

NEWS & NOTES FOR DECEMBER 31, 2023

THE WEEK AHEAD

- Monday 1/1:** Offices Closed for New Year's Day
- Weds. 1/3:** 10:30AM Joint Use Taskforce - Conference Room
- Thurs. 1/4:** 6:15PM Bell Choir Rehearsal
7:15PM Voice Choir Rehearsal
- Sat. 1/6:** 6:00PM SHINE Contemporary Worship for Epiphany - Chapel

SHARE THE WARMTH Project

Inspired by Phillip's Wish in the movie *5000 Blankets*, our collection of **GENTLY USED or new blankets, hats, mittens, gloves, scarfs** for the homeless in our community will run thru January 31.

The collection bin in the Narthex/Canterbury Room has overflowed several times and we are almost to our 125-blanket goal!



As of December 14, the following donations had been received:



101 blankets; 99 hats/ear covers; 68 pairs of gloves; 43 neck scarves/mufflers; 72 pairs of socks

Donations have been distributed to:

St. George/St. Mark Food Pantry; Union United Methodist Church homeless program; Belleville Christian Center; Moms on a Mission in Dupo; Violence Prevention Center of Southwestern Illinois

Check your closets to see how many blankets you have that will help keep our homeless a little warmer this winter! A collection can is in the Narthex.

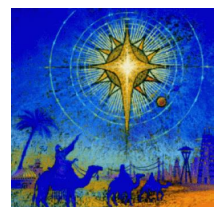
Neighborhood Watch Opportunity for St. Mark & St. George's

The Joint Safety Committee has identified a neighborhood need our churches might be able to help with. St. George's has begun the process of organizing a Neighborhood Watch (NW) program, and they have invited St. Mark to participate. Beyond wanting to be helpful to the neighborhood, we have our own interest in neighborhood safety and health. Organizational leadership, facility support, and hosting quarterly meetings are just a few of the ways our churches could support a NW program. Anyone interested in serving to implement this endeavor, please contact Mark Bearth, mark.bearth@gmail.com.



SHINE Worship Next Saturday

Join us for less-formal worship with guitar accompaniment led by combined musical talents from St. Mark and St. George's next **Saturday, January 6 at 6:00PM** in the chapel! **Let your light SHINE forth on the feast of the Epiphany!**





Diaper Drive for Epiphany!

As the Wise Men brought gifts to the baby Jesus, we will celebrate **Epiphany** with a **Diaper Drive** for little ones in need in our community.

Our Epiphany Diaper Drive will run January 7 through 14. Items collected will be donated to The Pregnancy Care Center of Belleville, Fontabella Maternity Home in O'Fallon, and other local organizations.

Diapers sizes 4 through 7 and pullups sizes 2T and 3T are most needed. Open packages will be accepted. **Unopened packages of diaper wipes and diaper rash cream are also welcome.**

Realizing diapers are expensive, members are encouraged to join together on purchases or provide monetary donations to Sherri Foppe or Ann Martens. Donations may also be made electronically at <https://secure.myvanco.com/L-YT91/campaign/C-14EWR> through January 15th.

St. Mark Offerings for 12/24 (Advent 4): General Fund: **\$3,039.11** (*incl. online offerings received by 12/29*); Food Pantry: \$115; Coffee Fund: \$25; Muller Landscaping Fund: \$101; Fiber Arts: \$101; Grounds/Property Maintenance: \$101; Sunday Morning Coffee/Kitchen: \$48
Christmas Eve Offerings will be reported in the January 7 Mark Times.

A Word to Christmas by Bishop Greg G. Busboom, Central/Southern IL Synod

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all" (Titus 2:11).

Some of you may have heard the story of the parents who overheard their young child praying the Lord's Prayer before she went to bed around this time of year. "Forgive us our Christmases," she prayed, "as we forgive those who *Christmas* against us" (source unknown). How very cute and poignant all at the same time. Indeed, we Christians are not immune from the temptation to let the hustle and bustle of Christmas get in the way of its true meaning...



Christmas — the celebration of the grace of God appearing for all in Jesus — holds the promise to transform how we live our lives. And it holds the promise to transform our churches.

How can we sing "calls you one and calls you all to gain the everlasting hall" and still be more consumed with excluding those we judge to be either "too conservative" or "too liberal" rather than sharing the good news that, in Jesus, the grace of God has indeed appeared to all as the Bible teaches?

How can we sing "peace on earth and mercy mild" and yet be silent in the face of unjust wars and indiscriminate violence?

How can we sing "bless all the dear children in your tender care" and yet ignore the children in our own communities who are suffering from poverty, abuse, and neglect?

How can we sing "cast out our sin, and enter in" and still not see *all* God's children, regardless of the color of their skin or the language they speak, as having been created in God's own image?

Indeed, **"forgive us our Christmases as we forgive those who Christmas against us."**

In light of our constant need for God's forgiveness, the good news of Christmas and always, is that in Jesus, God's grace has appeared to all, including us. After all, it is this grace, not our human effort or will, that transforms us. As we celebrate Christmas this year, may God's grace transform you. May God's grace transform your congregation. And may all the world come to see, in and through how we live our lives, the transforming power of God's grace at work, even today.