



# MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH

# MESSENGER

Volume 26, Issue 02

## Special Points of Interest

OWLs-Tuesday, February 10,  
12:00 noon

Taize Service, February 15,  
4:00 pm

Mardi Gras-Tuesday,  
February 17, 5:30 pm

Ash Wednesday, February 18,  
12:00 noon & 7:00 pm

Lenten Soup Supper-  
Wednesdays, February 25  
March 25

### OWLs

**Tuesday, February 10  
12:00 noon**

Potluck lunch, bring a dish  
to share.

Bishop Kristen Papson will  
be our speaker.

### Fat Tuesday, Mardi Gras

**Tuesday, February 17  
5:30 pm**

Beads, party masks, games  
and traditional style food.  
Fun for the whole family!  
Everyone is invited.

We will have a magic show  
by Magic De Jorge with  
magician Jorge Cruz.

Sign up in the Narthex of  
the Church no later than  
February 8

### Taize Service

**Sunday, February 15  
4:00 pm**

As part of our alternative  
worship experiences, join us  
for a meditative and singing  
liturgy at our Taizé worship.

Taizé worship is a  
contemplative, music-  
driven form of Christian  
prayer that grew out of the  
Taizé Community, an  
ecumenical monastic  
community in Taizé, France.

It emphasizes silence,  
simple repeated songs, and  
space for personal, interior  
prayer rather than  
preaching or long spoken  
sermons.

### Ash Wednesday Services

**Wednesday, February 18  
12:00 noon and & 7:00 pm.**

### Lenten Soup Supper Prayer Service

**Wednesdays in Lent  
starting February 25.**

Signup in Narthex to help  
with set up, clean up, or to  
bring a pot of soup or  
dessert! All are welcome.

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## ASH WEDNESDAY

For dust you are,  
And to dust you shall return  
(Gen 3:19)

## Contact Information

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pastor@messiah-erie.org

[www.messiah-erie.org](http://www.messiah-erie.org)

Follow Messiah Lutheran  
Church on Facebook

Live Stream Sunday YouTube-  
Messiah Lutheran Church Erie

## Church Office Hours

### Monday

Closed

### Tuesday

10:00am-5:00pm

### Wednesday

Closed

### Thursday

10:00am-5:00pm

### Friday

10:00am-5:00pm

## From the Desk of Pr. Tom

Dear Friends in Christ,

When I was growing up in the Twin Cities, this time of year meant one thing: the St. Paul Winter Carnival. For an entire week, every night without fail, we bundled ourselves in our warmest Minnesota layers, packed thermoses of hot apple cider, and drove down to Lake Phalen or Harriet Island to join the festivities. There were stunning ice carvings, uniquely Minnesotan foods that could only be eaten while wearing gloves, and radio shows broadcasting live from heated trailers - where you could watch the hosts through fogged-up windows as if they were exotic animals in their natural habitat.

There were always local celebrities: the mayor of St. Paul, the Minnesota State Fair's Princess Kay of the Milky Way, and the governor. One year, even George H. W. Bush came and gave a speech about his days fighting in the Pacific, pausing to complain about how hot and muggy it had been. I remember thinking he was pouring warm water on our frozen festival - especially since Minnesota hadn't voted Republican since 1972.

The Carnival had it all: ice fishing competitions, hot chocolate drinking contests, and, of course, the famous medallion hunt. Each morning, clues were printed in the newspaper, and all across St. Paul people could

be seen randomly digging through snowbanks, convinced *this* pile of snow might contain the million-dollar prize. It was delightfully irrational hope. Every night ended at 10:00 p.m. with a massive fireworks display, perfectly synchronized to music from the local soft-rock station. The Winter Carnival was wholesome, joyful, and unforgettable - a masterclass in making beauty in the cold.

But one year, I almost didn't go. I had just learned that the girl I was desperately hoping would ask me to the upcoming Sadie Hawkins dance had already asked the captain of the hockey team. I was crushed. I wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed and wallow in teenage insecurity, jealousy, and self-pity. My dad wouldn't allow it.

He ushered me into the back of our beloved Green Machine - a GM station wagon that resembled a tank more than a car. It was so rusted out that I could see the pavement of the highway rushing by beneath my feet. Structural integrity was optional in that vehicle. When we arrived at Harriet Island, I realized this was no ordinary year. The City of St. Paul had built an enormous and breathtaking Ice Castle, standing proudly in the middle of the Mississippi River. Two massive video screens flanked the castle, showing people wandering

through its icy corridors.

