

BETHELITE

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Revealing Christ to the World

“Epiphany, the manifestation of God, is like a stone dropped in the water, setting off larger and larger concentric circles, until the entire surface of the pond is drawn into and reflects the initial movement of the stone.” (Rev. Peter Gomes)

The Christmas story itself reflects this ever-expanding circle of the love of God. It begins with an angel bowing from heaven to a young woman, Mary, announcing that she will bear a son. Joseph, too, encounters an angel in a dream, and upon waking, realizes his life has changed forever. Then, like ripples in a pond, the news of Christ’s coming reaches others. Shepherds, startled awake on a hillside, are drawn to the manger, invited to witness the love of God born into the world. The magi, guided by a star, journey to find the child. With awe, they bow before him, offering gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh—symbols of their recognition of the holy child.

The magi’s encounter marks the beginning of a widening circle of those who see the light of Christ and carry the good news to others. From that moment, the Christmas story unfolds into the Epiphany story—a season when we celebrate God’s presence revealed to the world.

The Gospel of John proclaims this revelation with these words: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5). Notice, John does not say that the darkness disappears, is replaced, or is dispelled. Instead, the light shines steadfastly in the darkness, unyielding and unconquerable. (*con’t...*)



Pastor Lauren Wrightsman

(con't from page 1)

As people of faith, we are called to follow that light. It draws us into relationship with God, into the community of the church, and into a deeper familiarity with Christ, our Emmanuel, the Light of the World. During Epiphany, we recognize the light of God guiding us even amid the surrounding darkness. We witness God's presence breaking through and transforming our lives.

The story of God's salvation never ends. It continues to ripple outward—moving us and enlightening us in inspiring and awesome ways. I offer you this prayer for Epiphany and the New Year.

Loving God,

Your light shines in the darkness, drawing us closer to you and one another. As we journey through this season of Epiphany, may we see your presence in our midst. Guide us by your light when the path is unclear, and help us to reflect your love to the world. May we offer the best of ourselves in service, and may your ever-widening grace surround and sustain us. In the name of Christ, our Emmanuel, we pray. Amen.

Lauren Wrightsman, Lead Pastor

BUDGET REVIEW MEETING

Sunday, Jan 19
10:00 am

You are invited to attend the yearly **Budget Review Meeting** led by the financial leaders of the church following 9:00 am service. 🌈



WEDNESDAY EVENING VESPERS

Wednesday, Jan 15
at 6:30 pm

Please join us in the Good Shepherd Chapel for Bethel's monthly vespers. This service will feature our new seasonal theme: *Revealing Christ to the World*.

Bethel's vespers is a contemplative evening worship service led by Bethel youth on the third Wednesday of every month from 6:30 –7:00 pm. 🌈



INSTALLATION OF PASTORS LAUREN AND DAVID WRIGHTSMAN

Congratulations to Pastors Lauren and David Wrightsman, installed last month as our new Lead and Assistant Pastors. With their guidance and wisdom, we look forward to an exciting new future at Bethel Lutheran Church. 🌈

ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, Jan 26
10:00 am

Bethel Lutheran Church will conduct its **Congregational Annual Meeting** following the 9:00 am service.

All congregation members are encouraged to attend. 🌈

BETHEL BIBLE SERIES: OLD TESTAMENT CLASSES

Beginning Jan 4th and 5th

Bethel Bible Series Old Testament classes begin on January 4th and 5th with two options: **the Saturday class meets weekly from 8:30 to 9:30 am on Zoom.** The Sunday class meets weekly **from 7:45 to 8:45 in person in room 120 at Bethel.** The Saturday class is recorded and made available to students in both classes.

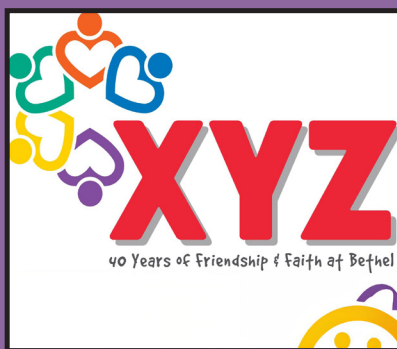
Using the Bible as the textbook, we learn how everything in the Bible is connected, from Genesis to Revelation. It helps us to understand the Bible in relationship to the culture and history of the times in which it was written. It brings us closer to the One who has blessed us.

