Bethlehem Star Lutheran Church Lansing

Pastor Matt December 2020

★

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. ~Psalm 98:3 NIV



What does a "COVID Christmas" look like?

I know that this is a question for all of us. We are about to experience our first Thanksgiving in the time of a pandemic. For MANY of us this will mean NOT spending time in person with loved ones. Honestly, the thought of having to watch football on Thanksgiving without being surrounded by extended family makes me not want to watch. ... but do find a way to be thankful... and reach out to those who many be spending this day alone.

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lansing, Michigan

But that's Thanksgiving, and we will have been given a taste of what a "COVID Christmas" might be like. With infection rates higher than ever, it is unlikely that we would be worshipping in person on Christmas Eve. There will one service on Christmas Eve on Facebook and YouTube at 7pm. It will include candlelight and the singing of "Silent Night", and we encourage everyone to light candles in their homes.

This year when you light your candle of Christmas Eve please pray for the millions of people in this country and around the world who are or have been infected. And pray for all those who have died from the virus. Pray especially for members and friends within the Bethlehem family. We know that all the ends of the earth have seen the spiritual salvation of our God. We wait patiently for physical salvation from this virus, trusting in the science and the best advice from medical professionals as gifts from God to help continue to keep us safe.

Youth

As you likely already know, we will be hosting our Annual Senior Dinner as take out this year. Youth will be involved to bring the meals from the kitchen to your cars.

In another sign that our ministry with young people continues, we have begun planning a **Youth Sunday** for early in 2021. On this Sunday, yet to be scheduled, youth will be in the roles of Assisting Minister, and worship leaders, and... Youth will be in charge that Sunday! Stay tuned...

Worship Changes

As we begin 2021, the Board of Worship life has planned that every third Sunday of the month I will be "off". That Sunday the service will consist of a pastor talking to a camera. This will mean no music, or bulletin on the third Sunday of the month starting January 17, 2021.

A video of Pastor John, Bishop Craig, or one of his Assistants (or another pastor) will be uploaded ahead of time to BELC Worship on Facebook and then at 9:30 AM on Sunday someone, will start a "Watch Party" with the video so everyone can watch it together and comment and have fellowship through technology. As always for those not on Facebook, a link to the service on YouTube will be emailed.

COVID Update

When the pandemic began, BELC's Congregation Council voted to not consider allowing small groups to meet or to have in-person worship until our region is moved to Phase 5 of the MI Safe Start Plan. Considering the recent acceleration of cases, following DHHS guidelines, Council will consider the possibility of small groups meeting when the test positivity rate drops below 5% for 14 consecutive days and the rate of transmission is below 1 for those same days in Clinton, Eaton, and Ingham counties. To follow these numbers, visit covidactnow.org/us/mi/. Council is monitoring these numbers daily, and our pandemic response and Reopening Plan is revisited at every Council meeting.

As this health crisis continues, we give thanks for your patience and understanding. We are working to ensure that worship continues as well as life-sustaining ministries. We are deeply disappointed in not having our church open to our neighbors, friends, and congregants. Yet, we are convinced that Bethlehem's commitment to the health of our communities is saving lives.

In our varied vocations, God has blessed us individually with unique gifts and talents necessary to the work of the kingdom. We treasure and appreciate you all, and we long for the time we can meet again and worship together once again.

May God continue to bless you all and bless our church.

Light of the world, we would put our light under a bushel, except for you. We would let the candles extinguish, except for you. We want your light to shine through us. Amen.



Page 1 December 2020

The Bethlehem Star

A monthly publication of Bethlehem Lutheran Church



Worship in December



549 E. Mt. Hope Ave. Lansing, Michigan 48910 Phone: (517) 482-3225 FAX: (517) 482-2458

Ministers

All of the members of Bethlehem Lutheran Church

Pastor Matthew A. Smith pastormattsmith@gmail.com (517) 881-9890

Pastoral Assistant
Pastor John Burow
pastorjburow@yahoo.com
(517) 614-4559

Church Secretary / Star Editor Tracy Baker bethlehemlansing@gmail.com (517) 482-3225

