

# Grace Family Weekly Message

21 December 2023



**ALL ARE WELCOME TO WORSHIP AT GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH ON SUNDAY MORNING, THE 24<sup>TH</sup> OF DECEMBER 2023**

The Gospel reading is Luke 1:26-38. (See page 3 for more information)

**ALL ARE INVITED TO GRACE'S CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP, WITH COMMUNION AND CANDLE LIGHTING, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24<sup>TH</sup>**

The Gospel reading is Luke 2:1-14. (See page 3 for more information)

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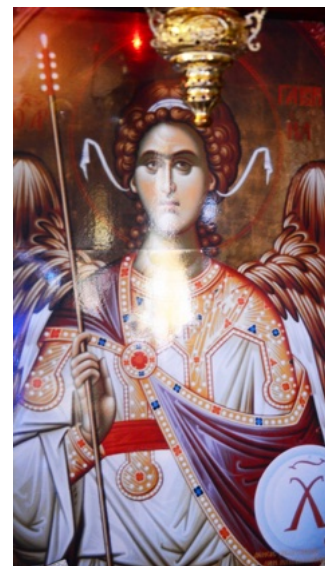
**A BIBLE STUDY ABOUT THE ANNUNCIATION.** This week, in our 2023 "The Story of Jesus" Bible Study series, we will look, once again, at a favorite Jesus Story associated with Advent, the Angel Gabriel's announcement to a teen-age virgin that she will become pregnant with Jesus the Son of God. Can anything really be more amazing?

**Luke 2:26-38** (NIV)(This scripture is also the Gospel reading for Sunday morning)

**<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."  
<sup>29</sup>Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup>and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."  
<sup>34</sup>"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup>Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup>For no word from God will ever fail."  
<sup>38</sup>"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.**

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Of all of God's mighty acts of creation, nothing surpasses the wonder of God himself taking on human form in the womb of a young teen-age girl from the obscure Galilean village of Nazareth, destined to be born as a human



The Angel Gabriel as depicted in an icon at the Holy Trinity Orthodox Monastery, Smiths Creek Michigan.

who would grow to fulfill the prophecies of a Messiah who was to save God's people. Indeed, can anything be more amazing than God affirming his creation of us (Gen. 1:26-27) by becoming one of us. This Bible Study will look at features in this story we call the **Annunciation**.

**THE MESSENGER.** Angels are God's messengers. They appear in human form with communications from God. The Angel Gabriel is mentioned three times in the Bible. He appeared to Daniel to interpret a dream. He appeared to the Priest Zechariah to announce the future birth of John the Baptist. He appeared in this story to tell Mary she would become the mother of the **Son of God**.

**THE VIRGIN.** The young woman or maiden in this scripture is introduced as a "**virgin**." Then we are told her name was "**Mary**." She was young, probably just barely of child-bearing age (12 to 14). At that time, she was "**betrothed**" to Joseph but



*The Annunciation, from the rear panel of the Isenheim Altar (Colmar, France), by Matthias Grünewald (1512-1516).*

according to Jewish marriage practices, still living with her parents. We believe she really was a "**virgin**" when she became pregnant with Jesus, but subsequent references to Jesus' brothers and sisters (Matt. 13:55-56) raise valid questions about the Church's concept of Mary's "**perpetual virginity**."

**THE ANGEL'S GREETING.** Gabriel appeared to Mary in person and offered a greeting that upset her. What is recorded by Luke as "**you who are highly favored**" really meant that God had chosen her for a mission that was totally unique in the history of humankind. Gabriel tried to reassure her, "**Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.**" God would sustain her through the trials that were to come.

**THE MESSAGE.** Gabriel's message was the real blockbuster: "**You will conceive and give birth to a son... (who) will be called the Son of God.**" Can you imagine the emotional impact this had on a young teenage maiden when she was told that she was going to become pregnant with the "**Son of God?**"

**THE CHILD'S NAME.** Gabriel's message was explicit in telling Mary that she must name this child "**Jesus**." The original version of this name in Hebrew and Aramaic was "Yeshua." Yeshua combines "Ya," a poetic designation for Yahweh, the Hebrew name for God (Exodus 3:14), and the Hebrew verb "yasha," which means to "**rescue**," "**deliver**," or "**save**." The name "**Jesus**" literally means "**God saves**" or "**God is salvation**."

