



Calvary
Lutheran Church ELCA
2508 Washington Ave SW
Bemidji, MN 56601

Reflections on the Christmas Miracle

“When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” – Luke 2:17-20

Loving God, I remember the moment so fondly from a few years ago; a moment that began with these words: “Can I push the button now daddy?” She said it with such excitement and delight and it crushed me just a little bit to say again, “not yet honey.” “But Daddy, the tree needs to light up.” She was right. This was the whole reason we set it up, to shine your light, God, to the world. She knew it, but I still needed her to wait a moment so I could finish getting things ready. This would continue to be the conversation for a few minutes. Norah on the chair eagerly anticipating the moment. Me getting the tree in place. Norah growing impatient. Me responding in kind. Finally, we reached the moment and gathered around. The kiddos were so excited. Nick was still pretty little, so I don’t know if he even knew what he was excited about, but he was still dancing around. Then 3, 2, 1 and click, Norah hit the switch, the tree lit up, we all smiled and joy abounded. It was a beautiful moment and each year I find I treasure it more and more. Sure, it doesn’t always come together in the most efficient way, but lighting up that Christmas tree with Christmas music in the background has got to be one of my favorite traditions. I treasure it, and I hope it makes you smile God.

I think one of the lines in the whole Christmas story that always gives me pause is one of the last lines, “But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” So much had happened and so much was still going to happen. Yet, in that moment we read that she just treasured it all in her heart. I mean, I have been there God, in that chaotic moment when a child is born. When the world feels like it is just spinning out of control and you have to just go where the ride takes you. Then on top of it all, to be in a foreign place, not the comfort of a hospital, or your own home. A space crowded with animals, hay, people, stuff, and who knows whatever else. I can’t imagine any of it was as this young teenage girl would have imagined. There is a way life is supposed to look, to unfold, and then there was this: an upside-down reality with broken traditions, uncomfortable spaces, twisted expectations, so much not being what one may consider normal, and it tells us that Mary treasured all these words, experiences, moments in her heart. Somehow past it all she saw you, and that was what mattered most. Your light shining. Your son illuminating her whole world.

Is that the Christmas miracle God? The promise of a constant presence to be with us no matter what life throws at us? It seems like Mary got that. I wonder if we can too. We endure so much in life. Sometimes traditions look different than we expect. Sometimes we feel grief over the loss of loved ones. Sometimes a sea of busyness overwhelms us. We get tired. We get worn out, but then we hear Mary’s story, and can’t imagine that anything that first Christmas was like she probably imagined it to be. Yet still, she found herself treasuring all of it in her heart. Perhaps because it didn’t have to look a certain way for you to still shine. She got that. Help us to see that too.

Loving God, help us see that you are here and that, that is enough. Illuminate our hearts through the lights that shine in the night sky. Speak to our hearts as you have through the Advent candles of Hope, Peace, Love and Joy. Unite our hearts in the gift of the Christ child and retune us to your grace as we turn the corner to a new year together. You are here God, and nothing will take away your light from shining. Help us to shine your light. In Jesus’s Name. AMEN.

Pr. Chris

Youth

Sunday School

Our after-Christmas learning continues with stories of the life of Jesus on our way to Lent. Sunday School will have our 3rd Faith Family Project Day on Sunday, January 14. We worship together as usual in the sanctuary at 10:30am with an interactive lesson. Then we'll gather together as a large group in the Fellowship Hall to do a project together as a family. It's a good time to remember Jesus' first works of calling a group of disciples. We still get to do that today when we invite friends and relatives to join us in Sunday School. All are welcome. For more information, talk to Brett Carter, Director of Faith Formation.

Confirmation and Club

Confirmation Classes move to Buena Vista, Wednesday, January 3 for our annual Crashed Ice Confirmation, (no crashing allowed,) from 5:30-8:15pm. We'll all gather in the chalet for pizza, worship, and fun. There will be music and games in the chalet. Bring \$20 for tubing and supper (if you're not tubing, bring \$5 for food). We'll have a brief closing at 8:00pm and head home after that. You'll need a signed liability release form for tubing (watch your Remind, if you still need a copy). See you there!

Club

Let's use our January 10 time to make some plans for the rest of the year. Bring extra people so we can have a great conversation about where the Spirit is calling us as a group. Things like lock-ins, retreats, coffee shops, and walking the mall are all on the table. Let's do some brainstorming and work together to create some extra fun through the winter and spring. Let Brett know if you have any questions or concerns before then (bcarter@calvarybemidji.org).