The castle itself glowed from within - lit by constantly changing colors that made it feel alive, almost as if it were responding to the *ooohs* and *aaahs* of the crowd. For the first time all evening, I forgot about my heartbreak. I was completely captivated. Then I heard a familiar voice call my name.

I turned around, and there she was (let's name her Ethel Merman) the very girl I had been hoping would ask me. My heart leapt into my throat. She smiled, walked up to me, and said, "Would you go to the Sadie Hawkins dance with me?" I opened my mouth to say yes and nothing came out. Just a cloud of warm breath into the cold night air. I tried again. Still nothing. Mortified, I covered my face with my hands.

When I looked up, I finally screamed, "YES! I WOULD LOVE TO GO WITH YOU!" What I didn't know was that at that exact moment, the two giant video screens flanking the Ice Castle panned directly to me, arms in the air, grinning like the Cheshire Cat, shouting into the frozen night.

The crowd erupted in applause. Someone congratulated me for landing a beautiful girl. Someone whistled approvingly. Someone else (because it was the 90s) offered me drugs. My parents appeared, and my dad smiled and said, "Thank

## From the Desk of Pr. Tom

cont'd.

God she asked you. I was afraid I was going to have to deal with your annoying depression for the next month." Just when everything felt hopeless, hope arrived anyway.

That's why February has always felt like that night to me. It is still winter. The nights are still long. Darkness still outweighs the light. And yet - something is changing. The days are getting longer. The sun lingers just a bit more. Beneath the frozen ground,

resurrection is already beginning its quiet work. Spring training starts. Birds slowly return. The earliest plants begin to push upward through snow and soil. Minnesotans start wearing shorts the moment temperatures rise above freezing.

February reminds us that hope does not arrive all at once. It comes gradually, persistently, faithfully. God is at work even when we are tired of waiting. Light is winning, even when

darkness still has a voice. As we grow weary of long nights and short days, remember this: warmth is coming. Redemption is close at hand. Resurrection is already stirring beneath the snow.

God bless you this month, and may Punxsutawney Phil not see his shadow!

Pastor Tom

## Lech Lecha: When God Calls Us Forward

### **Genesis 12:1-3**

One of the most pivotal moments in Scripture occurs quietly, without spectacle or explanation. God speaks to Abram and says, "*Lech lecha*" often translated, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1).

In Hebrew, *lech lecha* carries a deeper meaning than simply "go." It can also be heard as "go for yourself" or "go toward who you are meant to become." God is not only sending Abram to a new place; God is calling him into a new identity.

### **Leaving What Once Defined Us**

Abram is asked to leave three powerful sources of security:

- His land (economic stability and familiarity)
- His family (belonging and protection)

His father's household (identity and inheritance)

In the ancient world, this would have felt unthinkable. Family and land were everything. Yet God does not explain the full plan or name the destination, only promising,

"the land that I will show you." Faith begins not with certainty, but with trust.

### **Promise Before Performance**

What is striking is that God blesses Abram before Abram does anything to earn it:

"I will bless you... I will make your name great... and you will be a blessing."

This reminds us that God's grace always comes first. Abram does not move in order to be blessed; he moves because God has already spoken blessing over his life. His obedience is a response to grace, not a condition for it.

### **A Blessing for the Sake of Others**

God's promise to Abram is never meant to stop with him. "*In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*" Abram is chosen not for privilege, but for purpose. God's pattern is clear: blessing is always meant to flow outward.

This calling continues throughout Scripture, and into the life of the Church today. We are not blessed

simply to feel secure, but to become instruments of God's care, justice, and mercy for others.

### **Faith as a Lifelong Journey**

Abram's story does not unfold perfectly. Along the way, he experiences fear, famine, and failure. Yet God remains faithful. *Lech lecha* is not a one-time command; it becomes a lifelong way of living, trusting God step by step, even when the path ahead is unclear.

### **Why Lech Lecha Matters Today**

This ancient call still speaks powerfully to us:

- When we face change we did not choose
- When God invites us beyond comfort and familiarity

When faith means trusting promise rather than proof

*Lech Lecha* reminds us that God often works not by keeping us where we are, but by gently calling us forward, forming us, shaping us, and blessing the world through us along the way.

