



First Things – January 2024

A Glimpse of God

Perhaps you've been captivated by Robert Lewis Stevenson's poem, *The Swing*, with his simple truth,

*How do you like to go up in a swing,
Up in the air so blue?
Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!*

Or maybe you've dreamed about flying like a bird. World War II fighter pilot John Magee captured his emotions soaring through the sky,

*And, while with silent lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God. (High Flight)*

Wouldn't it be wonderful, wouldn't it be a great blessing – particularly on our darkest days – if we could see, if we could touch the face of God and be assured of his presence?

Moses asked the LORD for that in Exodus 33,

Now show me your glory.

And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by (18-23).

And Peter, James, and John had the opportunity to see the shining radiance of Jesus' glory at the transfiguration. Years later Peter could still recall the day:

He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (2 Peter 1:17).

Sadly, the glory that Moses and Peter witnessed with their own eyes began slowly, but surely to fade. Because that’s what happens to our memories. With time, their color and their clarities fade...and sometimes vanish entirely.

But we have a blessing that Moses and Peter could not have fathomed – God’s Word in written form, the Bible. And in it, we can see over and over again ***God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ*** (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The season of the church year that begins in January and lasts until Ash Wednesday – February 14, this year – is called Epiphany. Epiphany is a Greek word which means “revealed.” And in it, year after year, we hear portions of God’s Word which recount how Jesus continues to reveal God’s glory to us.

In all of the Bible, but especially in the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – God’s great love for us is revealed in his Son Jesus Christ. The Lord gives us these books for our darkest days, so that in them, we can catch a glimpse of God.

Epiphany – Jesus Appears

On January 6 (it’s a Saturday this year), the Christian Church celebrates the journey of the Wise Men, or Magi, to worship the Christ child. It is recorded in Matthew chapter 2. This day, January 6, is called by two names: some call it the **Gentile Christmas**, the first time that Gentiles came to worship Jesus Christ. We also call it **Epiphany**, which come from a Greek word that means “to reveal.”

The “season of Epiphany” when our paraments (or altar cloths) change to green will last from this coming Sunday through February 11. The theme for the Sundays of Epiphany this year is “Jesus Appears:”



January 7 – Jesus appears as **our substitute** (text: [Mark 1:4-11](#))

January 14 – Jesus appears **through the ambassadors he calls**
(text: [John 1:43-51](#))

January 21 – Jesus appears **committed to the lofty charge** (text: [Mark 1:14-20](#))

January 28 – Jesus appears as a **prophet with authority** (text: [Mark 1:21-28](#))

February 4 – Jesus appears **to undo the devil’s work** (text: [Mark 1:29-39](#))

February 11 – Jesus appears **as the Son of God in glory** (text: [Mark 9:2-11](#))

February 11 is **Transfiguration Sunday**, both the last Sunday of Epiphany and also the Sunday before **Lent** which begins on **Ash Wednesday** (February 14 this year). Mark your calendars for our **Wednesday evening Lenten services**: February 14, 21, 28 and March 7, 14, and 21.

Board for Lay Ministry Update

The **annual meeting** will take place on **Sunday, January 28** after worship. We invite all members to attend. The **proposed budget** will be available in church on **Sunday, January 21** or can be requested by emailing **ChurchOffice@KeepChristFirst.com** after **January 16**.

The repainting of the church entryway will begin soon.

At the annual meeting there will be more information about

- 1) Proposed technology updates
- 2) Proposed new flooring for the fellowship hall
- 3) We're in need of delegates to attend Luther High School's Conference of Delegates meetings four times a year

Finances through November

Church Expenses	\$217,578
<u>Church Offerings/Income</u>	<u>\$197,803</u>
Deficit	-\$19,775
ELC Expenses	\$404,492
ELC Income	\$419,795
Mortgage Balance	\$285,706

Pastor Jonathan Klein

At our call meeting on December 14, Pastor Jonathan Klein of Light of the Valley Lutheran Church of Layton, Utah was called to be First Lutheran's new pastor.

He is 40 years-old. He and his wife, Wendy, have two children: ages 12 and 14. A number of Board for Lay Ministry members have spoken to him and he seems highly personable.

Please keep him in your prayers as he deliberates where he can best serve the Lord at this time.

New Year's Resolution – GITGAKOOLASJC

What's your new year's resolution?

Top picks – every year – are: 1) lose weight, 2) exercise more, 3) eat better.

Top FAILED resolutions – every year – are: 1) lose weight, 2) exercise more, 3) eat better.

A better question is perhaps, *What does the Lord want you to do in the new year?*

The answer is obvious, and it's found in the closing verse of 2 Peter. There Peter says: GITGAKOOLASJC. That's ***Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*** (2 Peter 3:18).

It takes effort. It requires a change – for all of us. But it gives so much in return. And...there are so many ways to do it. Of course, there's *Meditations*, but here are some other things you might try out:

- 1) **5 X 5 X 5** – here's a neat Bible reading plan. It's 5 minutes a day, 5 days a week, 5 ways to dig deeper plan to read through the NEW TESTAMENT in a year.
- 2) **The Word of the Lord Endures Forever** – It's a daily 15-minute verse-by-verse Bible study on demand
- 3) **Issues, Etc.** – ten hours of podcasts every week on a variety of topics from a Lutheran point of view.

5x5x5



(pdf readers – you can click on the blue underlined titles above and be redirected to their scripture study webpage)

NEW Sunday Morning Bible Study

Maybe the easiest way to complete the Lord's new year's resolution for us – GITGAKOOLASJC (see previous page) – is to attend the NEW Sunday Morning Bible Study.

New Place – it will be downstairs in the Fellowship Hall where there are tables to put your Bible on, not to mention your breakfast snack and coffee

New Teacher – Dave Wendt has graciously agreed to teach the Sunday Morning Bible Study in January, February, and March

New Food Offerings – to satisfy your stomach's hunger as you as your spiritual hunger is fed by the Word of God

New 6-week Class – A Christian's Guide to Studying & Interpreting the Bible

Here's Dave's Summary

With the new year comes new opportunities for the members of First Lutheran to draw closer to their Lord by studying His Word. God wants nothing more than for us to trust in him as his dear children. Each time we study God's Word, he speaks to us through that Word, draws us closer to himself, and invites us to trust in him more and more. Perhaps there have been times, however, when your personal Bible study has left you feeling anything but closer to God and growing in your knowledge of his Word. Maybe it was due to the fact that multiple commentators could not agree on the meaning of a difficult Scripture passage. Or perhaps you were reading a section of the Gospels where Jesus was teaching a point to his disciples and everything was making complete sense, until you came across one passage that did not seem to fit in with the rest of the verses. These types of situations can leave us feeling confused, frustrated, and even reluctant to study God's Word. But this is not the result that God wants for your personal study of his Word.

The purpose of this six-lesson course is to help you learn some skills of Bible interpretation. You may always encounter “speed bumps,” or hard to understand passages, as you read God's Word. But learning from Scripture how God wants us to understand his Word will help you read with greater understanding and confidence, and with the Holy Spirit's blessing, will draw you closer to God and empower you to trust in him more and more as your dear Father. We certainly hope that you will consider joining us as we make a renewed effort to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as a congregation.

God Bless,

Pastor Mark



10,000 X 10,000

cross to glory

Cross to Glory in Concert

January 21 3pm

Luther High School Auditorium
Onalaska, WI Free Admission

