

FROM THE PASTOR

WE HAVE ONE week until Christmas. When you hear that, what feeling do you have? Is it a feeling of panic? "How can it have come so quickly. I have so much more to do to get ready!" Is it a feeling of regret? "Oh no, I've missed it again, focused on all the wrong things!" Is it a feeling of relief? "Finally, now we can get back to normal and past all this fuss!" Is it a feeling of joy? "I can't wait, we've made everything ready and now we get to celebrate!" How do you feel about Christmas coming next week?

`I probably have all those feelings and more. I get so busy this time of year that Christmas becomes like a checklist more than a celebration. I feel good about getting things crossed off the to do list, but often I haven't taken time to fully experience the spirit of the season. I can do all of the mental gymnastics of saying the culture has set us up for

failure; the expectations are too high that we will have a moment of revelation or awe. There is probably something to that, and we should be careful not to take on the expectations of others or accept some false story our culture is selling. But there is, I think, also an opportunity to reflect and receive the gift of Christmas.

Let me ask you this. What do you enjoy most about this time of year? What makes it meaningful to you? Whatever your answer, make that your priority. Take the extra time and effort and aim it towards what will matter to you this season. Christmas is a gift; at least it is supposed to be. Jesus came to us, where we are, in our full and real and messy lives. We don't create Christmas. It's not up to us to supply Christmas to anyone. Our job is to receive it. To receive the savior through simple faith and gratitude. I think we would please God to do the same with this season. Receive the gift that matters to you and give thanks.

For my part, I like being quiet and sitting in a comfortable place while my family opens presents on Christmas morning. I don't mind the noise or the mess or the hustle or hoaw quickly it is over. What I like is the moment of drinking coffee and seeing joy on their faces. I'm planning to receive that gift this Christmas. Everything else is, well...everything else.

Blessed Christmas to you all.

PASTOR TRAVIS NORTON

Sunday's Message

DECEMBER 14, 2025

ISAIAH 35

PASTOR TRAVIS NORTON

THE THIRD SUNDAY of Advent is called Gaudete Sunday or the Sunday of Joy. Gaudete is Latin for "rejoice" and during this season we pause to rejoice for the fulfillment of God's promises in Jesus and the promise of his return. As we focus this Advent on The Way We Know the path that God makes for us in Jesus, I was thinking of my time in high school playing football. I was a terrible football player and only played one season and didn't even finish the season. But I remember the summer practices well, and I watched the coach carefully as he crafted plans for the offense. I can still see the smile on his face when he taught us a new running play that he was sure would be amazing. He carefully instructed the offensive line what way they should block and walked the quarterback through the precise timing of the handoff. When we ran the play against the defense, it worked perfectly, the blockers made a path, and the running back broke through and kept going for a touchdown. The coach rejoiced, looked at all of us with this huge smile on his face and said, "This is going to work."

I think of that joy when I think of the plan God made to save us through Jesus, to make a way through all the things that get in the way. God designed the play to break through the obstacles of sin and our greatest enemy death. From the prophets of old to Mary and Joseph carrying the child, to John the Baptist preparing the way, God called the play and Jesus ran to the cross and made a new path in this world so everyone who believes in him could be saved. Today we rejoice for the plan and the path and the salvation that Jesus won for us. We've been focusing this Advent on The Way We Know, the familiar ways of this season, traditions and events that form a

well-worn path. And also, the reason for the season, Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life whom we know and celebrate at Christmas.

Advent is a season of preparation, of waiting and watching acknowledging the realities which are difficult while also anticipating Jesus coming back and healing this world. Isaiah prophesied during a time of difficulty, the threat of the empire Assyria put everyone on edge and made them afraid. And then when Assyria finally did attack even though Jerusalem was spared, Judah was defeated and ruined. The people had been forcibly removed from their land and forced to relocate to Assyria. It's similar to what Native Americans experienced 200 hundred years ago in this country. They were removed from their land and relocated to reservations. Do you remember studying the Trail of Tears? It's a hard history to read, but it is a history that has been repeated over the centuries. The people of Judah experienced this as Assyria took over their land and forced them to move to foreign lands. It was a strategy for control to prevent occupied lands from rebelling. Isaiah prophesied during this time to a people in despair, a people far from home, a people separated from their families. And he prophesied joy and promise and hope, talking about a new highway, a path through the desert. He says that not only will there be a return back home to Zion but there will be a special road just for God's people to come back. And the path will be straight not the circuitous route of their trail of tears, but a path that will cut straight through the desert, no need to take the long way. And instead of harsh wilderness, the desert, that isolated dry place, will flow with water and plants. Isaiah says the land