The God who called Abram still calls us today: *Go. Trust. I will show you the way.*

## Book Review: *Holy Envy* by Barbara Brown Taylor

In *Holy Envy*, Barbara Brown Taylor, a college professor and an ordained Episcopal priest, offers a gentle, honest, and deeply faithful exploration of what it means to encounter people of other religions without fear and without losing our Christian identity. Rather than arguing for religious relativism or watering down Christian conviction, Taylor invites readers into a posture of humility, curiosity, and love. For Christians engaged in ministry among neighbors, strangers, and loved ones, this book feels both timely and deeply pastoral.

Taylor introduces the phrase “holy envy” to describe something many of us have felt but rarely name: the quiet admiration we experience when we recognize beauty, discipline, or devotion in another religious tradition. Instead of treating this feeling as a threat to faith, Taylor treats it as an invitation, an opportunity to better understand both others and ourselves.

What makes *Holy Envy* especially valuable for Christians is its grounding in Christian theology. Taylor does not abandon the uniqueness of Christ. She remains clear about her own confession,

even as she listens carefully to Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and others. Her work reminds us that learning about another’s faith does not mean surrendering our own. In fact, it often clarifies it.

For those of us shaped by Lutheran theology, this resonates deeply. We trust that God is larger than our understanding and that salvation rests not on our certainty but on God’s grace. Taylor’s approach echoes Luther’s insistence that faith is a gift, not a possession to be defended at all costs. When we are secure in grace, we are freed to listen without fear.

In practical terms, *Holy Envy* speaks directly to how we live out our calling in the world. Our neighbors may pray differently or not at all. Our coworkers may hold beliefs unfamiliar or uncomfortable to us. Even within our own families, faith can look very different from person to person. Taylor encourages Christians to approach these relationships not with anxiety or superiority but with hospitality.

This is not about blending religions or pretending differences do not matter. Taylor is clear that differences do matter, but she reminds us that love comes first. Before debate, before correction,

before explanation, there is relationship. There is listening. There is the simple but radical act of honoring another human being as someone made in the image of God.

For a people, like us, seeking to serve the community with faithfulness and compassion, *Holy Envy* offers a helpful lens. It challenges us to ask: Are we curious about our neighbors or afraid of them? Do we listen in order to understand or only to respond? Do we trust that Christ is present even when conversations feel unfamiliar?

Ultimately, *Holy Envy* is not a book about other religions as much as it is a book about Christian maturity. It calls us to a faith confident enough to be open, rooted enough to be generous, and humble enough to learn. For Christians committed to loving neighbors, welcoming strangers, and nurturing relationships with those closest to us, Barbara Brown Taylor offers wisdom worth lingering over.

Pastor Tom highly recommends this book for individuals, book groups, and anyone seeking to live faithfully in a diverse world.

## Lenten Sermon Series: *The Prodigal God*: Returning to the Father's Heart

This Lent, we invite you to journey with us through one of Jesus' most beloved and challenging parables: the story of the Prodigal Son. Our 2026 Lenten sermon series will be based on Timothy Keller's book *The Prodigal God*, which explores this familiar story in a fresh and deeply moving way.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells of two sons who are both lost - one through rebellion, the other through self-righteousness - and a Father whose love is far more extravagant than either expects. Keller reminds us that the true scandal of the story is not the wayward son, but the "prodigal" Father whose grace is reckless, humiliating, and limitless.

Throughout Lent we will reflect on:

- How sin is not just breaking rules, but being far from the Father's heart
- How repentance is a coming home, not a groveling
- How religious pride can distance us from God just as much as open rebellion
- How Jesus is the true Elder Brother who goes into the far country to bring us home

This series will guide us through themes of exile and return, humility and restoration, repentance and rejoicing - preparing our hearts for

the costly grace revealed on the cross and the joy of Easter morning.

Join us beginning Ash Wednesday as we begin this sacred journey of return, and discover anew the God who runs to meet us while we are still a long way off.

If you would like to obtain the book to read along with the series, please go to the library or Amazon and search for *The Prodigal God* by Timothy Keller.



