for us to count. We have pursued our own goals, our own ambitions, our own desires.

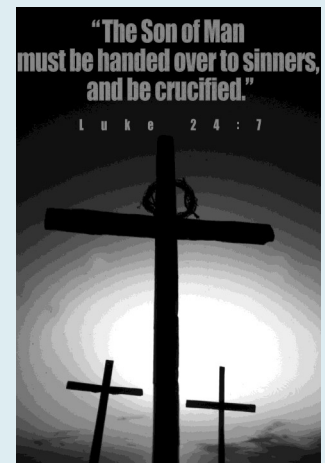


We have relegated God, and our neighbors, to secondary positions and placed our wants and our needs ahead of everything else. We have violated the Ten Commandments so many times that, if we are honest with ourselves, we truly recognize that the

fair punishment, that justice demands, for our sins is eternal

damnation. That is what we deserve. Every last one of us. To Hell with us all.

Fortunately, this is not the end of the story. Fortunately, God did not leave Adam and Eve, and the rest of us, in this awful state. Fortunately, God had a plan to save us from ourselves. Fortunately, God was willing to do the only thing that could deliver us from this terrible fate. Fortunately, God was prepared to die in our place.

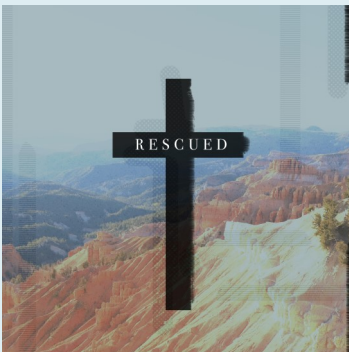


The almighty God, Creator of the universe and everything in it, was willing to die for us. For us, poor, miserable sinners, who have failed Him so, so many times, who have hardly treated Him with the awe, with the reverence, with the fear that He deserves. No, in spite of our wickedness, in spite of our selfishness, in spite of our sin-filled hearts, God decided that He would bear it all. He would take on our punishment. He would humiliate Himself to become man, He would live a perfect life with the limitations of being a man, He would die an

excruciating, shame-filled, completely unfair death on a cross for us. For us. For us, miserable sinners. For us, totally undeserving, completely wretched sinners. He would take on our punishment so that we didn't have to. He would die so that we could live. He would bear the punishment of the Father so that we could become His children. He would trade His perfect righteousness for our miserable filth.

What God has done is so mind-blowing that I struggle at times to accept it. Why would God die for scum like me? Why would almighty God even care about me? I am not worth saving. I deserve eternal damnation; that would be fair. Anything else is being merciful to me. Eternal life with God, eternal bliss in Heaven? No, I certainly don't deserve that.

The truth is none of us deserve eternal salvation. None of us merit eternal bliss. Certainly, none of us measure up to the standard of being called the children of God. Yet, this is what we are. Through God's grace, He has given us this incredible gift. We totally, totally don't deserve it. All we can do is offer our humble thanks and praise.



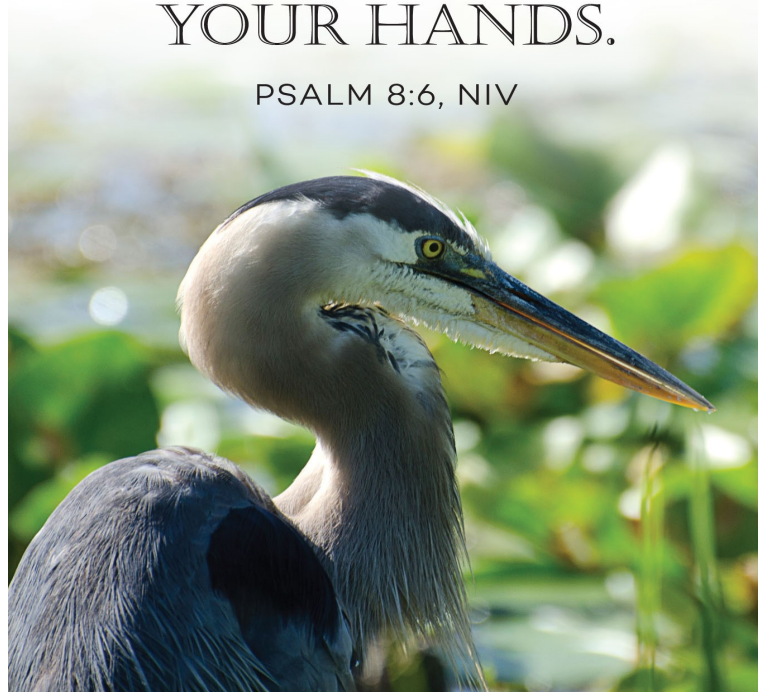
From Psalm 8

*O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?*

YOU MADE
THEM RULERS
OVER THE
WORKS OF
YOUR HANDS.