itself will rejoice and be glad, mirroring the experience of the people who after a long exile get to come home. Even the wild animals will be kept at bay so the people can come back home. Isaiah goes further to say that this prophecy applies universally. He says there will everlasting joy upon their heads, they shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. This isn't just a prophetic word for one historical circumstance but a word for all people, a word for you and me. The return isn't just to Jerusalem but a return to God and God's kingdom.

We are all people far from home and God promises us that one day we will return to Him. Jesus quoted this passage to the disciples of John when John was in prison and wondering if Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Imagine the doubt John had after being called by God to proclaim the coming Messiah and winding up in Herod's prison cell instead. In the depth of his imprisonment John asks that true heart question, "Are you the one to come or should we wait for another?" It's a question of both doubt and faith. John isn't sure if Jesus is the one or not, but regardless, John is sure that a Messiah is coming. If it's not Jesus, he is prepared to wait for another. But Jesus' response confirms the hopes of all who wait for Messiah. Jesus refers to this passage from Isaiah, "Go tell John what you see and hear, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them." Jesus never answers questions directly as much as we'd like him to. Instead, he reports to John what's happening, that Jesus is doing exactly what Isaiah has prophesied 700 years prior. John knew his Bible and would make the connection that the great promises of Isaiah were finally coming true. Not exactly in the way Isaiah envisioned, not exactly in the way John envisioned, but in God's way. God was making a new way in Jesus, a way to healing and wholeness, a way to joy for all who are in tears, a way home for all the displaced for all who feel like they don't belong.

Jesus is the way who comes to heal the sick, forgive the sinner and bring everyone back home to the Father. Jesus forges a path through a different kind of wilderness and brings to life a different kind of desert. His mother Mary knew this when she sang the Magnificat as Jesus grew in her womb. She sang, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, his mercy is for all those who fear him. He lifts up the lowly, he has filled the hungry with good things." The way that Jesus makes is the way of salvation. The desert we know is the desert of sin, death and the devil. But Jesus will make that desert bloom with forgiveness, life and justice.

So often in our lives we find ourselves stuck without direction. We find ourselves in places we don't belong where we fill disconnected and separated. Sometimes it comes when we just don't know what we are supposed to be doing with our lives; we lack clarity and feel lost. Sometimes we get stuck because we are in bad habits of sin, and we can't seem to break out of behaviors that keep us from moving forward. Sometimes we are lost because of illness or grief, problems in our families or relationships. How often do we find ourselves mired in hurt feelings and misunderstandings that we can't seem to unravel? We want to find a way out but the path is unclear. The Bible calls places like this "wilderness". Places of wandering like the ancient Hebrews in circles without any indication of when we will get out. Grief is a wilderness, sin is a wilderness, confusion is a wilderness. How do you find the way out of wilderness? How do you find that straight path that cuts through the impasse? The thing you do in the wilderness is pray and ask God for direction. When you're wandering, when you're lost, when you're unsure of what to do next, pray for that straight path to be made for you out of the desert, home to the Father.

When that prayer is answered, it comes in the form of clarity. I don't know about you, but I hate not knowing what direction to go in. I like clear answers, and a straightforward path. I remember being confused about my path forward in ministry seven years ago, and Tori and I were looking at coming west and I was looking at churches. First Lutheran was one of the options, but it was such a large church with a storied history that I was told it likely wasn't a fit for me, and I should keep looking. But then God did His

work and through a series of unpredictable events my name was given to the call committee here and things became clear. A path was forged; a way was made. There were a couple keys to finding the way through that brief time of wilderness. The first is to acknowledge the wilderness; name where you are lost or confused or need help. The second is to pray, to ask God to make a way, to bring clarity, to give you next steps. The third is to find travel companions. I had my wife to talk to and we spent a lot of time talking through next steps. I also had good friends whom I called and asked for advice both before my name was given to this congregation and then when I felt unsure if I was the right person. And finally, when God makes the path clear, our job is to take the steps, to rejoice and walk the path with confidence and trust in God.