**Committee Meetings****Altar Guild**

Bible Study Every Tue.  
Oct.-April 1:00 pm  
Wed. 6:30 pm

Bound 1st Wed.  
Together 1:00 pm  
Sept.-May

CYFM 1st Thu.  
12:00 noon

**Church Life**

Grateful Every Thu.  
Prayer 10:00 am CC

Guided Every Mon.  
Meditation 6:30 pm

Property 2nd Sun.  
9:45 am

Sewing Circle Every Tue.  
10:00 am

Servant 1st Sun.  
Outreach 9:45 am

Stewardship / 3rd Thu.  
Finance 5:30 pm

Worship 1st Wed.  
11:00 am

**Church Council Leadership**

Art Anderson-President

Robin Curtis-Vice-President

Cyndi Allen

Laurie Hecht

Steve Porada

Nate Sprouse

Linda Voigt

Blaine Waters-Secretary



*Find out  
what is going on  
in the ELCA:*

Church-wide - [www.elca.org](http://www.elca.org)

NWPA Synod -  
[www.northwesternpasynod.org](http://www.northwesternpasynod.org)  
[elca.org](http://www.elca.org)

**MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH PRELIMINARY 3-YEAR VISION**

Approved- 2025 to 2027

**WORSHIP**Technology

Add Screens in sanctuary (DONE)  
Update website (On-Going)  
Obtain Hearing Assisted Devices (DONE)

Music Ministry

Build out the Band (2025)

**CHILDREN & FAMILY MINISTRY**

Bubble Church (2025-2026)  
School Day Off Camp (2025)  
Milestone Ministry (Sept. 2025)

**PROPERTY**

Fix Front Electronic Sign (DONE)  
Repair/Purchase Boiler (DONE)  
Plumbing Upgrades/Restrooms (2027)  
Buy New Freezer (DONE)

**IN-REACH**

Recruit and Train More Volunteers (2025)  
Training for in-home communion ministry (2025)

**EDUCATION**

Bible Study (Adult and Children) - have more options (2025-2027)

**OUTREACH**

Maintain Community Garden (On-Going)  
Continue Back to School Bash (2025-2027)  
Continue participation in Community National Night Out (2025-2027)

**FELLOWSHIP**

Explore more group events (On-Going)  
Continue to grow OWLs ministry (spiritually and fellowship) (On-Going)  
Lutheran Walkers (2025)

## Ongoing Ministries

- Altar Guild open to training new members
- Bethany Outreach - collected men's and boys' clothing. Special need for underwear.
- Blankets for Babies - Through the Soldiers and Sailors Home we were asked if we could sew, knit, or crochet baby blankets 18x22 that will be part of a kit given to families in the National Guard.
- CYFM - Children, Youth, Family Ministries - Bible Studies, youth activities, milestones
- Church Life - plans fellowship activities. Open to new members to help
- Counter Ministry - open to training new members
- Guided Meditation - prayer ministry group
- Prayer Chain - email or call the office for prayer requests
- Prayer Shawl - available for all occasions; baptisms, baby shower/birth, weddings, illness, hospitalization, men, women, or children who need to feel God's love wrapped around them. Contact the office to pick one up.
- Property - takes care of the building and landscaping
- Servant Outreach - Outreach activities locally and globally
- Sewing Circle - sews blankets for various organizations including Lutheran World Relief, National Guard, Linus Project
- Stewardship/Finance - takes care of our financial well being
- Sound Booth Technician needed for both services - training available
- Worship Assistant/Lector blank availability schedule posted through the 15th of the month
- Worship Committee - plans worship services

## 2ND MILE GIVING APPEAL

Recipient for **February** is:

### Pastor Discretionary Fund

You may contribute through your regular envelope, marking how much to designate to 2nd Mile on the "other" line on your envelope, or by sending a separate donation.

Through **January 20 \$100.00** has been donated for the *Inter-Church Ministries*

Thank you for your generosity!

### **Want to know more about our 2nd Mile Giving organizations?**

Pastor Discretionary Fund helps members of the church who are in need of help with necessities of life.

## Wesleyville Food Pantry Volunteer Opportunities

February 3 at 5:00-6:00pm for Country Fair distribution.

February 9 at 10:00am to unload senior boxes.

February 16 at 10:00am to unload food delivery.

February 17 at 10:00-11:00am & 5:00-6:00pm for regular food distribution.

## Community Blood Bank Blood Drive

Thank you to those who have donated in the past. As you may know, you can donate every 56 days, so we have scheduled our next drive for **March 9 - 14, 2026**

so that you can stay on schedule.

Needless to say, the Blood Bank is always in need of new donors!

For anyone who wishes to donate but doesn't have a ride, please call the church office and let them know when you would like to go.

If you would be willing to drive someone and wait for them to donate, please call the church office and let them know your availability.