Parish Administrator Vicki Leighton belcparishadm@gmail.com (517) 482-3225

Congregation President Jim Whitman

Organist James Schippers

Choir Director Sue Nelson

Handbell Choir Director James Schippers

Contemporary Worship Director Laurey Wyble

Office Hours 9:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. (M-F)

Visit our website at: www.bethlutheran.org

Worship Schedule

9:30 - Live Streaming Worship Service On Facebook BELC Worship Group

Assisting Ministers Children's Sermons

Dec. 6 - Nancy Holderread Dec. 6 - Liisa Whitman

Dec. 13 - Susan Mahoney
Dec. 20 - Bob Meeker
Dec. 20 - need someone

Dec. 27 - Don Telles Dec. 27 - need someone

Resources to Nurture Faith and Spirituality

In our June/July newsletter we included a short list of resources you can use to strengthen your faith and spirituality, to deepen your relationship with God, especially in this time of crisis.

- Lutheran Hour Ministries https://www.lhm.org/covid-19/ Daily Devotions, Learning Resources, and even kid's activities.
- Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations https://cac.org/category/daily-meditations/.
- Centering Prayer App from https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/ available on Google Play and the App Store.

As you explore these resources, or engage in your own time of pray, ask yourself, "What is God inviting me to do in this time? What is God inviting Bethlehem to do?" My deepest prayer for all of you is that you will continually find ways to abide in God's love (John 15:9).

Virtual Worship

As a community we are continuing to worship at https://www.facebook.com/groups/ belcworship/. The service is also uploaded to our YouTube channel each week.

Our Website

There is a button on the Home page for prayer requests and there is so much other information on our website. It is a great resource to keep you connected to the community of faith. I also encourage you to <u>text</u> "belcprayer" to 81010 to join our Prayer Corner 2.0.

God's Peace and Love,



Pastor Matt

Statement of Purpose and Guiding Principles for Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

God's purpose for our church, as disciples of Jesus Christ, is to share with all people God's word, love and saving grace. We will pursue this purpose by:

- 1. Being a Christ-centered, joyful community of baptized believers who gather regularly for worship, the Lord's Supper, study and prayer.
- 2. Inviting, accepting, and supporting all people as we build attentive, respectful relationships.
- 3. Taking action and risks with bold faith, acknowledging our imperfection, while trusting in Christ.
- 4. Actively engaging in community outreach near and far.
- 5. Being faithful stewards of our time, talents, possessions and all of God's creation.

Adopted January 29, 2017

Page 2 December 2020

Stewardship



Sharing the blessings we receive from the Lord will surely give us joy!

Make a gift to the Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church Endowment Fund





Dear Friends in Christ,

As we all continue to experience a state of disbelief that we are still dealing with the Coronavirus, it is appropriate to provide an update on the current status for Bethlehem Lutheran Church.

This unexpected journey we are all on together began Sunday, February 16th. That is the date that the State of Michigan and the nation really began a lockdown due to the Coronavirus. Our first concern was that the Lenten season would be interrupted, but that we would be back to normal by Easter Sunday. How could we know that ten months later, we would still be in a state of flux, concerned for each other's health, missing our families and friends, not being able to attend church, postponing birthday parties, weddings, funerals, open houses, trips and vacations, business being disrupted and possibly lost, and the list goes on and on. It is almost too much to fathom how much has been sacrificed during this tumultuous time. The most difficult thing to fathom in all of this is how many lives have been lost and the pain that the world has endured. Naturally, we all have the most concern for how things affect us individually, but there is a much larger picture to consider. All the problems and needs of people that were occurring before the pandemic are still going on, but they are exacerbated by the disruption of a normal world. We as a church have worked to continue the services and mission that we can during this time because the need is still there, but now more than ever. We have continued our Food Bank, holiday food baskets, BELCW making and sending beautiful quilts, supporting the Pine Ridge Reservation, supporting Lansing SAVE for youth, maintaining our Mission Home, our offerings to Bethlehem and the ELCA, supporting our Pastors and staff, and trying to stay close to each other as best we can.