For more information contact Dave Myhre at dave@bethelbibleseries.org. 🌈

GOODBYE TO PHIL BRAMLEY

*Bethel Horizons
Adventure Director*

A special goodbye to **Bethel Horizon's Phil Bramley.** Phil has served several roles over the past 20 years with the majority of that time as the Adventure Director. He is moving on to a new job in Cook, MN as Executive Director of Voyager Lutheran Ministries. Phil will be missed at the camp and around church. 🌈



THANK YOU TO XYZ!

We want to thank the members of XYZ (eXtra Years of Zest) for their dedication and hard work over the years. After 50 years of service, the group has decided to disband. Established in 1972 under the leadership of former staff member Della Koester, the group engaged its many members in overnight travels, bazaars, and local activities.

With its closing, XYZ leaves a generous legacy, donating substantial funds from its leftover accounts to Future Senior, Media and Homeless Ministries, Bethel Horizons Camp, the Bethel Bible Series, and Bethel Organ Maintenance.

The current Board members—Charlotte Dillabough, Connie Dreger, Bonnie Gartner, Lorna Ribbke, and Sue Marking—deserve special recognition for their many years of service and leadership. The efforts and effects of this longtime ministry will be deeply missed by the hundreds of participants through the years, many of them not members of Bethel. Blessed to be a Blessing! 🌈

ATTENDER TO MEMBER: JOIN THE BETHEL FAMILY

Sunday, Jan 12
10:30 am

Are you ready to take the next step in your faith journey? Join our "Attender to Member" classes at Bethel Lutheran Church! **Attender to Member** sessions are a welcoming opportunity to learn more about our church's mission, beliefs, and ministries, and to explore what it means to become a member of our faith community. Members will be welcomed on Sunday, January 26th at the 9:00 am worship service.

Whether you're new to Bethel or have been attending for years, we'd love to have you join us. A light lunch will be served. Registration is required. For more information or to sign up, contact Chelssey at chelssey@bethel-madison.org or scan the QR code.

Welcome home to Bethel!



A FRESH START WITH REALM – YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO SHAPE OUR CHURCH'S FUTURE

We're excited to invite you to be part of something transformative at Bethel! As we give Realm, our church management system, a second chance, we're launching a pilot program to refine and maximize its potential—together. This is your chance to work directly with our team, provide valuable feedback, and help us iron out the details before we reintroduce Realm to the entire congregation.

Why Realm?

Realm connects every aspect of church life, creating a centralized hub for:

- **Ministries and Small Groups:** Join or lead a group, stay informed, and engage with others throughout the week.
- **Volunteer Opportunities:** Seamlessly sign up and manage your service commitments.
- **Event Participation:** Stay in the know about church-wide events, including how to register and attend.
- **Personal Giving:** Monitor and manage your annual contributions securely and efficiently.
- **Community Connections:** Easily contact staff and fellow members, ensuring no one feels disconnected.

Bethel Lutheran Church



Beyond streamlining administration, Realm empowers individuals to deepen their involvement and impact in church life. By participating in the pilot, you'll help ensure that our rollout is smooth, user-friendly, and tailored to Bethel's unique needs.

Your Role in This Pilot Program

As an early adopter, you'll:

- Test features like event promotion, group communications, and the volunteer portal.
- Provide honest, constructive feedback to improve the system.
- Be among the first to experience how Realm can simplify and enrich your church interactions.

Let's embrace this opportunity to grow, learn, and give ourselves grace as we strive for a stronger, more connected community. Together, we can make Realm a tool that helps Bethel flourish.

Sign up today and be a part of this exciting do-over for Bethel Church!

To register or for more information, please email Chelssey Hewitt at chelssey@bethel-madison.org



BREAKFAST WITH THE BIRDS IS BACK!

**Saturday, January 11
from 9 – 11 am
at Bethel Horizons
Nature Center**

Join naturalist James Marlow for a delightful morning of bird watching and storytelling at Bethel Horizons Nature Center's bird feeding station. Enjoy a light breakfast as James identifies local birds and shares tips and captivating bird feeding stories. During “**Breakfast with the Birds,**” participants will also learn about conservation efforts and how to support native bird species in their Wisconsin backyards and nearby.

Cost for the breakfast and program is \$29/adult, \$20/child. 🌈



LENT 2025 PREVIEW

Bethel's Lent team is in full planning mode for Lent 2025 that begins on Ash Wednesday, March 5. As is Bethel's tradition, we'll have daily devotions written by Bethel members and staff, a weekly pastor-led or small group book study, Wednesday evening worship, and family-friendly service projects.