PSALM 8:6, NIV



*Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!*

Birthdays

Jessica Juron	01/02	Betty Fischer	01/15
Quintin Thies	01/05	AnQuenette Gehring	01/16
John Ogles	01/06	Bob Smith	01/18
Roberta Willenberg	01/06	Carolyn Charnock	01/21
Patti Daily	01/09	Joanne Hildreth	01/22
Glen Charnock	01/10	Gloria Masters	01/25
		Al Ogles	01/26

Anniversaries

Tim & Leslie Hurst	01/03 (16 Years)
Jerry & Lynne Heape	01/20 (61 Years)



What is “The Epiphany of Our Lord”?

The word “epiphany” (pronounced ee-PIF-uh-nee) comes from the Greek word meaning “manifestation.” Jesus was made known to all people simply by being born. If we had been alive back then, we could have actually reached out and touched Jesus! He was real, and the evidence was in His birth!

Why do we celebrate Epiphany? Epiphany is the third part of the Christmas season. During this special season in the Church Year, we remember the visit of the Wise Men. Traditionally, this visit is celebrated on January 6.

Epiphany also brings to mind many other important events in Jesus’ life. For example, we remember Jesus’ Baptism, the star that guided the Wise Men, and most importantly, His birth! Wow! There sure is a lot happening after Christmas!

From: LCMS-Worship-Kids-in-the-Divine-Service-Epiphany-Color.pdf

From Matthew 3:18

Judy Burhans

The palace of King Herod “back in the day” was probably a very busy, very easy-to-get-lost-in place. Servants, maids, chefs, wine-makers, vendors, animals - you name it, the noise and the action were there. How a king with so many people around him was able to get anything done, or remember anything that was happening under his nose right then is beyond a laid-back person’s comprehension.

Take those wisemen who came into town and sought out the King and his advice:

- ◇ “Where is this new King, the one who has just been born?”
- ◇ “We have come to see Him.”
- ◇ “He was prophesied long ago in our writings and His coming was to be announced by a sign in the sky.”
- ◇ “We have seen His star and would like to pay Him homage.”
- ◇ “Can you give us directions as to where He is, now?”



King Herod, not to miss a beat to let these wisemen from the East figure out he had *no* idea what they were talking about, immediately got on his horn and had his own wise men tell him what they knew about this alleged event. It came to pass that there had been some significant sightings in the sky, beginning about 20 or so moons ago, when a new star first appeared in the sky south of the palace. Maybe some of the excitement among the stargazers had diminished, but that star was still in the sky. Perhaps that was what these Wise Men from the East were looking for.

When King Herod heard this, his human pride took over, his jealousy peaked. To continue his façade of calm control, he asked that the Wise Men come back through Jerusalem and stop at the palace to let him know where the new king was - if there even *was* a new king - so that he, King Herod, could go and make his acquaintance, too.

Sneaky, sneaky, King Herod! His words sounded appropriate, but his evil intent took over. His fear of being removed from the throne and being replaced was so great that when he realized that the Wise Men had ignored his request to return via Jerusalem, he ordered the death of all baby boys, two years and under, in Bethlehem and the area around the little town, to make sure this new King could not ever ascend to his throne.

*A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be comforted,
because they ‘are no more.’*



Calendar

January 2024

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 6:00 PM - Worship	2 10:00 AM - Ladies' Bible Study	3 6:00 PM - Choir	4 10:45 AM - Regency Missional Outreach	5	6
7 8:00 & 10:45 AM - Worship 9:30 AM - Sunday School and classes 9:45 AM - Regency	8 6:00 PM - Worship	9 10:00 AM - Ladies' Bible Study 7:00 PM - Board of Directors	10 10:15 AM - HHR 6:00 PM - Choir	11	12	13 10:00 AM - LWML
14 8:00 & 10:45 AM - Worship & Installation of Officers 9:30 AM - Sunday School and classes 9:45 AM - Regency	15 6:00 PM - Worship	16 10:00 AM - Ladies' Bible Study 6:00 PM - Board of Elders	17 6:00 PM - Choir	18 10:45 AM - Regency Missional Outreach	19	20
21 8:00 & 10:45 AM - Worship 9:30 AM - Sunday School and classes 9:45 AM - Regency	22 6:00 PM - Worship	23 10:00 AM - Ladies' Bible Study	24 10:15 AM - HHR 6:00 PM - Choir	25	26	27 8:30 AM - Men's Prayer Breakfast
28 8:00 & 10:45 AM - Worship 9:30 AM - Sunday School and classes 9:45 AM - Regency	29 6:00 PM - Worship	30 10:00 AM - Ladies' Bible Study	31 6:00 PM - Choir			