Confession, prayer, spiritual friendships and rejoicing are ways forward for all sorts of wildernesses. What wilderness are you in? What part of your life do you need God to make a path, to give you clarity? Pray for a way forward, share your need with faith-filled friends and trust that God will make a way. The good news of this day is that God has promised a path, a way through every wilderness, a way for all who are lost. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. He has come so that all might believe, so that all might be saved. Today we rejoice and give thanks for the salvation Jesus gives. Jesus has made a way; let us walk that way with faith and joy. Amen.



AGING TOGETHER

FRIDAY, JANUARY 9 | 10 – 11 A.M. PEEL HOUSE | ROOM 201

We will share our thoughts on the New Year and some of our goals.

Beginning in February, our group will meet on the first Friday of each month. This is a casual gathering to share our thoughts and experiences during our journey through the years.

CHURCH OFFICE CLOSED

DECEMBER 25 AND 26 JANUARY 1 AND 2

NO EKKLESIA

DECEMBER 24

JANUARY OUTREACH FOCUS

FAMILY PROMISE

During the month of January 2026, First Lutheran will support Family Promise three ways:

- 1. We will be collecting King Sooper and Safeway Gift Cards to give to the situationally unsheltered families to purchase food for breakfast and lunch items while living in the day house as well as gas for their car.
- 2. Under the mural Feeding of the 5000, we will have an In-Gathering of Household/Hygiene items including toilet paper, paper towels, shampoo and conditioner, face wash, body wash, bar soap, deodorant, baby wipes, body lotion, toothbrushes, toothpaste, hand towels, razors, her shaving cream, tissues, hand sanitizer and lip balm. Please be sensitive to families with other than Caucasian skin and hair. This is not intended to be a racial issue, just a real one.
- 3. FLC's goal is to provide all 13 evening meals, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, for the month of January! We still have 11 open slots! Please sign up for your spot now! Delivery to the Day House at 324 North Nevada can be made anytime between 4 6 p.m. Meals should feed 12-15 people (3 5 adults and the remaining children). Please sign up to bring a meal in January here: https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10CoB4AA9A-C28A3FEC52-49949464-meals#/

RAINBOW TRAIL SUMMER 2026 REGISTRATION IS OPEN!

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT. I DON'T BELIEVE ALL OF OUR YOUTH HAVE REGISTERED AND MOST WEEKS ARE ALREADY FULL

Availability numbers are posted on the Rainbow Trail bulletin board. Many weeks are already full, especially for girls. Registration will open to those outside of the ELCA on January 1, 2026.

CHERYL'S CORNER

CHRISTMAS EVE VOLUNTEERS STILL NEEDED!!

No experience necessary...on the job training provided!

- · 1 for Blue Christmas
- · 2 for the 3 p.m. service
- · 5 for the 5 p.m. service
- · 10 for the 7 p.m. service
- · 10 for the 9 p.m. service
- · 2 people to clean up Communion after the 9 p.m. service

Sign up on the "Church" app on your phone or on the iPad at the Welcome Center.

PIKES PEAK HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

FLC is scheduled to serve on the Interfaith Build site on Saturday, January 24, 2026, from 8:30 a.m. to noon. We have promised ten volunteers for the morning shift. No experi-

ence necessary, just a passion to serve. Contractors on site teach you everything you need to know! I've learned how to use a chop saw, install insulation, dry wall, and even hang doors! Please email **cheryl@flccs.net** if you are available to help.

