



St. Stephen's Lutheran Church

Physical: S214 Willow Street, Mailing: P.O. Box 435
Stephenson, MI 49887

Heather Esmahan, Office Manager
(906) 753-4932 SOoffice@gsslutheran.org

Reverend Brenda L. Greenwald

Phone/Text: 720.989.8218

E-mail: Pastor@gsslutheran.org

Sunday Worship: 10:30a (Fellowship BEFORE)

**Happy
2026!**



Important Calendar Dates	1
Birthdays, Anniversaries, Prayers, Ash Wednesday	2
Christmas Sermon - Pr Brenda	3 - 4
Decking the Halls of St. Stephen's	5
Candles - Pr Sharolyn	6
Daily Bible Readings for January + February	7 - 8
Council Minutes from December 2025	9 - 10
New Sound + Video System, Thank You	11

IMPORTANT DATES For Your Calendar

January 4, 11, 18 Sunday Worship: 9a at G, 10:30a at St.

January 6 Blood Drive at Gethsemane, 10a - 3p

January 25 Sunday Worship: 9a at G, 10:30a at St.,

Annual Meeting for St AFTER 10:30a Worship

**WRITE
THIS
DOWN**


February 1, 15, 22 Sunday Worship: 9a at G, 10:30a at St.

February 8 **SPECIAL Joint Worship: 9a at Gethsemane** (G Meeting after, No Joint Fellowship)

February 18 **Joint Ash Wednesday Worship: Noon at Gethsemane**

February 25 Lenten Evening at St. Stephen's: Supper at 5:15p, Service from 6-6:30p

Birthday Blessings

January

13 Sean Bright
13 Pam Sederquist
15 Penny Nehls
26 Callie Crawford
27 Sandy Chaney
29 Sally Oliver

Newsletter ~ January + February 2026 ~ Page | 2

February

4 Donna Tennessen
6 Kim Belec
8 Nick Diehm
9 Duelly Keyzers
16 Rev. Brenda Greenwald
16 Roy Parrett
21 Keith Salo
23 Pattie Starzynski
24 Shaw Salo

Feb 3
Feb 17

Continued prayers for those serving in the military:

Jordan Baril,
Jay Chapple, Toby Irish,
and Brent Jurmu

Happy Anniversary

Alvin & Sharon Etelamaki
Fred & Kim Belec

We continue to hold the following in prayer:

Jim Roubal
Roger Ihde

Julie Greenwald
Sue Skowronski

Mike Saari
Tracy Klatt

Rob Boe
Wendy Majkrzak

Thank you for holding the friends and families of our Congregants in your prayers. Contact the Office with any corrections.



Wishing a Happy 97th Birthday to Gma Dot!

Looking Ahead to LENT

(More details sent mid-February 2026)

Ash Wednesday - February 18, 2026

o Joint Worship at **12p** - at Gethsemane

Mid-Week Lenten Evenings - begins Feb 25, 2026

o 5:15p Supper (Soup + Sandwich Suppers)
o 6:00p Service



Grace Has Already Found You Rev. Brenda L. Greenwald + Western ND Synod + Rev. John Stevens

(The Christmas Sermon for those of you who were unable to join us Christmas Eve.)

Merry Christmas! All throughout **Advent**, we have been **blessed** with the **thoughts** and **words** of a **devotional series** from the Western North Dakota, Synod and from the Rev. John Stevens. It's been a **blessing** to lead you through the weeks of **HOPE** and **PEACE, JOY** and **LOVE**. And **tonight?** We add the **Christ Candle**, well, and the **Christ Child**...to the **mix**!



"It always amazes me how **ordinary** the Christmas story **sounds** when you read it **straight**: Caesar gives an order. Gotta count the people. People travel. A baby is born. Shepherds working the night shift. Could be just more yadda, yadda, yadda - heard it before. Could be as bored as Colton looks! It could **ALMOST** slip past us, like just another scene from a historical drama.

But then — **angels** break in, **light** floods the sky, and a **choir** of heaven **belts** out a song that makes Handel's *Messiah* feel like **background** music! Suddenly, what **looked** like a **simple** story about counting people in their hometown becomes. a story. of **GRACE**! **GRACE** always does that. It **sneaks** up on us when we **least** expect it, showing up in crowded **inns**, unremarkable towns, or in the **middle** of our own chaos.



GRACE is God's unearned, undeserved, unconditional **LOVE**.