It is not easy and it appears that there is no clear end in sight. The frustration and the unknown make every day a challenge for each of us. But as Pastor Matt always says in his sermon, there is Good News. The Good News is that God is with us and understands our fears, hopes and dreams. If we listen to what He is telling us, we will come out of this hopefully stronger as a church than we were before. But it is up to us; each and every one of us has to make that decision. We must pull together even though we are apart and stay together. Bethlehem will not look the same when the Coronavirus has been finally tamed as it did before. There may be people who have chosen to go to another church because they chose to meet for worship. We have lost people during this time and we were not able to pay our respects to them in the traditional way. We may find that some people will choose to not come back to church right away because they don't think it is safe yet. We may find that some people will choose not to come back to church at all for whatever reason. There is no question that this has changed us as individuals and it will change Bethlehem as well.

So, what does all this mean?

Ever since the pandemic started and we realized that it was a life changing occurrence, Pastor Matt, church leadership and Council began to proactively address the situation to be as prepared as we could with all the information we could gather. It has been an undertaking of incredible time, frustration, uncertainty, focus and most importantly love and concern for this congregation. We have said many times that the church is not the building; it is the people who belong to it. We will survive this because of who we are and what we aspire for this family of believers to be.

(continued on page 4)

Page 3 December 2020

Pastor Matt, church leadership and Council will continue to monitor the ever-changing situation on a daily and weekly basis. We are utilizing the Covid Act Now website that provides us with daily information regarding infection rates and positivity rates supported by the Department of Health and Human Services, the CDC and the Michigan Safe Start Plan. The Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church Re-opening Plan was constructed using all these resources as well as others. Every decision made has been out of consideration for the health and safety of every member of this church. We have used an abundance of caution in the decision process and have acted out of love for you and not fear. Any decisions regarding the future ability for small groups or in-person worship to resume will be based on the infection rate being <1% and the positivity rate being <5% for a period of fourteen days. This is not an arbitrary decision, but one based on science and all the available guidelines. We have also listened to and considered the recommendations of Bishop Satterlee and the ELCA and will continue to stay apprised of those recommendations.

In closing, I must say that these types of messages are something that none of us would ever imagine having to convey. We always focus on our faith, mission work, stewardship, love for our church and each other. The work that has been done behind the scenes to be prepared and keep this congregation safe will never truly be known or understood. Please know that you are the most important consideration in all that we do and that will always remain. The question remains, "When can we come back to church?" There is no "IF". We can and we will when it is safe to do so and that is what I pray you will hold close. We pray for your patience and understanding as we guide this congregation in the way God would want us to.

As the world endures quarantines, closures, and even panic during the coronavirus pandemic, God offers peace. His word can displace anxiety and fear with hope and healing.

Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. ~1 Peter 5:7

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. ~2 Timothy 1:7

May God continue to bless you and Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Jim Whitman
Congregation President

Lord.

I'm asking for protection from COVID-19. Be my shield and place a hedge of protection around me, my family and loved ones. You are always faithful, Lord! Protect me from the evil one, from sickness, and from this deadly coronavirus. Your word says you will strengthen me, help me, and uphold me with your righteous right hand, and I trust in your words. You are my refuge, my place of safety, a fortress of protection around me. I know where my help comes from, and it's from you, Heavenly Father. Your word says not to fear the terror of night, the arrow that flies by day, the pestilence that stalks in the darkness (COVID-19), or the plague that destroys at midday. I don't want to live in fear. I want to live in the freedom that comes from knowing you and being secure in your love. Pour out your comfort and peace during this pandemic and save me from harm, sickness, and death. Give me wisdom on how to stay safe and keep my social distance as much as possible. Thank you, God, for hearing and answering my prayer.

In Jesus Name, Amen.

Page 4 December 2020

Prayer Corner

Please Note: Hospitals do not notify churches when a member has been hospitalized; even if you inform them at registration of your church membership. If you would like a visit from the pastor, please call the church office at 482-3225 or call Pastor Matt directly at 881-9890.

REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS and with your cards and visits:

Shelby Waters in The Willows at Okemos

Rhoda Hunter in Holt Senior Care and Rehab Center

Those at home: Mary Ann Allen, Virginia Bauman, Mary Brenke Marv Cole, Crystal Collins, Ruth Ferguson, Doug Griffin, Ernie Hassell Jim Hicks, Ellie Ibarra, Kurt Kollmeyer, Marilyn Kostrzewski Michael Mahoney, Linda McClellan, Teri Meeker, John Nelson Yvonne Nelson, Tharin Palmer, John Ransom, Gloria Robbins Bob Robbins, Carol Roush, Audrey Skidmore, Don Spencley Cheryl VanPatten, Ron Wescott, Matthew White

If you know of a member you would like us to include on this list or remove from this list, please call the church office.

SEMINARY STUDENT Jason Mills, from BELC, is studying at Gettysburg Theological Seminary. Please keep him in your prayers.

MISSION PARTNERS Pray for the people and ministry at Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and the Baker Neighborhood Partners.



PRAY for those who are on active duty in the United States Military Services:

Chris Browne — U.S. Air Force
Darian Doan — U.S. Army
Andrew Devine — U.S. Nat'l Guard
Carson Kosloski — U.S. Marines
Joshua Kosloski — U.S. Army
Rusty Landry — U.S. Air Nat'l Guard

Christopher Morgan – U.S. Marines Ben Painter – U.S. Air Force Ryan Schiffner – U.S. Air Force Jake Sonnenberg – U.S. Army Eric Wheeler – U.S. Army



Exploring the Gospel of Mark – An Invitation

Beginning in Advent, the Gospel of Mark will mostly provide our Sunday Gospel readings for the next 12 months. In the coming weeks we will slowly move through from what Mark calls, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God." to the abrupt and puzzling ending at Mark 16:8. Pastor John will facilitate our journey, providing some backstory; connections to the rest of Scripture; prompts for reflection and application; various ways of encountering and taking in specific passages, and suggesting images and artworks that may enrich our hearing the living Word of God. Participants are also encouraged to share among themselves.

As with our previous shared explorations of God's Word, the time and energy you invest in this project is up to you.

To participate simply e-mail Pastor John <u>pastorjburow@yahoo.com</u> letting him know that you would like to give this a try. For a delightful 10 minute introduction to Mark's Gospel go to "You Tube" and search for "Overview of Mark – Bible Project."

Our assumption is that God desires to address us in personal and profound ways through his life-giving Word. Our hope is that we might use this opportunity to truly hear God and to draw closer to Jesus. Our start date is December 12th.

Please share this invitation with others in the congregation and beyond.

Blessings, Pastor John

Page 5 December 2020

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church Women



Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America All women of Bethlehem Lutheran Church are members of the Women of the ELCA and are invited and encouraged to participate in all activities listed in the newsletters, bulletins, flyers or on the bulletin boards.



DECEMBER NEWS FROM THE BELCW BOARD

We are pleased to announce we have a volunteer for the Vice President position – Michelle Smith! Thank you Michelle. We now have a full slate.

The Board has continued to meet every month and we miss getting together as a large group with all of you. Due to the pandemic we will not be holding a December General Meeting. However, there is still business that needs to be done at the end of the year (even a year like this). A new budget needs to be approved, new board members need to be elected and any extra money will be donated. The Board has decided to give any extra money we have to Pastor's discretionary fund. We are not expecting it to be very much. All of these items need to be voted on by the general membership. If you are a member of a Circle, and have an email address, you will receive a survey in December to enable you to vote. If you do not have an email and would like to vote, please contact Tosha Brisbo at (517) 648-4293.

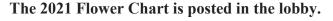
We will have a Zoom Bible Study again this month on December 14 at 6:30pm from our December Gather magazine. Jamie Andrews will be the Leader. Your Circle chair will send out the invitation via email.

As your Board, we are praying you all are safe and healthy, and that 2021 brings a vaccine and healing to our world. Best wishes for a wonderful Christmas and God Bless you all.



ALTAR FLOWERS FOR 2021

Thank you to all who have sponsored Altar Flowers for Bethlehem's Sunday Worship Services.





For those wanting to sponsor Altar Flowers for a special occasion, please contact the church office (call or e-mail) and ask Tracy to assign your name to the selected Sunday. Let her know how you would like your sponsorship noted in the bulletin.

All checks should be made payable to Kris Burow and sent to her home address.

