

2024
January
Newsletter



Saint John Lutheran Church
Hattiesburg, MS



A NOTE FROM YOUR PASTOR

Greetings this Holiday Season!

A while back, I discovered a new little widget on my Windows menu bar. It is a test version of a new Microsoft A.I. I thought I would uninstall this as I don't need it on my computer. Turns out it doesn't let me and is not even an option. It's built into the version of Windows on my laptop. Well, it sat down there on my menu bar for several weeks until the other day. I decided to open it since I had heard that A.I. is the next big threat to human existence. The version on my computer generates images and writes things. Within the parameters of what the programmers seem appropriate and what you the user enters as reference material. From what I understand how this A.I. works is I give it a command to draw me a picture of say, a mountain at sunset. And it will search through the web looking at all the sunset and mountain pictures using an algorithm and makes a picture based on that. With it I can create beautiful landscapes that look familiar yet never truly exist.

Therein lays the problem with this A.I. It generates text, images, and whatever else based off the stuff on the internet. With so much stuff on the internet that is false, the pool that it draws from will be inherently flawed. I showed this to my kids, and they experimented with it. I now have a picture of a pirate border collie and an army of pinecones with eyes. To create this picture it searched border collies and pinecones with eyes and drawing from reference pictures it found, created this rather random picture.

I decided to kick this up a notch and I asked it to draw a picture of Jesus forgiving the world from its sin. The first time I did this I got a rather strange looking Jesus with a glowing halo standing among a bunch of streams of water. Not a hundred percent sure where it drew its source material. The next time I tried again to enter a similar topic the program informed me that was offensive.

Jesus saving us from our sins is offensive? What kind of weirdness is that. But it actually takes me back to the passage in Galatians from St. Paul where he tells us that the cross is a rock of offense. We also learn from Isaiah and Peter that Jesus has become a rock of offense. The message of the cross is folly to those who don't believe, but salvation for those who do.

As I look at the A.I. and its limitations, it makes sense to me that it would not accurately know who Jesus is. It doesn't rely on the word of God in the scripture for who Jesus is, but every weird blog and crazy image the programmers have given it access to. Not only that because controversy often surrounds things of religious nature it labels it as offensive. Are the messages of the dangers true? I say, yes, it is dangerous because A.I. cannot tell what the truth is. There are people that will go to this thing, type in things they wish to know and desire and get a chimera instead of truth. And really that what this A.I. is to me. It can have access to all the internet and still know nothing. And there are people like this in the world. The source material matters.

I will close with this mental image: If you drink dirty water, expect to get sick. A.I. drinks from a sewer pond. If you do not have a filter to filter out the bad, you will simply receive toxins. We rely on the word of God, our scriptures, to be the filter to know what is good and bad. A.I. does not. Be wary and diligent as you see this technology become more and more integrated into our lives. Make sure you have a strong foundation in what is true so that you will not be led astray.

Blessings and peace,
Pastor Chet



Board of Directors' Christmas Message

The BOD did not meet in December. We had the Annual Congregational meeting on December 4th and passed a budget for the next year.

As is often the case, we as individuals are often caught up in everyday life and rarely take a break and consider what is going on around us. Likewise, St. John has for the last 3 years experienced a lot of activity that changed our congregation. Pastor John accepted a call to Aggie Land, and we as a congregation accepted the challenge in continuing our ministry to the Pinebelt community. Coinciding with this, we learned different ways to communicate and bring the word of God to the community during a worldwide pandemic. We lost several members to that pandemic and many others were affected directly by the virus, either short term or long term. Yet, the family of St John endured and continued its ministry as it has since its inception.

In Ephesians 6:10-11, Paul challenges us to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." The Board firmly believes that we as a congregation heeded these words of St. Paul as we continued our work as a congregation. We thank everyone for continuing to support in every way the ministry of St. John as we provided Sunday services, assistance to the community, Sunday school, ministered to our members, and supported local, regional, and worldwide missions. This is by no means an exhaustive list. This is, however, what we as Christians are challenged to do by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So, as we rejoice in the birth of our Savior in Bethlehem and look forward to our work in the next year, let us rejoice in our receiving a shepherd to lead and minister to us. Let us also continue to support our ministry in the future with our time, talents, and treasures as we serve God, our Lord and Savior. Amen

In his service and yours,
The Board



LWML MITES collected on Sunday, December 3, 2023, totaled \$114.51. Thank you for your prayers and support of the Mission Grants selected in Convention by the Gulf States District and National LWML.