If you have any questions, please contact Jean Parker at 814-528-5817.

## Bound Together Book Review

### **1st Wednesday at 1:00 pm**

**February** - Women in War by David Yuzuk (Cyndi)

**March** - The Glassblower by Petra Benning (Bonnie M.)

**April** - The Berry Pickers by Amanda Peters (Sandy)

**May** - To be determined

***Our Mission:****Glorifying God through our worship, our witness, our service, and our support****Our Vision:****To build and strengthen the body of Christ***Unofficial Council Highlights**

- Review minutes from November Council Meeting;
- Meeting was postponed due to weather.
- Next meeting will be February 19 at 6:00 pm in the Conference Room.

**Altar Flowers**

\$30.00 for one, \$55.00 for two

**Bulletins**

\$7.00 each

**Vigil Candles**

\$3.00 a week

**February 1**

1.

2.

**February 1**

8:30:

11:00:

**February 1****February 8****February 8**

1.

2.

**February 8**

8:30:

11:00:

**February 15****February 15**

1. Robin Curtis

2.

**February 15**

8:30:

11:00:

**February 22****February 22**

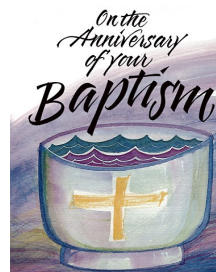
1.

2.

**February 22**

8:30:

11:00:



*"Through baptism you have been received into the household of God, entrusted with the good news of Jesus Christ, and strengthened to serve by the holy and life-giving Spirit."*

|    |                      |    |                      |
|----|----------------------|----|----------------------|
| 6  | Laurie Hecht         | 18 | Bonnie Magee         |
| 8  | Cynthia Needham      | 24 | Ethelynne Cunningham |
| 12 | Robin Curtis         |    | Timothy Wolf         |
| 13 | Gabriella Piccirilli | 28 | Al Schell            |

|    |                |    |                    |
|----|----------------|----|--------------------|
| 17 | Kayla Bresee   |    | Bruce Frick        |
| 19 | Gerrie Elias   | 27 | Corey Brainard Jr. |
| 25 | Bradley Bresee | 28 | Joseph Burwell     |



## February Heart Reflections

- Day 1: Proverbs 4:23
- Day 2: Psalm 51:10
- Day 3: Matthew 5:8
- Day 4: Psalm 73:26
- Day 5: Proverbs 3:5-6
- Day 6: Jeremiah 17:9
- Day 7: Psalm 27:14
- Day 8: Matthew 22:37
- Day 9: Proverbs 16:9
- Day 10: Psalm 19:14
- Day 11: Psalm 139:23-24
- Day 12: Mark 12:30
- Day 13: Proverbs 23:26
- Day 14: Romans 10:10
- Day 15: Psalm 34:18
- Day 16: 1 Samuel 16:7
- Day 16: 1 Samuel 16:7
- Day 17: Ephesians 6:6
- Day 18: Colossians 3:23
- Day 19: Psalm 119:11
- Day 20: 1 Peter 3:4
- Day 21: Proverbs 14:30
- Day 22: Psalm 112:7
- Day 23: 1 Chronicles 29:17
- Day 24: Isaiah 57:15
- Day 25: Psalm 51:17
- Day 26: Psalm 33:21
- Day 27: Psalm 119:2
- Day 28: Psalm 143:8
- Day 29: Romans 15:1

*"God doesn't just want our obedience,  
He wants our hearts." – Francis Chan*

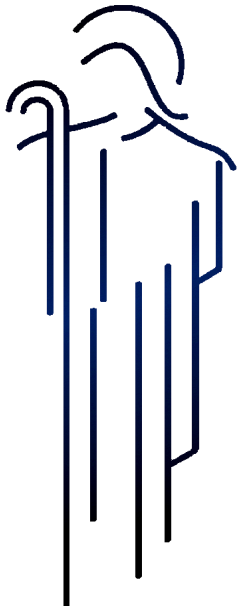


*"Bless them so that all may see in their lives together within the community of your people a vision of your kingdom on earth."*

13 Robin and Mark Curtis

*If we missed your Birth, Baptism, or Marriage Anniversary we apologize.*

*Please contact the church office to provide us with that information.*



## MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH

2025 Eastern Avenue  
Wesleyville, PA 16510

Address Service Requested  
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Volume 26, Issue 02

MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH

*MESSENGER*



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