



VOICE OF GRACE

Vol. 56 December 2025

Every Heart Prepare

“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:7

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.*

Where do I put the Christmas tree?

A Christmas tree was the last thing on my mind when I first set up the furniture. But now, three months later, it is at the forefront. It's hard to believe how quickly time has passed. Christmas seemed a long way off back in September. Everything was new, and time seemed to be moving slowly. Not so anymore. Our advent preparations of evergreens, lights, and nativity scenes are upon us.

Why didn't I prepare for this? Christmas is my favorite season. The Christmas tree is my favorite decoration. The warmth and glow of the tree brings a gentle light to the otherwise darker month of December, but now... I have no room. Why didn't I prepare?

Our theme this Advent and Christmas season is that of preparation: Every Heart Prepare. Throughout our series, we will draw upon common Christmas decorations and how they each help us prepare for our Christmas celebrations. All these things draw us to Handel's triumphant carol, *Joy to the World*, which reads (or rather sings):

(LSB 387)

This triumphant verse exclaims the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ who comes as King and Savior to His people. What a joyful proclamation! What a wonderful message! What joy to the world!

Yet within this triumphant declaration is a task: prepare Him room!

Christmas is only a few weeks away, but there is so much more to do than time allows. Decorations need to go up, presents need to be wrapped, and obligations to family and friends need to be fulfilled as the deadline of December 25 fast approaches. Christmas parties are coming swiftly - and behind them, a stampede of family visits that never end! Then, just when Christmas comes to a close, New Years hammers its fist at the door!

We anticipate and look forward to the joyful celebration of Christ's birth; and yet, by the time Christmas arrives, we are, perhaps, weary of all the goings on and begging for one breath of relief. We

Continued on next page.

have no more room for another celebration, another feast, another gathering. Yet when Christ returns, a call will go up, and we will be called to make Him room. So, are you ready? Do you have room in your heart for Christ?

Well... that's what we're going to talk about this Advent and Christmas season. We're going to focus on what it truly means to have every heart prepare! But, don't worry! Preparing Christ room doesn't mean you have to have your whole life together in a neat and ordered schedule.

The city of Bethlehem (or at least their innkeepers) weren't prepared for Christ's arrival. There was no room for Him in the inn. But think also of Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah, or even the shepherds out in the field. Were they truly prepared for what Christmas would bring to this world?

While all these people stepped forward when God called upon them, they still had a lot of heart work to do. The angel's constant word, "do not fear" reveals that each of these people trembled when God called upon them to receive His Son. Mary had to physically make room for the birth of her Son. Joseph had to make room in his life for the adoption of a Son who was his Lord. Zechariah and Elizabeth were called to prepare Christ room through their son John who would then prepare the way. The Shepherds were simply working when the angel's song rang out, "I bring you glad tidings of great joy." (Luke 2:10)

Every heart is called to prepare Him room. Sometimes we'll have everything in place; more often, we'll be scrambling for space. It can be so easy to become distracted and filled with other things. In the moments that Christ calls, we have the opportunity to lay down our busy schedules and let the Lord fill our hearts. Through prayer, fasting, and reception of the Word and Sacraments, we actively practice and prepare our hearts to receive Him now. So, as you put up your decorations and reflect on those wonderful ornaments and strings of lights, in those quiet moments, prepare your heart, for Jesus is on the way!

Blessings in Christ,
Pastor Steve



Coming this way! **EVERY HEART PREPARE**

Daily devotions for Advent for each family will be handed out at the end of November. We will have special noon services on **Wednesdays (12 PM, Dec. 3, 10, 17)** and a special sermon series on Sundays to help prepare our hearts for the current and ultimate advent/arrival of our Lord. What an awesome sight that will be when the whole family of God is gathered not around a manger in a stable, but around a risen Lamb who was slain but reigns from the grand throne of the new heavens and the new earth! Topics for the week:

Week of November 30

Christmas Trees and Evergreens

Week of December 7

Christmas Lights

Week of December 14

Nativity Scenes and Creches

Week of December 21

Christmas Bells and Christmas music

Christmas Eve

Wrapped Presents



Advent Brown Bag Lunch Gatherings
Wednesday, Dec. 3, 10 and 17
12:30 PM in Trinity Hall

Share in the Christmas spirit by joining us in Trinity Hall immediately following the mid-day noon advent service. Bring your brown bag lunch. Special desserts, coffee, and hot chocolate will be provided. Our time together makes for a lovely addition to the hearing of the Christmas gospel in worship. Hosted by the Sunshine Club.