GRACE is God's unearned, undeserved, unconditional **LOVE**.

And the **Christmas** story is one long, holy interruption where **GRACE** insists:

"I'm **here**. For you. Right here in the **straw**."

Now, if we were **scripting** this night for **Netflix**, the **manger scene** wouldn't even pass the **pitch** meeting. It would **bomb**. It's too **messy**. The lighting is **bad**. The setting is **NOT** awe-inspiring. The wrong kind of **people** show up. And **NOBODY** would choose a **cattle stall** for their *Christmas Special*. **And yet....this** is where **God** decided to enter the world. It's a reminder that **grace** does **NOT** need **perfect** conditions. Grace does **NOT** wait for us to have our lives **filtered**, **edited**, or **cleaned** up. Grace is **God** saying, "**YOU** don't have to be ready. **I AM**." Which, if we think about it, might be the **craziest** part of it all. In a **culture** where **WE** always think **WE** need to be ready, (or at least it **seems** that way) God **interrupts** us and **changes** the **game plan**.



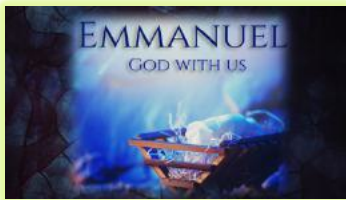
Think of it like the **final** scene of *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*: the **kids**, with all their scraped-up **knees** and **BMX bikes**, are racing against impossible **odds** to protect this **fragile, glowing** little **being**. They are **ordinary** kids, they're **TOTALLY** outmatched, and **YET** the whole story **tilts** around this **small, tender life** they're carrying.

Strength and **vulnerability** together. It's absurd and beautiful, **all at once**. That's **GRACE**: God showing up **small, fragile**, and yet somehow the **Savior** of the world.



Grace **also** meets us in our **FEAR**. **WE** think we will **NEVER** be good enough, that no matter **what** we do, it **won't** be perfect. If we only had **10** more minutes, we could make it **better**...etc. The **shepherds** knew that **fear**. Out there in the **dark**, their **minds** were probably racing with **what-ifs**: wild animals, thieves, accidents, failure.

And then suddenly: **LIGHT**. An **angel** saying the one thing we need to **hear** most: **"Do not be afraid."** And not only **one** angel, but a **multitude** of angels. A **MULTITUDE**! Can you even **imagine** what that **looks** like? A multitude of angels **singing** of God's love for God's people?! **Do not be afraid**! God has come **into** this world and you will **never** be the same. You **don't** have to measure up, or perform perfectly, or have everything together. **God shows up anyway. God shows up here.**



The shepherds didn't just **peek** into the manger and **shrug**. They **went back different**. They left **glorifying** and **praising** God! **Grace** does that — it doesn't **leave** us the **same**. You can't **un-hear** the angel song. You can't **un-see** the Savior in a manger. **Christmas GRACES** whispers (*as we heard Bishop Curry say to the kiddos*) that even in the **ordinary**: the diapers, dishes, long drives, crowded schedules **God is with us. Emmanuel**. And once you **KNOW** that, once you've **seen grace** lying in a manger, you start **looking** for it **everywhere**.

So, **tonight**, as you sing the **carols**, as you light **candles** in the shadows, as you **go home** to whatever awaits for you, **remember this: "ET, PHONE HOME!"**

No, truly: I pray that you remember **this: GRACE** has already found **YOU**. In the **manger**, God made a home **with us** so that **nothing**: not **fear**, not **failure**, not even **death**, will ever **separate** us from **love**.



May this **blessing** go with you as you enter a world that **God loves**: Blessed are you who came here tired, or hopeful, or just trying to hold it all together. **Grace has already found you**. Blessed are you who carry **grief** in one hand and **joy** in the other. You don't have to choose. **Grace is big enough to hold it all**. Blessed are you who **wonder** if there's really room for **you** in this story. There is. There **always** has been. The **manger** is for you. May you leave tonight knowing that the **God** who came **small** has already made you **beloved**. And may you carry this grace **home**, into your ordinary, extraordinary **life, Amen."**

P. Brundage



Candles

Rev. Sharolyn Swenson

Candles are evocative. It is not just a way to shed light, but they stir in us a strong image, memory, or feeling, along with the sensorial pleasure of the light and aroma. The meaning attached to lighting candles varies across religions, denominations, congregations, and households.

