

Dear People of Bethlehem,

What a year this has been! 2020 has been unlike anything in recent memory and has presented, not only our congregation, but the entire world, with so many challenges to be overcome. It has been a year of great loss and mourning. A year where much that was looked forward to with eager anticipation, ended up not being able to happen, or else looked incredibly different than what we had envisioned. It has been a year of reevaluation of priorities, as well as sacrifice; difficult decisions done out of love for our neighbor and a commitment to the common good. But in the midst of all of that, it has also been a year of surprising grace, unexpected moments of joy, and a lesson in the strength and resiliency of the human spirit.

Despite the narratives of scarcity around us, stories that would leave us fearful and worried about there not being enough, God's abundance has shown up in unique and wonderful ways. Especially here at Bethlehem. Which is why the theme for this year's stewardship focus is "*Discovering Abundance in a Time of Scarcity.*"

First and foremost, we want to say thank you. Thank you for the ways that you have continually, graciously, and joyfully supported the work of this congregation. Through your financial support, the countless volunteer hours you have shared, and the time and energy you have given participating in this community in brand new ways, you have helped Bethlehem live into new and exciting expressions of what it means to be the church. We are so grateful for you!

As we look forward to next year, we need your help to plan as best we can. Knowing what your planned contributions are for 2021 helps us to create a budget that faithfully and honestly facilitates the work of this congregation.

Now, more than ever, we need to understand the importance of being a *community* of faith. Just as we wear our masks, not always for our own safety, but for the safety of our neighbor, whether we know them personally or not, we must support one another as the people of Bethlehem. This has been a difficult year, and as we ask God to guide our giving, we know that some of you may not be able to increase your pledge from last year, or may even need to decrease your planned gifts. If that is the case, please know that we fully understand, and if we can be of any assistance to you or your family please reach out and let us know. For others, this may not be the case. If you are in a position to increase your support for our congregation, if you have the ability to step forward so as to allow others to step back, we ask that you prayerfully consider that option as you fill out this year's pledge card.

Given our new worship practices, our usual Commitment Sunday will not be possible. However, if you are attending our in-person worship service on either October 4th or 11th, we ask that you bring your completed pledge cards with you and place them in the baskets provided. If not, please feel free to return them by mail. We also have an electronic way of responding with your pledge through a Survey Monkey link that was emailed to you through our newsletter mailing list. Rest assured these responses will be safe and confidential.

Like everything else, our return to “normal” is filled with uncertainties, but there are three certainties you can count on: God’s Spirit will carry us into this new “normal.” With support from you and people like you, Bethlehem will continue to be the church together in service to the world. And finally, and most importantly, God’s love, grace, and mercy will find you, wherever you may be. For never before have the words of the Apostle Paul been so true and so needed –

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Blessings to you and your family, and thank you for your support of the work of this Congregation.

In Christ,
The Bethlehem Lutheran Church Council
Pastor Sam and Pastor Laura