ANNUAL CHRISTMAS TOY DRIVE

It's that time of year again!! Grace will be partnering with Heartland for Children (a community-based care agency contracted with the Department of Children and Families to serve Polk, Highlands, and Hardee counties) this Christmas to collect toys for foster children in our community. Please take a tag off the Christmas tree in the narthex. All UNWRAPPED gifts should be returned by **Friday, December 12**. This is a great way to celebrate the birth of Jesus and show His love to children in need. Thank you for your generosity!



Senior Orphans

If you have a heart for seniors living on a fixed income, we have a great way for you to get involved. Senior Orphans is a ministry that collects specifically needed items and distributes those items to seniors in need. Please take a yellow bag that will be handed out in the narthex on **December 13-14, and December 20-21**. There will be a list of needed items inside each yellow bag.

Voice of Grace is published monthly by Grace Lutheran Church
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www.glvh.org

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Grace Lutheran Church

2025 Schedule of Holiday Services

Advent

December 3, Wednesday	12 PM Midweek Advent 1 Worship 6:30 PM Pre-School Christmas Program
December 10, Wednesday	12 PM Midweek Advent 2 Worship 6:30 PM K-2 Christmas Program
December 17, Wednesday	12 PM Midweek Advent 3 Worship 6:30 PM 3-5 Christmas Program
December 20	5:00 PM – Evening Worship*
December 21, 4 th Sunday of Advent*	8:30 AM – Morning Worship* 10:45 AM – Morning Worship *

Christmas

December 24 - Christmas Eve	4 PM Family Worship 6:30 PM Pre-Worship Music 7:00 PM Christmas Eve Worship 10:30 PM Pre-Worship Music 11 PM Christmas Eve w/Communion*
December 25 – Christmas Day	10:00 AM Christmas Day Worship*
December 27 (Sat.)	5:00 PM – Evening Worship*
December 28 (Sun.)	8:30 AM – Morning Worship* 10:45 AM – Morning Worship *

New Years

December 31, Wednesday	6:30 PM New Year's Eve Worship
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No Tuesday Prayer Service on December 23 or December 30

***Indicates Communion**



MUSIC



LSB 387 Joy to the World

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n and nature sing,
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.</p> <p>2 Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.</p> | <p>3 No more let sins and sorrows grow
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.</p> <p>4 He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders of His love.</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Text by Isaac Watts, 1674–1748; based on Psalm 98

This hymn is beloved by many people, both those who regularly attend church and those who never have set foot in a church. While most people associate this hymn with Christmas (since that is when the Messiah did come to the earth as a baby born in Bethlehem – First Coming of Christ – see the first lines of the hymn), it really is a versification of Psalm 98 that looks toward the Second Coming of Christ. A versification of a text is when you take, as in this example, the text of Psalm 98 and write it in a form that can be sung (rhyming words like grow and flow or King and sing). The psalm commands us - just as this hymn does - to “make a joyful noise to the Lord.” The Church has done this throughout the centuries since Christ walked upon this earth through music and spoken responses (e.g., Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!).

As we enter into this season of preparation, the season of Advent, we, too, must prepare our hearts to receive Him who comes to us. Indeed, we do this every Lord's Day when we confess our sins and receive forgiveness in the bread and wine, the body and blood of the Lord's Supper. Let us continue to make a joyful noise and prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, both in our celebration of Christmas (the First Coming) and also the Second Coming on the Last Day!

Thomas Schulteis
Dir. of Worship Arts (Organist)





Candy Cane Cinema

CHRISTMAS MOVIE, SNACKS,
AND COOKIE DECORATING

DECEMBER 14
4-6 PM

Trinity Hall
327 Ave C SE
Winter Haven, FL 33880



Families in the Park
Sunday, December 14

Trinity Hall

4 - 6 PM

Candy Cane Cinema





Grace Lutheran Church Sunshine Club News



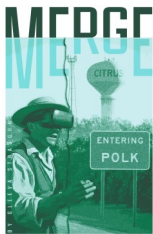
December 4, 2025 – It's a Holly Jolly Sunshine Club gathering! Grace School Music performance, Christmas Cookies, and pot luck. Ham is provided so please bring a side dish to share. Arrival begins at 11:00 AM in Trinity Hall. Bring a friend! A thank offering will be collected.