SHARING OF YOUR TIME AND TALENT BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER WORSHIP

We have many volunteers who make Sunday mornings run smoothly. Some start at 7 a.m. brewing coffee and preparing Communion. Greeters, Ushers, Worship and Communion Assistants help during our worship services. Others deliver flowers to homebound members. take home albs and/or tablecloths to launder, or tidy and replenish items in the pew of our Sanctuary after all the services are done. We are blessed with people who are willing and able to serve in many of these areas, but we are always in need of new volunteers! If you are already a part of one of these volunteer groups, the 2026 First Quarter sign-ups are out. Make sure you pick the Sundays you are available to serve! If you'd like to test drive serving in any area, please let cheryl@flccs.net know and she'll match you up with an expert to shadow!

CHERYL MAHON, DIRECTOR OF LAY MINISTRIES

MOMCO

JANUARY 13 | 9:30 A.M.

MomCo usually meets on the second and fourth Tuesdays in the Peel House Lounge, next to the coffee bar. In December they will only meet one time. Thanks in advance for helping the Sand Creek team start the new year strong

DANCE LESSONS - CHA CHA

January "Cha Cha" Lessons – Angela Harder is back to teach us the "Cha-Cha"! Enjoy four one-hour lessons for just \$80/couple or \$40/single. We set a maximum of twenty people to allow Angela to introduce new moves each week while helping dancers progress at their own pace too.

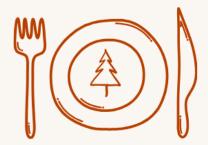
Register here: https://bit.ly/44OdLJg

WELCOME BACK TEACHER LUNCHEON

FOR THE TEACHERS AND STAFF OF SAND CREEK

The holidays are coming fast and will be over before we know it. With that in mind we are planning to welcome back the Sand Creek teachers and staff with a luncheon on their teacher workday on January 5. Our plan is an Italian buffet and the following link shows how you can take part: https://bit.ly/4iDJt1B. We will set up at 10 a.m. and start serving at 10:30 a.m. as some teachers have their lunch breaks quite early. Food donations will be picked up in the Gathering Place kitchen after the final service on Sunday, January 4, or can be brought to the school, 550 Sand Creek Dr., to arrive no later than 10:30 on the 5th. Thanks in advance for helping the Sand Creek team start the new year strong.

Congregational Potluck Brunch



Join us on **Sunday, December 28** for one worship service at 9:30 a.m. After worship, gather with the community for an 10:30 a.m. potluck brunch in the Gathering Place. Bring a dish to share as we celebrate fellowship and the season together. Use the QR code to sign up.



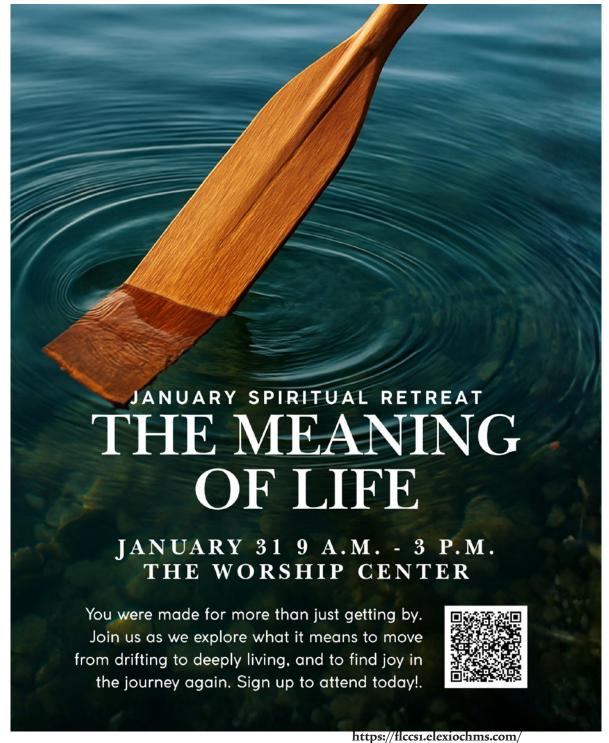
CHRISTMAS EVE AT FIRST

Wednesday, December 24



CONTEMPORARY SERVICE 4 P.M.

*will be live streamed at flccs.net



THE EMMAUS WAY

"...the Human One didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people."

- Matthew 20:28 (CEB)

Happy Advent! I know I said the next couple of reflections would parallel our Imagine meditations, but there's something else I'd like to talk about. If you were at the 9:30 a.m. service on the second Sunday of Advent, you heard me say these words: I worship a human being. I'd like to say a bit more about that idea.