**THE CHILD'S MISSION.** The child that Mary is to bear is destined to become a ruler, a new Davidic King, whose kingdom "**will never end**."

**MARY'S QUESTION.** Mary obviously knew how pregnancies occur because she protested to Gabriel that this is impossible, "**I am a virgin**."

**GABRIEL'S ANSWER.** Gabriel's answer to Mary was that "**the power of the Most High** will cause her to become pregnant. The "**Most High**" is God so he was saying that God, in his exquisite creativity, would cause Mary to become pregnant.

**MARY'S RESPONSE.** Here we may ask, "*did Mary have the option of saying NO to God's plan?*" Her answer suggests that this was never part of the story. Mary responded to God's messenger by saying, "**I am the Lord's Servant.**" This young woman, who was barely past childhood, had just received the most amazing news in all human history and she simply said, "**May your word be fulfilled.**"

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## WEEKLY NEWS AND ACTIVITIES AT GRACE

**WORSHIP ON SUNDAY MORNING.** Sunday, the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, is the Fourth Sunday of Advent. The Gospel reading is Luke 1:26-38. This scripture is the Annunciation where the Angel Gabriel announces to the virgin Mary that she will become pregnant with the Son of God. This week's **Weekly Messenger** Bible Study has a study on this scripture (pages 1-3). The liturgical color is blue. SAM Clyde Bame will conduct this service. Ryan Erard will serve as the organist.

**WORSHIP ON CHRISTMAS EVE.** On Sunday evening, the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, Grace's traditional Christmas Eve worship service will take place, starting at 8:00 PM. The Gospel reading is Luke 2:1-14 (15-20). This is the Biblical record of Jesus' birth in a Bethlehem manger and the visitation by the shepherds. The liturgical color is white. The service will feature traditional Christmas carols, communion, and the singing of "Silent Night" by candlelight, in its original German language. Pastor Jaci will conduct the service; Ryan Erard will be the organist.

**CHOOSE WHERE YOU WORSHIP AT GRACE.** At Grace, you can worship in a traditional Sanctuary setting, or you can worship while remaining in your vehicle and tuning your radio to FM 94.1. Grace's worship services are broadcast on FM 94.1. Worshippers who remain in their vehicles should park near the main entrance (south) door. All in-vehicle worshippers will be communed by the Pastor during the service.

**ALL ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE!**

© **PRAYER CONCERNS.** Please keep the following persons in your prayers:

The Family of Laura Gilbert

Ruth Ann Anderson, Merlyn Weng, Al Domrose, Tom & Cheryl Hoot, Chris Gump, Kyle Heins, Robert Bean, Craig Traver, Tim Fejes, Dawn Peters, Allison Trujillo, Laura Binns, Pat Bowe, Laurie Pangle, Matthew Rolf, Steve, Jody Angelone, LaVerne Edwards, Bev Burroughs, Carol Jacob, Tom Szor, Shelly Sherman, Barbara Harger, Patricia Morral, Karen Southwyck, Dustin Schmidt, Stephen Andrew, Kelly Troyer, Nadine Crisologos, members of the Grace family who reside in nursing homes including Bob & Pat Sondergeld (Riverview), Donna Foss (Parkcliff), Sandy Cutchall (Genoa), and Ruth Hammel (Genoa), and members of the Grace family and their colleagues who serve in the Armed Forces.

*If you know of someone to add to the prayer list, please inform Pastor Jaci or the Church Office.*



© **ATTENDANCE AND OFFERING LAST WEEK.** 74 people attended worship at Grace on Sunday, the 17<sup>th</sup> of December. Nine people attended the third and final Soup Supper and Evening Prayers on Wednesday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of December. The offering last Sunday was \$11,908! In order to fully fund the budget adopted by the congregation last November, weekly offerings need to average \$2,736 per week. After 51 weeks in 2023, total offerings are slightly below this budget target. Thank you to all members of the Grace Family who continue to attend worship and contribute regular offerings.