December 12, 2025 - Sunshine Club members are invited to help decorate gingerbread houses with our 2nd grade school students on Friday, December 12, from 1:30-3 PM in Trinity Hall. Thank you so much for your generous thank offering at November's gathering. Because of you, the students are able to have this special event.



January 8, 2026 (2nd week) - Kick off the New Year with the Sunshine Club. Bring your favorite pot luck dish to share (fried chicken provided), and we'll provide a very special surprise dessert to celebrate the New Year and YOU! We look forward to seeing you in the new year! Join us in Trinity Hall. Arrival begins at 11 AM...11:30. Devotions and announcements...Lunch Noon... Program 12:30 PM. A thank offering will be collected.



Artist Gleeva Straughn will join us and share her most recent collection. MERGE is an exhibition that imagines what it would be like if Polk County's founders could see the thriving community of today. Gleeva creates collages using only recycled paper clippings from local publications, with no paint involved. The pieces are meant to spark a dialogue between the past and the present. We hope you'll experience her art with us.



SAVE THE DATE—WED. JAN. 28, 2026 - 8:30 - 11:30 AM

National Lutheran Schools Week Grandparents'/Grandfriends Day – We need volunteers to serve snacks in Trinity Hall and serve as Grandfriends. Contact Tammi Straughn, 863-660-2617 for more information. Thank you.

One of the most active groups (1961- present) in our church community, Sunshine Club focuses on individuals and couples, providing social interaction, support, and spiritual growth. Join us the first Thursday of the month for food and fellowship. Everyone is welcome.



ADULT GAME DAY

1 - 3 PM

December 18 - Mary-Martha Room





Thank you, thank you for the overwhelming response to our shoes and socks collection during October and November for The Mission. We made periodic trips to deliver these so people needing them could have them during our recent weather changes.

Another big thank you for the wonderful response to our annual Thanksgiving Pie Sale. Again you prove what a generous and supportive congregation you are. As always, all proceeds from this event go to supporting our various mission projects and the seminary student we support.

Mark your calendars for the annual book reviews each Tuesday beginning January 6, 2026. Again, our women's ministry ladies will be preparing the lunch each week. We look forward to seeing you there and invite your friends and neighbors to join us. Ladies, please mark your calendars for the Martha Circle meetings the second Thursday of each month at 1:00 PM. We enjoy a time of Bible Study, discussion, and fellowship. Also, remember our quilting group meets every Thursday morning and always needs more hands for the many tasks involved with that effort.

Grace Bytes Second Tuesday each Month at 5:30 PM

If you are interested in learning about the Bible and Lutheran theology, please join us for Grace Bytes on the second Tuesday of each month starting in the sanctuary for a short time of prayer at 5:30 PM. We will then go to the Mary-Martha room for pizza, learning, and discussion led by Pastor Reich. Bring a friend, your questions, and join us!

Tuesday, December 9 - 5:30 PM - Meet in the Sanctuary

December's Topic: **Virgin Birth or Immaculate Conception?** Led by Pastor Charles Reich

If you have any questions, please call the church office and speak to Michelle at 863.293.8447, or email mreddick@glwh.org. Looking forward to seeing you there.

Discover Grace Class

If you are interested in becoming a member at Grace Lutheran Church, or if you would simply like to learn more about what we believe about the Bible and Lutheran theology, please join us for our upcoming Discover Grace Class, **Saturday, January 24, 9 AM – 3 PM**. This informal class is pastor-led and will include time for questions and answers. Lunch will be provided. It is the perfect time to get to know others who are learning about Grace also.

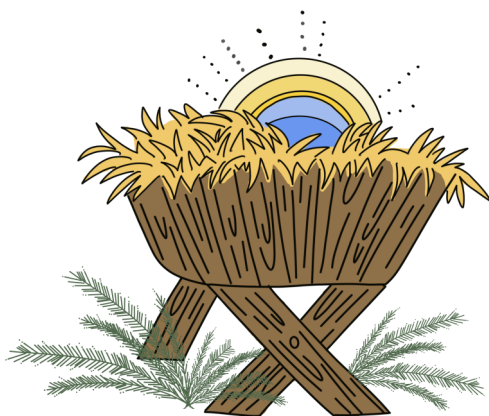
Please RSVP to Michelle Reddick at the church office 863.293.8447, or mreddick@glwh.org. We look forward to seeing you there.