Saint John Ladies Guild (LWML) Business meeting was held on Sunday, December 3, 2023, immediately following the Congregational meeting in the church sanctuary. Election results for Year 2024 President, Shirley Thone; Vice President, Lillian Smith; Secretary, Sheila Curry; Treasurer, Christina Noffke. District Business: Gulf States District Travel Fund (\$5.00 per member). There are thirteen signatures on the Constitution. Orders for Quarterly (\$7.50 each) were taken. All monies needed by Sunday, December 17, 2023. God has truly blessed Saint John Ladies Guild (LWML) this past year. It is wonderful to serve the Lord with our Sisters in Christ sharing the Love of Jesus in our church and community. Praise God!!!

The Gulf States District 40th Biennial Convention will be held in Prattville, AL on April 26-27, 2024. Theme: "Return to Your Rest - Psalm 116-7." Registration Fee of \$130,00 includes Friday Reception, Beverage Bars, and Saturday's Banquet. Last day Registration is due by March 22, 2024. Julie Radavich and Shirley Thone plan to attend the convention as Delegate and Alternate for our church. Hotel rooms are limited. If you plan to attend, contact Julie or myself as soon as possible. In preparation for the District Convention, the Magnolia Zone Spring Rally will be held at Christ Lutheran Church in Pascagoula, MS early in the spring. Watch for more information in the Church Bulletin. Please make plans to attend this important meeting as our Zone will be hostess for the next District Convention in 2026. "Gifts from the Heart" collection at the Prattville Convention - ALL BABY ITEMS - which will benefit the Autauga Interfaith Center.

LWML MITES will be collected on Sunday, January 7, 2024. If you are unable to attend worship service, you may make your check out to Saint John Lutheran LWML and mail it directly to Christina Noffke at 108 Ramblewood Drive, Hattiesburg, MS 39402. There will be no Business meeting in January 2024. The first LWML business meeting of 2024 will be held on Sunday, February 4. All women are welcome and invited!

LWML MISSION STATEMENT

As Lutheran Women in Mission, we joyfully proclaim Christ, Support Missions and Equip Women to honor God by serving others.

Until Next Time . . . "Serve the Lord with Gladness!!!"
Shirley Thone, President





Thank you, thank you, thank you! To those who assisted in decorating the church earlier in December, again I say, "Thank you!" Your care and dedication is reflected in the loveliness of the church that you prepared for the celebration of the birth of our Savior.

Ah, but it is soon time to put away our lovely Christmas decorations. All available Altar Guild and church members are asked to lend a hand.

When? On the January 6th at 9:00am. See you then!

Christmas Plants:

There are still plants may be taken home after Sunday service on January 7th. Please, leave the plastic trays, as they will be needed again for the lilies at Easter.

January 6th: Epiphany

An epiphany is an "aha" moment, a realization. The word is Greek in origin meaning "to reveal" or "make Manifest." It is also the fulfillment of Simeon's prophecy in Luke 2:31: "a light for revelation to the Gentiles." Jesus' identity is revealed for all, this One who is both true God and man. While stories of the Magi are traditionally shared through legend, lore, and song, scripture reveals these wise men visited the infant Jesus and "fell down and worshiped him" (Matt. 2:11). The gifts they brought--gold, frankincense, and myrrh--confess His royalty, His deity, and His priestly sacrifice.

January 7th: The Baptism of Our Lord

The First Sunday after the Epiphany is the Baptism of Our Lord. The Baptism of Our Lord was the first of His deeds to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15) and sanctify the waters of our Baptism.

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord signifies the end of the Christmas season. The Baptism of the Lord is notable because it marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry and confirms his identity as the Son of God. This event is documented in all the gospels except John.

Christ's baptism remarkably shows all three Persons of the Trinity at the same time: the Son being baptized, the Holy Spirit descending, and the Father speaking from the heavens. In this event, the Father and the Holy Spirit confirm the deity of Christ, and Jesus submits to his Father's will.

May His Light be revealed in your heart,

Christina Keiper
Altar Guild Chair



Searching after God's Rest

"... Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness ... Therefore, I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" Hebrews 3:7-8, 10-11 (ESV)

I've been a "yes, but ..." girl too many times to count in my lifetime. In fact, it's an ongoing struggle.

Yes, I'll follow Jesus, but ...

Yes, I love Jesus, but ...

Do you know who else also seemed to have a "yes, but ..." attitude? The Israelites in the Exodus account. During their escape from Egypt to the promised land, God provided precise direction in the form of a cloud by day and fire by night. He provided water from rocks and bread from heaven. After all the miracles the Israelites witnessed, how could they still show such unbelief and discontent? They must have displayed an extraordinary level of obstinance to turn an 11-day journey (Deuteronomy 1:2) into 40 years of wandering (Numbers 14:34)!

We shake our heads at them, feeling smug in our self-righteousness. We think we would have had more trust had we been in their sandals, but truth be told, we still struggle to follow where God leads today.

As the author of Hebrews used the Israelites' wilderness story to caution his readers, it remains a warning for us today. Hardening one's heart to the voice of God means missing out on His rest.