© **CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PAGEANT.** This past Sunday, the 17<sup>th</sup> of December, the children, and youth of Grace presented a Christmas Pageant that was part of the worship service. The Pageant theme was "**Why the Angels Sing for Joy**". It was directed by Mary Schlievert. Participating in the program were Trenton Wolfe, Garrett Wolfe, Addie Tiell, and Brianna Simkus as Angels. Grace's Confirmation students Adelyn Simkus (flute, narrator, choir) and Jaycie Marquardt (choir and set designer) participated. Joan Eckermann and Rachel Beeler supported the Pageant as musicians. The youngest angels in the congregation joined the presentation group for the final song. It was a delightful and meaningful presentation and a big thank you goes to all of the youth and adults who participated in this special worship presentation.



*The youngest children in the Grace family joined in the last song of the Pageant.*

© **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION UPDATE.** Please make note of the following holiday changes in Grace's Christian Education Program:

- December 24 - No Classes
- December 31 - Youth Sunday. After worship, the congregation is invited to help with "Tying In the New Year." A simple lunch will be served, and fleece blankets will be created (tied) to donate to the Bethlehem Monthly Giveaway.
- January 7 - Regular classes will resume for K-12 at 9:30 AM.

© **2024 OFFICERS AND BOARD CHAIRMEN.** At the Council Meeting on 12 December, Mary Schlievert announced her willingness to serve as President for 2024 and she was confirmed in that position by the Council. In addition, Treasurer Mike Schlievert offered to also act as Financial Secretary on a temporary basis until that vacancy can be filled. Six members of the 2024 Council have now been elected. Secretary Karen Hammel and Treasurer Mike Schlievert were elected to two-year terms in 2022. Steve Blausey, Board of Property Chair, and Joan Eckermann, Board of Worship Chair, were reelected by the congregation on

November 5<sup>th</sup>. John Heminger was elected to serve as Board of Witness and Mission Chair and as a new Council Member.

- © **GRACE GRIEF GROUP.** The Grace Grief Group now meets in person on Wednesdays. The group meets at 1:00 PM on Wednesdays at Grace Lutheran Church in Elmore. *“Anyone dealing with grief or loss of any kind is welcome to join us as we support each other through some of the most difficult times of our lives.”* Please see or call Mary Lou Kohli if you would like more information.



© **WALKING IN GRACE.** With the coming of winter many of us look for a warm place to walk and stay fit. So each Wednesday the doors of grace will be opened for walkers from 9:00 to 10:0 AM. A walking route or two will be designated to keep traffic moving in a similar direction, and walkers will walk at their own pace. We'll begin each walk with a brief prayer. Friends are welcome. If you have any questions, please ask Dave Wietelmann.

- © **2023 ADVENT GIFTS.** This year’s Advent Special Offerings will be dedicated to purchasing environmentally friendly stoves that are available through the ELCA Good Gifts program. For each \$105 in donations, Grace’s Advent Offerings will purchase one cookstove. These stoves are designed to burn more efficiently, produce less smoke, and utilize a wider variety of fuels. One benefit will be fewer health risks for the families that receive and use these stoves.

- © **OPERATION OREO.** We recently added a new name to Grace’s Operation Oreo roster: MA2 Esteban Reyes (Donovan). Donovan is a Woodmore graduate. He is in the Navy onboard the USS Gerald R. Ford. He is currently out at sea but will arrive back to Norfolk shortly.

- Please keep all military personnel in your prayers, but especially: **SSG Stephen Simkus, U. S. Army Special Forces; Cadet Julian Sanchez, U.S. Military Academy; 2LT Eli Gerkenmeyer, U. S. Air Force; Sgt. Ted Orzanski, U. S. Marine Corps; and MA2 Esteban Reyes, U. S. Navy.**
- The shipping price for one goody box is now \$17.10. Anyone wishing to donate to Operation Oreo to help offset the cost of shipping and also the contents of the Goody boxes -- Just mark “Op Oreo” on the memo line of your check.
- If you have a name to add to our list or if you have any questions about Operation Oreo, please contact Jennifer Marquardt

- © **WORSHIP PLANS AT GRACE.** The Board of Worship has approved plans for worship services from now through the end of 2023. Be sure to note these dates in your personal calendars.