**Treasurer's Report for Grace Lutheran
Income Statement Compared to Budget
For the Four Months Ending October 31, 2025**

	Current Month Actual	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Budget	Variance
<u>Church</u>				
Income	\$ 107,392.02	\$ 482,570.14	\$ 498,866.64	\$ (16,296.50)
Expenses	\$ 132,753.08	\$ 462,600.30	\$ 498,120.13	\$ (35,519.83)
Total Net Income (Loss) Church	\$ (25,361.06)	\$ 19,969.84	\$ 746.51	\$ 19,223.33

<u>School</u>				
Income	\$ 251,853.74	\$ 1,378,977.07	\$ 1,142,937.68	\$ 236,039.39
Expenses	\$ 469,935.35	\$ 1,682,471.45	\$ 1,632,108.79	\$ 50,362.66
Designated (In/Out Accounts)	\$ 25,564.14	\$ (1,045.68)		
Total Net Income (Loss) School	\$ (243,645.75)	\$ (302,448.70)		

<u>Investment Assets</u>	
Church Endowment Fund	\$ 776,463.36
School Endowment Fund	\$ 483,805.50
Bernthal Endowment Scholarship Fund	\$ 151,316.92
All Other Scholarships/Investments	\$ 23,791.34



Parish Statistics

Baptism

Brian Leeh Wortman - 11/29/2025

Deaths

Jeanette Elizabeth Thompson - 10/8/2025

Dr. Alan Sizemore - 10/18/2025

Bob Ference - 11/10/2025



Preschool and Elementary

The past month has been filled with many fun and exciting activities here at GLS! Our families and community members truly enjoyed our annual Fall Fest. A special thank you goes out to P.A.C.E. for their hard work, dedication, and commitment to making this event such a wonderful success.



In the classroom, our students have been learning about the Reformation and the incredible influence Martin Luther had on the church. It has been inspiring to see our students connect history with their faith and gain a deeper understanding of God's word and grace. We are so thankful for the continued support of our GLS families and church community as we grow together in faith, learning, and fellowship!

Middle School

November has been an exciting and productive month in Middle School! Our annual Poinsettia Sale was a great success, bringing in over \$7,000 in profit to support middle school programs and events. Basketball season is underway, and our teams are working hard as they prepare for a strong season of growth and school pride. Sixth graders enjoyed a fun and meaningful field trip to Lake Aurora, and we proudly recognized our Student Council Students of the Month—Aliyah (6th), Bailey (7th), and Tytan (8th)—for their leadership and positive impact. As we approach Thanksgiving break, our eighth graders are preparing for their service project at One More Child, where they will support children and families in need. Middle School continues to shine with learning, service, and Lion pride!

Athletics

Soccer Season Ends with 2nd Place Finish in the State tournament

- The varsity soccer team finished their season as the second-best Lutheran school in all of Florida.
- They won their semifinal match against St. Michael Ft. Myers before losing a close 4-3 game in the finals to St. Luke's Oviedo
- A special congratulations to Bradley for being named to the All-Tournament team for his excellent work as a goalie.
- New bleachers will be installed in the gym over Thanksgiving Break.
- The basketball season is officially underway.
- The first basketball home games will be in December.

Curriculum Corner

Our Fall Book Fair wrapped up the beginning of November, and we're thrilled to share that new books will be arriving in December! We're so excited and grateful to offer our Grace students fresh, engaging titles to explore and enjoy. If you're interested in donating to the library or learning about volunteer opportunities, please contact ipalomaki@glwh.org. A heartfelt thank-you to our school and church community for your continued support of our students and programs here at Grace Lutheran!



Artists of the Month

- Lola - 1st grade
- Blakely - 3rd grade
- Olivia - 4th grade

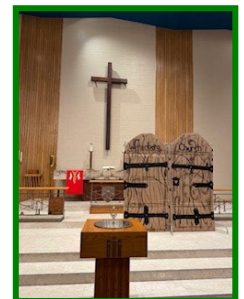
SCHOOL CALENDAR

December

- 1: School Resumes After Thanksgiving Break
- 3: Uniform Sales 7:30AM - 4:00PM
Preschool Christmas Program 6:30PM
- 4: \$2 N.U.T. Day (Grades K - 5)
- 6: Grace Invite Basketball Tournament
- 10: Grades K - 2 Christmas Program 6:30PM
- 12: Middle School Sneaker Ball
- 17: Uniform Sales 7:30AM - 4:00PM
P.A.C.E. Coffee Talk 8:15AM
Grades 3 - 5 Christmas Program 6:30PM
- 19: End of 2nd Quarter
Early Release
N.U.T. Day (Grades K - 5)
Spirit Day (Cain's Snowballs)
- 22 - Jan. 6: Christmas Break - No School

January.....