When that phrase unexpectedly went through my head a few years ago, I was initially taken aback, because it just sounded blasphemous. But then I thought it through. It's true, of course, that the human being I worship also happens to be God. But Jesus's full God-ness in no way diminishes his full human-ness, so it's true: I worship a human being.

And so do you.

Have you spent much time thinking about Jesus's humanity? Every person I know who seeks to follow Jesus takes the Incarnation seriously.

But I think most of us, if we're honest, believe that his humanity was just the necessary "delivery system" – like a gel capsule full of medicine – required to

get his saving

divinity into humanity, but that it doesn't really have too much to say to us otherwise. But that's not right—his humanity speaks just as loudly as does his divinity. I think that's the primary reason that the TV show The Chosen so speaks to people – we can see with our own eyes that Jesus is just as human as we are.

One doesn't have to look far to see the fallout of diminishing the meaning of Jesus's humanity. When only his divinity matters, it's all too easy to make the humanity of others not matter, especially when we disapprove or disagree with something. We are all guilty. Do we have the humility to see it in ourselves and repent? Do I?

I worship a human being. What if we lived like every single human person is Jesus? Dehumanization, objectification, and subjugation would disappear. Self-righteousness would vanish, as would self-loathing. The world would be transformed, and the Kingdom just might come on earth as it is in heaven. It's one thing to give intellectual assent to the truth that every human is created in the imago Dei; it's a whole different thing to look at every human being – every single one, ourselves included – and see the full reflection of the fully Human One that we worship rightly, and rightly worship. Let's walk together.

LORI DUNCAN, MINISTER OF SPIRITUAL CARE





POINSETTIAS FOR CHRISTMAS EVE

You may purchase a poinsettia plant for \$12.00 to honor or memorialize a loved one. All poinsettias will be used to decorate the chancel area for the Christmas Eve services. You can take your plant home after the last Christmas eve service. Purchase by December 17. You may call the church office, or you may register here: https://bit.ly/3CJzP7d

END OF YEAR GIVING

As of November 2025, First Lutheran is experiencing a year-to-date shortfall of \$15,352. This is a familiar pattern for us, and based on past years, we are confident that year-end offerings will help close the gap.

We are deeply grateful for your continued generosity and commitment to First Lutheran's mission. Your support makes a meaningful difference in the life of our church and community.

With year-end quickly approaching, now is the time to ensure your 2025 offering is applied to this year. Please note:

- 2025 contributions received after January 9, 2026, will be processed for 2026.
- To have your gift applied to 2025, please clearly indicate that it is for 2025.
- Due to holiday mail delays, please allow about one week for mail within Colorado and one to three weeks for mail from other states.

Thank you for helping us finish the year strong and for faithfully supporting the ministry of First Lutheran.

DINING OUT WITH FIRST LUTHERAN

SELECT TUESDAYS | 5:30 P.M. VARIOUS RESTAURANTS

All are welcome to join this group, which meets at local restaurants on two Tuesdays of each month to enjoy various cuisines and fellowship. Reservations will be made two weeks in advance, so be sure to sign up early. To register, visit https://bit.ly/41Rh4ff.

January 13 Saltgrass Steakhouse 1405 Jamboree Drive January 27 Carabbas Italian Grill 7120 Campus Drive February 10 Hacienda Colorado 5246 North Nevada Avenue February 24 Urban Tandoor 8125 North Academy Blvd

In the Life of the Church ...

Birthdays

December 22 Alice Aden

Brenda Bocek Ruth Kosley

December 23 Diane Boldt

December 24 Liz Shoemaker

December 26 Lannette Abbey

Jan Larson

Alex Thompson

December 27 Anne Brdley

Noelle Cole Stacy Gatto

December 28 Ryan Kosley

December 29 Lynn Bennett

Megan Dean Edna DeJohn

Pastor Travis Norton

Ken Stading

December 30 Cindy Berndsen

Alyssa Kopenhafer Dayle McCormack Carol Schmitz Isaac Warchol

December 31 Butch Backlund

Anniversaries

December 22

Adam and Lorena Cerniglia 13 years Dick and Vickie Kennedy 53 years

December 28

Jerry and Linda Branesky 54 years Joe and Barbara Dixon 58 years

David Fenell and Cathie John - Fenell 7 years George Gillaspie III and Paula Gillaspie 37 years