This is the time of year that candle conversation can preoccupy Council or Altar Guild meetings. We swirl around blue or purple Advent candles. When do we light the pink Gaudete candle and do we even need it? When does the Christmas candle appear (and do we even need it?). And let's not forget the year-round wonder of decorative candles in many of our spaces, beyond the two that light the words of the Word...at the pulpit and on the Altar. Or the borrowed tradition of the red "eternal flame" denoting for our Catholic siblings the presence of the reserved sacrament...we will keep that spark burning even when we have no theological basis for it. There are the skinny beeswax tapers, carrying the light of our hearts, as we gather in Evening Prayer, as we remember loved ones, or sending out Advent hopes during the long nights.



The most important candle may be one we don't speak about often. We might assume everyone knows the ritual and symbolic load it bears in our religious language system. It is the Paschal Candle. It is the tall, (often) beeswax candle...inscribed with an Alpha and Omega and the year, standing at the ready near the baptismal font. "Paschal" means spring or Easter, and for liturgical Christians, it symbolizes the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

The way the Paschal Candle is imbibed with meaning is through story. The Paschal Candle is lighted for three occasions, all days full of story, with beginnings, endings, and life in between. The light of the Paschal Candle begins in the most storied night, the Easter Vigil, with the blessing of the new fire, to increase in us a desire to shine forth with the brightness of Christ's rising. The Paschal Candle brings the light of the bonfire into the worship space and burns through- out our gatherings all through the Easter season. Just like the fire of Pentecost...the Paschal light goes out in the streets to bear the Light of Christ in the wild. It is only lighted again at a Baptism, the beginning of a new Christ story, and at the Funeral, the completion of that story begun at baptism.

On All Saints Sunday (November 2, 2025) at Zion Lutheran Church in St. Ignace, Michigan the candles illumined the leader books. The ELW were carefully laid out in the narthex so folks might find ones they had given in honor or memory of loved ones. There were special doughnuts and coffee. And many more folks than expected. And tapered beeswax candles were ready to light for the ones we'd lost this year, and the ones we've carried in our hearts a long time.

AND the Paschal Candle was lighted. One last time...proclaiming Christ's life, death, and resurrection...the Alpha and Omega...the beginning and the end. As Zion celebrated the completion of its mission as a congregation, stories were shared, smiles and tears were abundant, peace seeped in, and the candles burned. When the other candles were extinguished for the smoke to drift around the room and out the door...the Paschal candle was still burning (but poignantly short for all the baptisms and funerals) with the promise of Christ...yesterday and today, the beginning and the ending, belonging in all of time and all the ages, now and forever.

Shalom+
Pastor Sharolyn Swenson



Daily Bible Readings: January 2026

Thurs, Jan. 1	Jesus Is Baptized	Matthew 3:13-17
Fri, Jan. 2	Temptation in the Wilderness	Matthew 4:1-11
Sat, Jan. 3	Jesus Begins His Ministry	Matthew 4:12-17
Sun, Jan. 4	Come and See	John 1:35-51
Mon, Jan. 5	Simon and Andrew	Matthew 4:18-20
Tues, Jan. 6	James and John	Matthew 4:21-22
Wed, Jan. 7	Matthew's Call	Matthew 9:9-13
Thurs, Jan. 8	Harvest Is Great, Laborers Are Few	Matthew 9:35-38
Fri, Jan. 9	The Twelve Disciples	Matthew 10:1-4
Sat, Jan. 10	The Mission of the Twelve	Matthew 10:5-12
Sun, Jan. 11	The Wedding at Cana	John 2:1-11
Mon, Jan. 12	A Parable about Weddings	Luke 14:7-11
Tues, Jan. 13	The Parable of the Great Dinner	Luke 14:15-24
Wed, Jan. 14	Food and Drink for All	Psalms 104:10-16
Thurs, Jan. 15	The Eternal Wedding Feast	Revelation 19:1-10
Fri, Jan. 16	The Feast of the Lord	Isaiah 25:6-9
Sat, Jan. 17	A Psalm with Overflowing Wine	Psalms 23:1-6
Sun, Jan. 18	Cleansing the Temple	John 2:13-25
Mon, Jan. 19	Prophecy Concerning the Temple	Jeremiah 7:1-11
Tues, Jan. 20	The Future Temple is Foretold	Zechariah 6:9-15
Wed, Jan. 21	The Future Temple Has No Traders	Zechariah 14:20-21
Thurs, Jan. 22	God and the Lamb	Revelation 21:22-26
Fri, Jan. 23	House of Prayer	Isaiah 56:1-7
Sat, Jan. 24	Zeal for the House of the Lord	Psalms 69:9
Sun, Jan. 25	Nicodemus Visits Jesus	John 3:1-21
Mon, Jan. 26	John the Baptist Preaches about Jesus	John 3:22-30
Tues, Jan. 27	John's Continued Teachings	John 3:31-36
Wed, Jan. 28	John Put in Prison	Luke 3:19-20
Thurs, Jan. 29	John Sends Messengers to Jesus	Matthew 11:2-6
Fri, Jan. 30	John Is Elijah	Matthew 11:7-15
Sat, Jan. 31	Jesus Compares Himself to John	Matthew 11:16-19