- 7: School Resumes
Beginning of 3rd Quarter
- 13: \$2 N.U.T. Day (Grades K - 5)
- 14: Uniform Sales 7:30AM - 4:00PM
Middle School Youth Group 6:30 - 8:00PM
- 15: Class Pictures
- 19: No School - MLK Jr. Day
- 21: P.A.C.E. Coffee Talk 8:15AM
- 26 - 30: National Lutheran Schools Week**
Scholastic Book Fair
- 28: Grandparents' Day
Early Release
Spirit Day (Cain's Snowballs)
Middle School Youth Group 7:30AM - 4:00PM



THE MISSION STATEMENT OF GLS: *The mission of Grace Lutheran School is to provide its students and their families with a strong spiritual and academic foundation so that they know and understand God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ and are also able to live lives appropriate to their positions in their families, churches, community, and country.*



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 7:30 AM Staff Devos 6:30 PM Elder Meeting	2 10 AM Bible Study 10:30 AM Church Staff 12 PM God's Guys 5:30 PM Prayer Service of Healing 7 PM Praise Rehearsal	3 12 PM Advent Worship 1 PM Advent Lunch 1 PM WM Bd. Mtg.	4 9:30 AM LWR Quilters 11 AM Sunshine Club 5:30 PM Trinity Bells 6 PM AHG & TL 6:30 PM Grace Chorale	5 10 AM Bible Study - MM	6 5 PM Worship Svc 6 PM Christmas Dinner
2nd Sunday in 7 Advent 8:30 AM Worship 9:45 AM Bible Study & Sunday School 9:45 AM Confirmation 10:45 AM Worship	8 7:30 AM Staff Devos 9 AM Circuit Pastors Meeting	9 10 AM Bible Study 10:30 AM Church Staff 5:30 PM Grace Bytes 7 PM Praise Rehearsal	10 12 PM Advent Worship 1 PM Advent Lunch	11 9:30 AM LWR Quilters 1 PM Martha Circle 5:30 PM Trinity Bells 6:30 PM Grace Chorale	12 10 AM Bible Study - MM	13 5 PM Worship Svc
3rd Sunday in 14 Advent 8:30 AM Worship 9:45 AM Bible Study & Sunday School 9:45 AM Confirmation 10:45 AM Worship 4PM Candy Cane Cinema	15 7:30 AM Staff Devos 6 PM School Board	16 10 AM Bible Study 10:30 AM Church Staff 12 PM God's Guys 5:30 PM Prayer Svc. 7 PM Praise Rehearsal	17 8:15 AM PACE Coffee Talk - Trinity Hall 12 PM Advent Worship 1 PM Advent Lunch	18 9:30 AM LWR Quilters 1 PM Adult Game Day 5:30 PM Trinity Bells 6 PM AHG & TL 6:30 PM Grace Chorale	19 10 AM Bible Study - MM	20 5 PM Worship Svc
4th Sunday in 21 Advent 8:30 AM Worship 9:45 AM Voters' Mtg 9:45 AM Confirmation 10:45 AM Worship	22	23 10 AM Bible Study 10:30 AM Church Staff 7 PM Praise Rehearsal	Christmas Eve 24 4 PM Christmas Eve Family Worship 6:30 PM Pre-Worship Music 7 PM Christmas Eve Worship 10:30 PM Pre-Worship Music 11 PM Christmas Eve Worship	Christmas Day 25 10 AM Christmas Worship	26 10 AM Bible Study - MM	27 5 PM Worship Svc
28 8:30 AM Worship 9:45 AM Bible Study & Sunday School 9:45 AM Confirmation 10:45 AM Worship	29	30 10 AM Bible Study 10:30 AM Church Staff 7 PM Praise Rehearsal	31 6:30 PM New Year's Eve Worship			



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