December 29

Bill and Sherry Phipps 46 years Nick and Leslie Striegel 50 years

December 30

BJ and Bob Evans 25 years Scott and Rene Louis 2 years

December 31

Pastor Michaela and Reverend Will Eskew 10 years

Joe and Dayna Frei 31 years Corby and Teresa Meyer 35 years



Prayer Requests

Lannette Abbey
Agnes Barry
Wanda Anderson
Fred Bachmeier
Janice Baldwin
Brad Bauer
Elmer Bauman
Tana Beall
Joan Boehm
Kirsten Boyd
Bill & Barbara Brown

Skyela Campbell Karl & Pam Cartwright

Tanya Charbonneau
John & Debbie Chlebus

Nell Clowder
Jack & Linda Collier
Rinda Dunson
Alan Flinn
Donna Flores
Edna Fross
Kelly Gempler
Corinne Gibson
Nola Gosch

Private Steven Harris The Jim Hauck Family The Nancy Hjelmstad Family

Linda Herpin Ginger Hipszky Jake Hodnett Bill & Doreen Hulka

Irene

Matthew James
Josh Jones
Shirley Jones
Ann Junk
Jonas Kagarise
Kephart, Tami
Kyong Kelley

Gaye Lynn Kielcheski

Cindy Koger

Sharon Lakey

Jesse Lawrence & Family

Timothy Lillich Dayne Lindquist Scott Louis

Scott & Rene Louise Patricia Lopez Susan Lundmark Jim Mathews Jim Matthews

Nick McKibben & Family

Hugh McNeely

Brandon Miller & Family

Gwyn Miller Marilyn Miller Larry & Lucille Moe

Paul Moe

Wilma Nicolaisen Sam Norton

The Samantha Norton Family

Owen & Family
John Palmen
Ken Palmen
Patsy Pedersen
Jack & Judy Peterson
Ralph Peterson
Darlene Radke
Jeff Rapp
David Selleck

Lisa Smith and Family Catherine Spencer Matthew Stark Gwen Stein Becky Sternal Barbara Swan Michael Taylor

Aaron & Cindi Thorson Linda Townsend & Famly

Bob VanDuyn

Karen Henderson-VanDuyn

Sandy Weber

Christine Welch Greg & Carolyn Young

Please keep these members – and family and friends – of First Lutheran in your prayers this week. If you are requesting to have a name added to the prayer list, please consult with that person prior to making your request. Prayer requests may be submitted by using a Connection Card (in church) or by emailing teri@flccs.net.

Worship and Study

TRADITIONAL WORSHIP

SUNDAYS IN THE SANCTUARY 8, 9:30, AND 11 A.M.

CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

SUNDAYS IN THE WORSHIP CENTER 10:15 A.M.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT LIGHT

WEDNESDAYS IN THE WORSHIP CENTER DINNER 5:15 P.M. | SERVICE 6:30 P.M.

ONLINE WORSHIP

STREAMED LIVE AT 9:30 A.M. Tune in on First Lutheran's YouTube channel, on the church website, or in the church app.

QUARTERLY ADULT EDUCATION

Weekly Adult Seminar is now finished. We will continue with quarterly Adult Education classes. The Lunch and Learn Footsteps of Paul class is part of Adult Education. Check here in the Ekklesia in January and April for our winter and spring options, respectively.

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

LUTHER HALL | 10 A.M. Led by the preaching pastor for the week.

GENERATION TO REVELATION

FIRST LUTHERAN'S NEW PODCAST! Find our podcast on YouTube, on the church website, or anywhere you get your podcasts.

PASTORAL TEAM

The Rev. Travis Norton, Senior Pastor The Rev. Carrie Baylis, Associate Pastor The Rev. Michaela Eskew, Associate Pastor

NEXT SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 7: 10 – 16 Romans 1: 1 – 7 Matthew 1: 18 – 25

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