Daily Bible Readings: February 2026

Sun, Feb. 1	The Woman at the Well	John 4:1-26
Mon, Feb. 2	Many Come to Believe	John 4:27-42
Tues, Feb. 3	The Parable of the Lost Sheep	Luke 15:1-7
Wed, Feb. 4	The Parable of the Lost Coin	Luke 15:8-10
Thurs, Feb. 5	The Parable of the Lost Son	Luke 15:11-32
Fri, Feb. 6	The Parable of the Shrewd Manager	Luke 16:1-13
Sat, Feb. 7	Jesus Returns to Galilee	John 4:43-45
Sun, Feb. 8	Healing Miracles	John 4:46-54
Mon, Feb. 9	Jesus Heals on the Sabbath	John 5:1-18
Tues, Feb. 10	Jesus' Authority Comes from God	John 5:19-29
Wed, Feb. 11	Testimonies about Jesus	John 5:30-47
Thurs, Feb. 12	Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand	John 6:1-15
Fri, Feb. 13	Jesus Walks on Water	John 6:16-21
Sat, Feb. 14	Jesus Is the Light of the World	John 8:12-20
Sun, Feb. 15	Spiritual Blindness	John 9:1-41
Mon, Feb. 16	The Transfiguration	Matthew 17:1-13
Tues, Feb. 17	Fear Not Little Flock	Luke 12:22-34
Wed, Feb. 18	Following the Shepherd	John 10:1-18
Thurs, Feb. 19	Finding Lost Sheep	Luke 15:1-7
Fri, Feb. 20	My Sheep Hear My Voice	John 10:22-30
Sat, Feb. 21	Jesus' Signs Testify	John 10:31-42
Sun, Feb. 22	Jesus Raises Lazarus	John 11:1-44
Mon, Feb. 23	Concern about Jesus' Actions	John 11:45-57
Tues, Feb. 24	Jesus Anointed at Bethany	John 12:1-11
Wed, Feb. 25	Jesus Enters Jerusalem	John 12:12-19
Thurs, Feb. 26	Greeks Want to See Jesus	John 12:20-36
Fri, Feb. 27	Many Are Scared to Admit Their Faith	John 12:37-50
Sat, Feb. 28	Isaiah's Prophecy about the People	Isaiah 6:1-10



Church Council Minutes



December 17, 2025 - Council Meeting

Present: Cheri Leiphart, Kami Salo, John Starzynski, Donna Tennesen, Donna Thonne, Pr Brenda

Opening Devotions: Pr Brenda - 'For when you need a little help'

CALLED TO ORDER: 2:22p

AGENDA APPROVAL

New Business Item: A short discussion about Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2026.
Will follow-up at our January council meeting

Motion to Accept Amended Agenda: Kami **Second:** Donna Th **FAVOR**

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Motion to Accept Minutes: Pr Brenda **Second:** Kami **FAVOR**

PASTOR'S REPORT: November 6 - December 16, 2025

Pr Brenda



CALENDAR

- ☐ **Baptism** 1/18/26 Miller Jeffrey Kinjerski at Gethsemane
- ☐ **Weddings** 7/11/26 Calvin Voss + Sarah Shilts at Carp River Gardens
- ☐ **Worship** 12/28/25 Online Only Worship - Synod Worship available
- 1/25/26 Regular Worship Times. *Annual Meeting for St.*
- 2/8/26 Joint Worship: 10:30a at G. (*Annual Meeting after*)
- 2/18/26 Full Ash Wednesday Service: Noon at G