Page 6 December 2020

Community Partners:





• Potter Park is hosting *Wonderland of Lights 2020* from November 21st through December 27th. Open Thursdays through Sundays, from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., stroll around the zoo taking in the holiday light displays while holiday music plays. Goodie bags are available for the kids as you leave. For more information, go to: https://potterparkzoo.org/events.

You can use the zoo passes available at the church to attend Wonderland of Lights.

 November has five Sundays, so we will be making another contribution to the future of our neighborhood (and BELC) kids. Bethlehem has partnered with Lansing SAVE since early 2019 and your generosity continues to affirm and encourage students to strive for a future that holds options for continued education. We support those Lansing School District students who are BELC members or live in the Baker Neighborhood.

For more information about the program go to: https://www.lansingmi.gov/674/Lansing-SAVE

BELC/Building News:

- The custodial position has been re-posted as our congregation is used to the benefits of having an inhouse person doing our cleaning. If you know someone who would be interested in the custodial position, please have them contact the church office or one of the board members. Please, if you see something that needs attention, email Vicki @ belcparishadmin@gmail.com.
- The boiler installation is complete and the heat is working. There remain a few details to work out, some final calibrations and some discussion with a couple of us on site who need an overview on the new unit.
- On November 7th, the board attempted a leaf clean up event. We had two board members able to participate and one non-board member. There was a minor dent made in the work to be done.
- All our COVID related purchases have arrived. Several members of the congregation have been trained in the use of the electrostatic sprayer. A small group policy has been drafted and tweaked. Cleaning and safety protocols have been introduced. These will be updated as necessary.
- As seems to be true of all our activity, the organ purchase has presented some unforeseen challenges. We
 are seeking expert advice on how to move forward. Thank goodness James can play any keyboard
 instrument to enhance the voices of our choir!
- The freezer in the kitchen has breathed its last. A replacement is being sought.

Page 7 December 2020



SENIOR DINNER

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church is pleased to announce that the Annual Senior Dinner "<u>TAKE OUT</u>" will take place on Sunday, December 13, 2020!



This will be a comfort food "take out" meal consisting of:

Beef Pot Roast
Mashed Potatoes with gravy
Glazed carrots
Dinner salad
Dinner roll
Pie

Those Seniors that would like to indulge will need to call the church office to place your "take out" order and indicate how many meals per household. More information regarding the pick-up process to come, but we wanted to let you know that your special day will still take place.

God bless you and take care, 'Chef' Whitman

December
Birthdays

Mary Allen	Dec. 1
Art Alvera	Dec. 1
Terri Lentz	Dec. 2
Jack Midgley	Dec. 6
Sandra Westover	Dec. 7
Rick Wyble	Dec. 9
Kathy Halligan	Dec. 13
Heidi Berry	Dec. 16

Cheryl VanPatten Tom Finn Bob Robbins



Dec. 18 Dec. 22 Dec. 24

Each year our birthday list of members 62 and over is updated from the church records. If for some reason you do not wish to have your name appear in the newsletter or if you see someone we have missed, please call the church office.



CHRISTMAS FOOD BASKET DONATIONS

Please consider giving generously to this year's Christmas baskets going to families in need.

At Christmas we try to give extra food to families with children to help during the school holiday break.

The free meals they currently receive will pause during the scheduled break.

With the pandemic ramping up, we'd like to also add household items of soaps and toilet paper.

But we need extra money to do that.

Please send any donation to the church by December 12.

Thank you!

Page 8 December 2020



Here, you will find a list of the scripture readings that are part of the Daily Lectionary which move us from one Sunday to the next. You can also find these readings on our "Taking Faith Home" sheets we distribute after worship. They are also posted daily on our Facebook page. We encourage you to read your Bible every day as you live out your life of discipleship.