Middle School Youth Gathering

Seeking Kids (grades 6-8) and adult leaders willing to serve on the Mission Trip to South Dakota this summer. We have more spots reserved and we're happy to have you come along to put your faith in action. We'll be on the Lake Traverse Reservation to serve and learn and have great fun as a group traveling together. [Register now on the Calvary website!](#)

High School Summer Trip

Senior High Youth are making a grand return to the ELCA National Youth Gathering next summer, July 14-21, 2024 in New Orleans. It's time to register and start fundraising for this great trip. Spending time with tens of thousands of other Lutheran kids is an amazing experience, especially when worshipping together all in one room. Details have been sent, but if you need more information, talk to Brett. We're working on creating a fun bus trip that will be part of some great stories. Come be part of this amazing faith-building event! [Register now on the Calvary website!](#)

First Communion Training

Calvary will be hosting a class on Thursday, February 1 at 6:30pm for all those interested in taking their First Communion the following Sunday February 4 at the 9:00am service. Lent begins on Wednesday, February 14. If you're interested in serving as a Lent Mentor for a confirmation student this year (or if you have questions about what that entails), please contact Pr. Jeremiah.

The class is for all 5th graders at Calvary, though all ages are welcome - If those younger (or older) are hungry for the sacrament and wanting to learn about it, the meal is for them too! Contact Pr. Jeremiah with questions.

Lent Mentoring

Lent begins on February 14! If you're interested in serving as a Lent Mentor for a confirmation student this year (or if you have questions about what that entails), please contact Pr. Jeremiah.

Office Closed



Calvary's building is closed for the holidays through January 1, 2024.

Happy New Year!

Confirmation Service Night

This is one of the Confirmation groups working on a quilt with the Calvary Quilters for service night.



See Calvary's January Birthdays Here!

[View this newsletter on the web and follow this link to see who to wish a happy birthday this month!](#)

MONTHLY MINISTRY PARTNER ~ CHURCHES UNITED



Calvary's monthly ministry partner for January is Churches United! All of us have both spiritual and physical needs, and Churches United is one place where God is working to provide especially for the physical needs of our neighbors. Located in the old Lincoln School on 4th Street in Nymore, Churches United is a place where people can go to receive material and financial assistance in the name of Jesus. Around twenty area churches work together through this ministry to provide gas and food vouchers, bus and laundry tokens, and other gifts for community members in need.

To support Churches United (or any of our other monthly ministry partners), you can donate online through RebelGive choosing "second offering monthly partner," or by mailing a check to Calvary with "Churches United" in the memo line.

Churches United reports that they are in need of sturdy gloves and mittens for adult men and women. Toothbrushes for both adults and children are also in demand, as are men's razors. Any donations can be dropped off in the baskets in the entryway at Calvary, or at the Churches United office located at 414 Lincoln Ave. SE. Between noon and 4:00pm on Mon, Tue, Thurs, or Fri. Volunteers are also always welcome! To volunteer, contact Wanda at 218-444-1380.

Calvary Happenings

This article featuring New Members, Deaths, and Baptisms will be updated monthly as another way we can stay informed of what is happening in our congregation.

- **New Members:** December 3: Kimberly & Thomas Oustad, Jessie Emond, Brett & Pauline Franklin and Bonnie Dahl
- **Baptisms:** November 12: Nora Velasquez, November 23: Bode Genkinger, November 26: Jadya Skye Thunder Davis, December 3: Finn Voss, January 7: Graham Balmer
- **Deaths:** October 27: Joann Strand

Baptisms at Calvary

If you are interested in having your child baptized at Calvary, just contact the church office to get schedule with us! For more information, [please visit the baptism page on our website.](#)

Thank You Christmas Decorators!



We have so much to be thankful for this Christmas season. We want to especially give thanks for those who spent time bringing the season to life through decorating the church, sanctuary, and preschool space. Your gift of time brought color and joy to so many. While

the decorations will soon come down, the light of the Christ child continues to shine at Calvary each day. Thanks for all you did to make this season special!

Church Un-Decorating

The church looks amazing after the wonderful efforts from our volunteer decorators! Unfortunately, the decorations can't stay up all year.. For that reason, we are planning a day to un-decorate sometime in the first couple weeks in January, (date and time to be determined.) If you are willing to help with this, please let us know in the office. We will announce when the date has been set.

Donation Statements

Unless you have requested otherwise, your 2023 donation statement has been sent out via email to the address we have on file. Please review your donation statements to ensure the donations shown match your records. If they don't, reach out to Garrett by January 31 to make any adjustments or corrections.