MINISTRY MOMENTS

- ☐ **Community** Blood Drive on January 6, 2026 - 10a - 3p
- ☐ **Concerns** (*to be shared verbally at meeting*)
- ☐ **Jordan Project** Members interviewed community member - Website search begins!
- ☐ **Living Trusts** G: Updated website after Spectrum Switch. St: WOW!!
- ☐ **Ministerium** IRS Status RENEWED! WHEW. Seeking Bookkeeper
- ☐ **NGL Synod** We pray for Bishop Katherine --> Sabbatical and A2B Rev. Sharolyn Swenson
- Hosted Boundary Training at G
- ☐ **Nursing Homes** Harbors: Jack Wittgren - 4th Tuesday of each month
- Luther Home: Visits with Dying Community Member
- Menominee Health: Worship - 4th Tuesday. Planning Remembrance.
- Roubals: Called-in for visits with new residents
- ☐ **Visits** Homes: **3** Hospital: **2** Retire. Home: **7** Office: **A Few**
- Phone: **DAILY** Text: **CONSTANT** Squad Calls: **0**

TREASURERS/FINANCIAL SECRETARY'S REPORTS

Motion to Accept Reports: Pr Brenda **Second:** Donna Th **FAVOR**

BRIEF MINISTRY TEAM UPDATES

Bethesda (Pr B)	Faith Formation (Kami)	Fellowship (Cheri)
All is calm, all is....tucked away for the winter months.	Discussed conformation prospects future undecided. Taylor and Shaw continue to teach the young children when they are present.	Fellowship calendar for 2026 has been posted. The congregation enjoys the simple coffee, treats, and conversations.
Living Trust (Pr B)	Memorial (John)	Property (John)
Pastor Brenda will let the people know what to expect, what will be televised, and how it all works when the installation is completed.	All Memorial information will be published at the end of the year.	Need a new garbage disposal plan. John will contact Delta Disposal. Their present rate is \$30 monthly for weekly pick-up on Thursdays.
Social Ministry (Donna Th)	WELCA (Donna T)	Worship/Music (Cheri)
The Advent Giving Tree is up, all items will be given to Rainbow House.	It has been decided our monthly meeting will be on the 2nd. Sunday of the month. During fellowship time at about 9:10. 3 Christmas bags have been made and delivered to members who are unable to attend church. A gift basket is being assembled and will be given to a couple that are having health problems. The possibility of a mid-winter potluck dinner for all was discussed. More on that at the next meeting.	Last week, Pastor Brenda played a video of 4 men playing one piano during Communion (<i>The Piano Guys</i>). The music was very lively and put everyone in a happy and spirited mood as they left the church.

Motion to Accept ALL Updates: Cheri

Second: Donna Ten

FAVOR

NEW BUSINESS

- The **2026 Budget** has been officially proposed. It will be voted on and finalized at our Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 25, 2026, following our 10:30a worship service.
- Carla Dutkavich is excited to begin teaching **sign-language**, free of charge, to anyone who is interested. She has agreed to 2 stipulations (applicable to anyone who would want to hold meetings or classes inside St. Stephen's) that must be met before teaching inside the church: 1. A background check 2. If teaching anyone under 18 years old, 2 adults must be present. Look for information about this unique opportunity very soon!



NEXT STEPS

- Next St. Stephen's Council Meeting:** Wednesday, January 21, 2026 at 2:15p
- Devotions for January 21, 2025:** John
- Motion to Adjourn:** Pr Brenda **Time Adjourned:** 3:44p **THE LORD'S PRAYER** was spoken.

Submitted by Donna Tennesen, Secretary



The installation of our new sound and video system is complete! Now, we'll spend time tweaking and learning the system to fulfil the wishes of +Nancy Diehm+ and her family to bring God's Word to God's people...online!



Thank you, dear St. Stephen's, for the generous gift cards given to me by our Council! I already (cheese) have a few ideas (purple fabric) about how the money (plaid fabric) will be put to good use (more cheese)!

Looking forward to welcoming 2026 together!

Sincerely, Pastor Brenda



Northern Great
Lakes Synod
www.nglsynod.org

Bi-Monthly Newsletter - 2026

Important Dates and Information inside!

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church
P.O. Box 435 - Stephenson, MI 49887
Office Phone: (906) 753-4932
E-mail: Soffice@gssslutheran.org