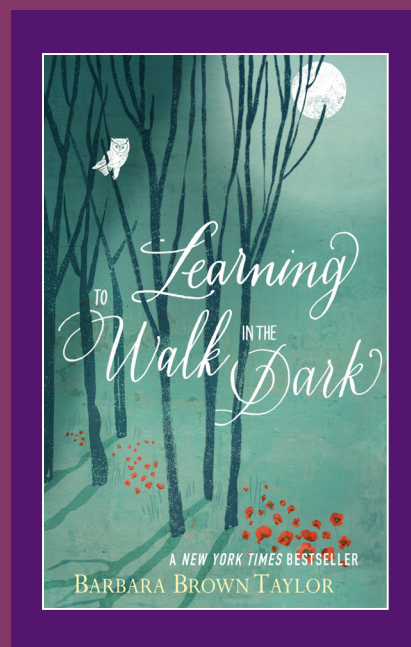
Pastor Lauren has selected the book *Learning to Walk in the Dark* for our study, written by best-selling author and Episcopal priest, Barbara Brown Taylor. Copies of the book will be available for purchase for \$10 starting Sunday, February 16.

The image of light as good and dark as bad is all around us. Yet as Taylor discovered, not only is God present in the darkness, but it's where we can encounter God in new ways and grow in faith. In *Learning to Walk in the Dark*, Taylor asks us to put aside our fear and apprehension and to explore all that God has to teach us "in the dark." "...New life starts in the dark. Whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark" writes Taylor.

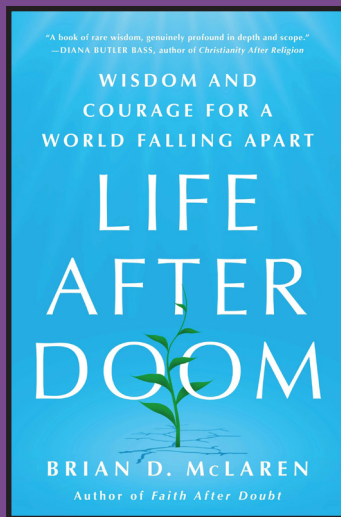
Here are some of our plans for Lent 2025:

- Starting the week of March 10, Pastor Lauren will lead a five-week study of *Learning to Walk in the Dark* on Monday evenings on Zoom, and in person at Bethel on Wednesdays at noon and 7:30 pm following the evening worship service.
- A leader guide will be available for small groups to study and discuss the book together. Consider forming a small group for Lent.
- Daily devotions and prayers based on Bible verses about light and darkness will be available in print and/or as a daily email.
- Service projects include Luke House and Emerson School, our Adopt-a-School partner.

Plan to set aside time this Lent to pray, worship, study and serve together as we walk toward new life in Christ.



"Then I said to myself, 'Oh, he even sees me in the dark!
At night I'm immersed in the light!
It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;
night and day, darkness and light,
they're all the same to you."
-Psalm 139:11-12 (The Message) 🌈



Life After Doom

A CARING FOR CREATION BOOK STUDY

Our Synod's Care for God's Creation Team is offering a Zoom book study in January, February, and March. They will discuss the book "Life After Doom" by Brian McLaren (a Bethel Lutheran Church Series Speaker). **The group begins Thursday, January 16** and meets every Thursday through February 20, from 6:30 pm to 7:45 pm. Contact Deacon Meg Nielsen, team chair, at churchladymeg@hotmail.com for more information. To join, please register using the Zoom link: 🌈



VISIT THE HOLY FAMILY IN SACRED GROUNDS

This year I have been asked to share some of the creches Norv and I collected from several countries where we traveled or served. Each one has a story of discovery which often included discussions of faith. For example we were in the Czech Republic with Bethel folks led by Pastor Duane Hanson when we visited a small church in a small town. I asked if there was a creche to be found in the village. The pastor's wife quickly replied that the church created small creches from the soil on the church property. It is hand formed from their clay soil. I love it! From Jerusalem to Uruguay to Bolivia, Panama, New Zealand, Africa and beyond, the creches help us prepare for the most important story ever told and to celebrate the birth of Christ. Our family has enjoyed them through the years but we are spread out now, so I am grateful for the opportunity to share them with you.