Date	Activity	Time	Location
24 December, Sunday	Sunday Worship	10:30 AM	Sanctuary
24 December, Sunday	<b>Christmas Eve</b> Worship, with communion	8:00 PM	Sanctuary
31 December, Sunday	Youth Led Worship, with Lessons and Carols	10:30 AM	Sanctuary

© **PIECEMAKERS.** The Piecemakers plan to start their 2024 quilting project with their first meeting on Tuesday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January. The Piecemakers will begin each session at 9:00 AM. Grace Piecemakers production of quilts for Lutheran World Relief is a major ministry in which members are invited to participate. Contact Nancy Pries.

© **BETHLEHEM MONTHLY GIVEAWAYS (Formerly Backpacks for Humans).** The folks at Bethlehem Lutheran were thrilled with the large donation of bedding and clothing that came to them from Grace this week. Michelle, the Bethlehem Monthly Giveaways Coordinator said their November Giveaway was attended by so many neighbors that their supplies were nearly depleted. Bethlehem's relationship with Backpacks for Humans has ended; however, the church continues to collect, and give away needed items on the third Saturday morning of each month through their Bethlehem Monthly Giveaways Program. Thank you for all who donated and for those who loaded the car: Trenton, Garrett, Brianna, and Adelyn. They are ALWAYS in need of bedding (sheets, blankets, etc), pillows, towels, wash cloths, and dish cloths. They also have a current need for children's clothing (all ages) and men's clothes.

UPCOMING ACTIVITES AND EVENTS AT GRACE			
Date	Event	Time	Location
2 January, Tuesday	<b>Piecemakers Quilting</b>	9:00 PM	Grace Basement
3 January, Wednesday	<b>Grief Support Group</b>	1:00 PM	Conference Room
9 January, Tuesday	<b>Board of Congregational Life</b>	7:00 PM	Conference Room
11 January, Thursday	<b>Council Meeting</b>	7:00 PM	Conference Room
<b>Regular Weekly Events:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sunday mornings, at 9:30 AM; Christian Education Classes for K-12 Children and Youths</li> <li>• Sunday mornings, at 10:30 AM: Worship, with communion (<i>in the Sanctuary</i>)</li> </ul>			

© **DEACON AND LECTOR SCHEDULE.** Deacons and Lectors scheduled to serve in December worship services are listed in the table. The Worship Committee has asked that individuals sign-up for Deacon and Lector opportunities in succeeding months for the dates of their choice. The Deacon Forms will cover two months sign-up and three months for Lector sign-up. The forms are on the table in the Narthex. Please choose the dates when you will be able as a Deacon or Lector.

DATE	DEACONS	LECTORS
24 December, morning	Bruce King & Pr. Dave Wietelmann	Nancy Bennett
24 December, evening	Mary & Mike Schlievert	Gary Anderson
31 December	Youth Deacons	Youth Lectors
<i>See the sign-up forms in the Narthex for Deacon and Lector opportunities in 2024</i>		

© **THRIVENT CHOICE.** Thrivent members are reminded to check your Thrivent accounts and donate your available Choice Dollars before December 31<sup>st</sup>.

© **AREA OFFICE ON AGING.** This advocacy agency for the elderly is asking for donations of new blankets and socks for persons who receive mobile meals in Ottawa County. Donations can be placed in the box under the table in the Narthex.

© **POCKET QUILTS.** A POCKET QUILT is a way we all can pass a tangible message about God's love to someone else. Keep an extra one and a card in your pocket to share with someone you see who looks troubled or needs a hug. You'll be surprised at the response you will get. Sometimes there will even be tears.

© **ELMORE FOOD PANTRY.** The Grace Food Pantry item for December is “a box of cereal.” Grace hosts the Elmore Food Pantry, which is open on the second Friday of each month, from 9:00 AM until noon. Anyone who wants to drop off Food Pantry items at the church may bring them to the church on Sunday or leave them inside the north door during times when the church office is open.

***Our Prayer: Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy, that willingly we may bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.***

GRACE CONTACT INFORMATION		
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