<>< Pastor Matt

DECEMBE	R
----------------	---

<u>01</u>	1	Corinthians	1:3-9

Revelation 22:12-21

Micah 4:1-5

1 Thess. 5:1-11

Psalm 80:1-19

Mark 1:1-8

Isaiah 40:1-11

2 Peters 3:8-15

Malachi 4:1-6

Matthew 3:1-10

11 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Psalm 85:1-13

13 John 1:6-28

Isaiah 61:1-11

15 1 Thess. 5:16-24

Romans 10:14-17

17 1 Thess. 3:6-13

Genesis 18:1-18

Psalm 126

Luke 1:26-38

2 Samuel 7:1-16

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:46-55

Luke 2:1-20

John 3:11-16

Psalm 89:1-26

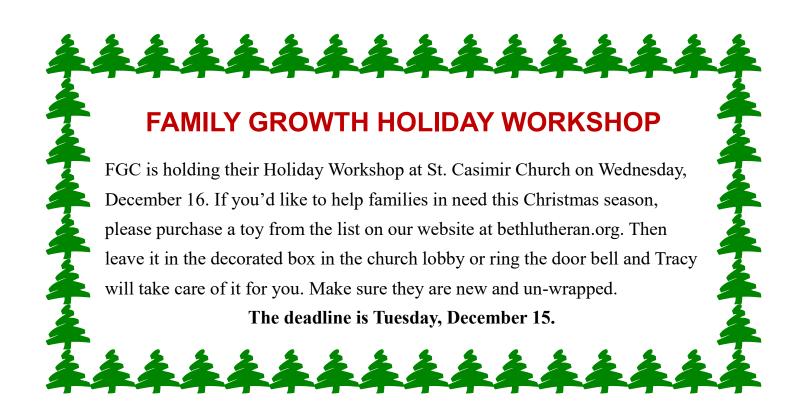
27 Luke 2:22-40

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Galatians 4:4-7

Jude 1-2

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13



Page 9 December 2020

Reflections, From Vicki Leighton

The pandemic has us all in a bad place...at least it feels bad to me. I am lonely. I feel isolated, frustrated, boxed in, and ready to explode all of the time. (knowing yourself is so important) I am also in the enviable position of trying to balance everybody and everything in my life. This includes being concerned and frustrated for everyone in this congregation whose 'needs' are not being met. In all of my frustration and 'wonderings', God put this into my head.

Remember 'Alice in Wonderland''? There was a chapter titled, "The Queen's Croquet Ground". Unlike any other croquet ground, this one was bumpy and full of furrows. The game was played with flamingoes as mallets, hedgehogs as balls, and the 'card soldiers' as the hoops. So, Alice would tuck the flamingo under her arm and get the neck straight, when the flamingo would turn and look at her quizzically. Then, the hedgehog ball would decide to wander off. If that wasn't enough, periodically the hoops would leave. All in all, a frustrating and patience-stretching game.

THIS IS COVID. Church leadership, like everyone, was caught completely off-guard when the pandemic presented itself. We thought it would pass. It did not. We thought we could produce worship like worship looks. Thanks to the dedication of our pastor and his 'mad technology skills', we have worship with music, assisting ministers, announcements, the 'WORD', and 'communion' when possible.

So why are we sad?? Because a huge part of our identity is in relationship, and relationship is hard to maintain when you can't touch, see, feel another person's presence.

But isn't this reflective of our relationship with God? We can't touch or see God, but we feel his presence and we know he is there. So in this time, let's try to have a similar relationship with our loved ones. We can't touch....we can only see via technology...we can only **feel** the love and presence of our beloved. But it is real. It is strong. It is our refuge in times of trouble. And it is bigger than COVID, or troubles, or pain, or loneliness or...



My prayer is that you stay strong, rely on God, ask for help when you need it...give help when you can. This church is an anchor for me. I hope it is for you as well.

Much love, Vicki

p.s. my phone number is 517-202-2233. Call me if you want to. Call me if you need to.

THANK YOU!

On behalf of the Board of Outreach and more importantly, the 44 families who will be having a Thanksgiving meal this year,

I want to thank you for your generosity. I wish I could bottle the gratitude that is expressed when we pass out this food and share it all with you.

Liisa Whitman

Page 10 December 2020

Bethlehem Star Lutheran Church Lansing

NON-PROFIT ORG. U.S. POSTAGE PAID Lansing, Michigan Permit No. 110

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED









Newsletter Deadline is **December 15** for the **January 2021** Bethlehem Star.

Also available at www.bethlutheran.org

In-Home Date: December 1, 2020 Mailed on November 25, 2020



UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN, WHO IS "CHRIST THE LORD"