Carrie Bernhardt

Bethel is Blessed to enjoy the creche collection of Carrie Bernhardt's family in our Sacred Grounds area during Advent and Christmas. Families, members, and all visitors are invited to see the unique artistic variations of creches from numerous different cultures and countries around the world.

Bethel is also Blessed with the gift of a ceramic creche given by Ann Leon. It will also be featured with the exhibit. It was handmade by women potters from Nicaragua.

The Bethel Fine Arts team wishes you a blessed Advent along with great enjoyment of this extra Christmas display.

Thank you! 🌈



BETHEL'S HOMELESS MINISTRY

In 1 John 3:17-18 we read that ..."If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

Bethel opens its doors every Tuesday and Thursday to 75-100 homeless people, providing warm comfortable space, a cold breakfast and nutritious hot lunch, a clothing closet, and Christian conversation and community to the isolated. The program is staffed by volunteers and relies on Bethel's generous gift of space—the Pentecost Room, offices, use of the kitchen, storage room, and a clothing room. Operating costs are funded with private donations, allowing it to operate as the only faith-based program in Dane County. Bethel has stepped forward as a faith-serving neighbor reaching out to a vulnerable group of downtown residents offering them a respite from their stressful unprotected

lives. The program encourages good behavior, offers problem-solving guidance, and builds a sense of community that not only benefits the client, but those who own property and run businesses downtown.

Last year over 200 individuals and groups made contributions to Bethel's Homeless program, supporting the continuation of the seventeen-year successful program. The **Homeless Ministry** would like to thank the many donors for advocating for the program with their generous gifts. Recently, the program received several major gifts--from **the estate of Bonita Bruce, XYZ, the Rennebohm Foundation** and community organizations. All gifts help sustain Bethel's ability to deliver comfort and assistance to the "least of these." A special thank you to all members who participated in Bethel's Christmas Giving Tree.

Thank you for your continued support. 🌈



BETHEL BLOOD DRIVE

Wednesday, January 8
from 1 - 5 pm
in Borgwardt Hall

Please join us for a blood drive at Bethel Lutheran Church. If interested in volunteering at the blood drive please contact Dale at holmendd13@att.net with available times between 12-5pm. Thanks in advance. **Note: You will be automatically added for a chance to win an exciting trip for you & a guest to Super Bowl LIX in New Orleans!**

For an appointment call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or visit RedCrossBlood.org and enter sponsor code: BethelMadison, or scan the QR code. 🌈





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LUTHERAN CHURCH

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LOOKING AHEAD

Jan 4th, 5th
Bethel Bible Series begins

Jan 8 | 1 - 5 pm
Bethel Blood Drive

Jan 11 | 9:00 am
Breakfast with the Birds

Jan 12 | 10:30 am
Attender to Member

Jan 19 | 10:00 am
Budget Review Meeting

Jan 26 | 10:00 am
Bethel Annual Meeting

FUND FACTS

The year 2024 brought both joy and sorrow. While it marked a remarkable year for bequests and estate gifts, it also meant the loss of many fellow Bethelites whose legacies have blessed us. Bethel and its ministries are deeply grateful to have received gifts from thirteen workers with us in the kingdom of God, benefiting eight mission and ministry areas and totaling over \$1 million. We pledge to steward these gifts with care and intention. Thanks be to God, as we prepare to celebrate Bethel's 170th year as a Christ-centered church in 2025. 🌈

NOVEMBER 2024 YEAR-TO-DATE FINANCIALS

November 2024 year-to-date financials results			
	YTD Actual	YTD Budget	Variance
REVENUES			
Offerings	1,267,280	1,448,791	(181,511)
Miscellaneous revenue	533,710	363,321	170,389
Non-operating revenue	27,599	7,334	20,265
Total Revenue	1,828,589	1,819,446	9,143
MINISTRY INVESTMENTS			
Staff	1,147,814	1,291,813	(143,999)
Ministry & Resource Teams	407,170	409,890	(2,720)
Benevolence	26,467	25,666	801
Administration	75,650	90,981	(15,331)
Total Ministry Investments	1,657,099	1,818,350	(161,249)
Total Net Income (Loss)	171,491	1,095	170,392

A complete copy of the financial statements are posted to Realm;
you can access these through your Bethel Realm profile.



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Worship Times: Sunday at 7:30am & 9am - Traditional; 11am - Contemporary
Saturday at 5pm - Casual