A Trip to the Holy Land

Tuesday, January 16 at 1:00pm in the Lounge at Calvary. We will be showing a video and maps of the Holy Land. Lamae Ritchie will be presenting this. What an adventure we will go on! All are welcome and Coffee will be served.

Food Shelf Representative Needed

Calvary is looking for someone to serve as our Representative on the Bemidji Community Food Shelf Council of Churches! Duties include Coordinating Calvary Volunteers once a month (4th Wednesday of the month), attending a meeting once a quarter, and acting as a communication bridge between the Food Shelf and Calvary. If interested, please contact Pr. Jeremiah by calling the office at: 218-751-1893

FINANCIAL REPORT 12 MONTH FISCAL YEAR – AUGUST-JULY

General Fund – November

<u>Income</u>	<u>Budgeted</u>	<u>YTD Income</u>
\$91,112	\$97,821	\$329,054
<u>Expenses</u>	<u>Budgeted</u>	<u>YTD Expenses</u>
\$96,226	\$97,659	\$366,483

Cash, Receivables, & Savings: \$67,307

November Ministry Partner: Luthern Campus Ministry \$1,674

Calvary Foundation Balance: \$52,274

We want to thank everyone for their continued support as we grow in our ministry together!

Getting to Know Calvary Council ~ Len Ochowicz



Hello Calvary!

My name is Len Ochowicz and I serve on Calvary's church council as an at large member. As this is written, we find ourselves amid the Advent season of light. I was reminded of this as I sat at our dining room table this morning, looking out the window, drinking my usual eye-opener cup of coffee. In the southern sky, I noticed a very bright star in the darkness of pre-dawn. I did not know the astrological name of the star, but I did know that it kept the darkness of the sky from dominating the scene before me.

As we live out our daily lives, we wonder if the chaos of our world destines everything to darkness, but the tiny bright light of this morning star stands in defiance of the darkness around it. We find hope in that light, just as we find hope in our church. There is hope we are pulling together to rid ourselves of the chains of Covid and moving forward to do God's will not only in the church, but in our neighborhoods as well. We are doing good things. We are sharing our gifts, both our given talents and our financial gifts for Calvary and our partnership ministries. It isn't hard to figure out why. God is using diligent leaders at Calvary and throughout our community to transform our world as He has always done.

Evidence of how God works will manifest itself this Christmas Eve as we gather to lift our candles of light following the lead of Pastor Chris as he lifts, in one candle, the hope, joy, love, and peace of Advent and we in response lift our candles, together with him to push back the darkness of our world as we share the light of Christ to all the world! Merry Christmas and God be with you all.

The Refuge GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP

Calvary is hosting a grief support group for those who have experienced a death related loss, especially during this Holiday season. This is a continuous support group called The Refuge, with group meetings held on Tuesday evenings from 4:00-6:00pm. The Refuge meets in Room 1 at Calvary. No need to pre-register - Contact Erin Kossivi at 813-417-7678 with questions!

Refuge Kids This group is for any child that has lost a close family member (parents, sibling, or primary caregiver). The program is best suited for kids 7-13 years of age. For more information contact Erin Kossivi 813-417-7678.

Thank YOU!

We want to give everyone a sincere thank you from all the staff here at Calvary. We are all so thankful for all the amazing members of our congregation that give us such meaning and fulfillment in the work we do every day. You all make life so vibrant here at Calvary, not only during services, but also through volunteer efforts, bible study groups, breakfast hangouts, mentoring, quilting, crafting, singing, cooking - the list goes on and on. We are also lucky to have a lively preschool here. It is a gift every day to have all these wonderful kids doing crafts, running around the gym, and otherwise making us smile every day; Not everybody is lucky enough to have that experience while they work. For that, we are grateful to each of the parents that entrust us with their children's education.

Thank you all for making 2023 such a wonderful year for Calvary and the staff. You make this a great place to be!

CALVARY ALIVE

January Menu:

- January 3 - No Calvary Alive
- January 10 - Traditional Chili/Chicken Chili
- January 17 - Tacos/Spanish Rice
- January 24 - Mac & Cheese/Hot dogs
- January 31 - Chicken Patty on a Bun

Opportunities to Connect

Quilters - Thursdays 9:00-11:00am

Men's Breakfast & Bible Study - Wednesdays 8:00am

Martha Circle - Every 3rd Tuesday of every month 1:00-3:00pm

Hope Circle - Every 3rd Tuesday of every month 9:30-11:00am

Marigold Circle - 1st or 2nd Monday every of month 10:00-12:00pm

Senior Group - 3rd Friday of every month 12:00-1:30pm

For more information about the different groups please contact the front office 218-751-1893.