"...Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness ... Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest'" (Hebrews 3:7-8, 10-11).

The Israelites' unbelief that God would do what He promised kept them from entering God's rest (Deuteronomy 1:32). Sin is deceitful; it will cause us to doubt God's voice and look to ourselves for direction. Faith feels too difficult — trust feels too hard. We have waited too long for God, so we make our own path. We live in the "yes, but ..." and our wandering begins.

How do we find our way back to the rest God desires to give us? Hebrews 3 lays the groundwork:

- **Fix our thoughts on Jesus (Hebrews 3:1).** When we're preoccupied with our circumstances, our eyes wander from our Savior to our struggle. Immersing ourselves in God's Word refocuses us on the One who wants to carry our burdens and direct our path (Matthew 11:28-29; Proverbs 3:5-6).
- **Don't harden our hearts to the voice of God (Hebrews 3:7-8).** The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we will recognize His voice. Calluses form on a heart that continually turns from His voice, so let's keep our hearts soft to His gentle whisper.
- **Exhort one another (Hebrews 3:13).** Staying connected in Christian community is vital for spiritual health. Fellowship allows us to know and be known, to encourage and correct, to receive and give godly wisdom, using God's Word as our road map (2 Timothy 3:16).

Do you trust God's promises? Take hold of the truth that God's direction does not hinder your joy but leads you to true rest. It all begins and ends with faith, changing "yes, but ..." to "yes, Lord."

Yes, Lord, I will follow You.

Dear heavenly Father, forgive us for the times when we live in the "yes, but ..." and when we think our ways are better than Yours. Teach us to trust Your character and love, even when we don't understand. Help us to rest in the knowledge of Your guiding hand. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Lisa Case



Be in the know.

Church Office Hours: 8:00am – 12:00pm, Monday – Thursday

Phone: 601.583.4898

Email: stjohnlutheranchurch@gmail.com

Pastor's Hours: Tue-Thu: 9:00am – 1:00pm; Fri – Sun: by appt; Mon: off

Jan 6: 9:00am - Storing of the Greens-All are welcome to help!



Flower Chart

The 2024 Flower Chart is available with dates open for Altar flower purchases and support for our Eternal Candle. Write your name and phone number by the date(s) for which you wish honor or remember a special person or occasion. Use the envelope designated for either Flowers or Eternal Candle, make your checks payable to St. John Lutheran Church, and place in the Secretary's mailbox in the narthex. Please try to have payment ready two weeks prior of your requested date. Both are a wonderful way to remember someone or a special event. Your commitment to the beauty of our Altar is truly appreciated.

January 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 12pm AA New Year's Day	2 12pm AA	3 12pm AA 1:30pm Kaffee Klatsch	4 12pm AA	5 12pm AA	6 9am Storing of the Green 10am AA
7 10:30am Worship MITES/ Breadbasket Collected	8 12pm AA	9 12pm AA	10 10:00am Avenues Bible Study 12pm AA	11 12pm AA	12 12pm AA	13 FH in Use All Day 9am Men's Breakfast 10am AA
14 10:30am Worship	15 12pm AA Martin Luther King Jr. Day	16 12pm AA	17 12pm AA 1:30pm Kaffee Klatsch	18 12pm AA 6:30pm BOD Mtg	19 12pm AA	20 10am AA
21 10:30am Worship	22 12pm AA	23 12pm AA	24 12pm AA 10:00am Avenues Bible Study	25 12pm AA	26 12pm AA	27 10am AA
28 10:30am Worship	29 12pm AA	30 12pm AA	31 12pm AA			

Serving in January

Pastor

Chet Scherbarth

Pianist

Lewei He

Altar Care Team

Debbie Frederick Christina Keiper

Live Streaming of Worship Services — www.saintjohnhattiesburg.com.

Portals of Prayer for January-March are available in the Narthex.

January Newsletter — available via the church website and printed copies are near the foyer mailboxes. Thanks to all those who contributed!

February Newsletter Deadline — Monday, January 22nd.

The Spirit that is St. John:



January Celebrations!



B I R T H D A Y S

Brenda Hesselgrave	1/1
John Blair	1/4
Jerry Frederick	1/11
Don Shields	1/11
Gracie Scherbarth	1/13
David Grunig	1/16
Regina Johnson	1/27
Susan Perkins	1/30
Karla Weiss	1/30
Trenia Thiel	1/31



B A P T I S M S

Mary Lowry	1/1
Lisa Case	1/8
Jane O'Connor	1/10
Isaac Jimenez	1/13
Michael Jimenez	1/13
Naomi Jimenez	1/13
Willy Noffke	1/19



A N N I V E R S A R I E S **W E D D I N G**

Thomas & Brenda Hesselgrave (34)	1/6
Bob & Mary Cubley (45)	1/27



Saint John Lutheran Church

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