



Monthly Newsletter

ANCHORED IN CHRIST
through every season

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS TOGETHER

APRIL 2026

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YES, YOU WERE THERE

PETER'S DENIAL, OUR SIN, AND THE MERCY OF THE RISEN CHRIST

On the night our Lord was betrayed, Peter was absolutely certain of himself. Jesus had just told His disciples that they would fall away because of Him. Peter could not imagine such a thing. With bold confidence he replied:

“Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”—Matthew 26:33

Peter loved Jesus. He believed his faith was strong. He believed his devotion would never fail. But Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself.

“Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” —Matthew 26:34

Peter could not believe it. And yet, only hours later, standing in the courtyard while Jesus was being tried, the impossible happened. A servant girl recognized him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” Peter quickly replied, “I do not know what you mean.” Soon another voice spoke up and said, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” Again Peter denied it, this time with an oath: “I do not know the man.” Finally others gathered around him and said, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” Then Peter began to curse and swear: “I do not know the man!” —Matthew 26:74
And immediately the rooster crowed.

Luke records something haunting about this moment: “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.” —Luke 22:61

Imagine that moment. Across the courtyard stands Jesus—beaten, mocked, and abandoned. Peter looks up. Their eyes meet. And Peter remembers the words of Jesus. Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. Scripture simply says: “He went out and wept bitterly.”—Matthew 26:75

The Courtyard of Our Own Lives

Peter's denial is painful to read because we know what it must have felt like. The shame. The guilt. The realization of what he had done. Peter did not merely make a mistake. He denied the Lord who loved him.

But the uncomfortable truth is this: Peter's denial is not just Peter's story. It is our story as well. We too betray our Lord in countless ways. We deny Him when we treat the Divine Service as optional. We deny Him when we gossip about our neighbor. We deny Him when we lie to protect ourselves or bend the truth to get ahead. We deny Him when we cheat, act dishonestly, or pursue what we know is sinful. We deny Him when we fill our eyes and minds with things online that we would be ashamed if Christ Himself appeared before us to see us looking at it. We deny Him when we remain silent about our faith because we fear what others might think. Each of these moments is its own kind of courtyard. Each echoes Peter's words: “I do not know the man.”



Were You There?

The hymn “Were You There” (LSB 456) asks a haunting question: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” Many Christians sing those words as though they were merely observers of the crucifixion. But the truth is far more sobering. Yes. We were there. We were there in the betrayal of Judas. We were there in the cowardice of the disciples. We were there in Peter’s denial. And we were there in the crowd crying out for His death. Our sin helped drive the nails. Our rebellion placed the crown of thorns upon His head. Our guilt carried the cross to Golgotha. The hymn captures the weight of that truth when it says: “Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.” And it should. For when we see our sin honestly, we begin to understand the terrible cost of our salvation.

Yet the Story Does Not End With Peter’s Tears

If the Gospel ended in the courtyard, Peter would have been lost forever. But the story does not end there. On Easter morning, Christ rose from the dead. And sometime later, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the risen Lord went looking for Peter. Three times Jesus asked him: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”—John 21:15–17

Three denials. Three restorations. The same Peter who denied Jesus became the Peter who would later preach Christ boldly before rulers and authorities. Why? Because Peter’s salvation did not depend on the strength of Peter’s faith. It depended on the mercy of Christ. The same is true for us.

Yes, You Were There—But So Was Christ. Yes, we were there when Christ was crucified. Yes, we were there in Peter’s denial. But the Gospel gives an even greater truth. Through Holy Baptism, God united us to Christ’s death and resurrection.

As St. Paul writes: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead... we too might walk in newness of life.”—Romans 6:4

In Baptism, the risen Christ claims sinners. He claims people like Peter. And He claims people like us. We who betrayed Him are forgiven. We who denied Him are restored. We who deserve judgment are given eternal life.

The Risen Lord Still Looks at Us

Peter never forgot the moment when Jesus looked at him. But that look was not only one of sorrow. It was also a look of mercy. For the same Lord who saw Peter’s denial also saw Peter’s future forgiveness. And the risen Christ still looks upon His Church today. He sees our weakness. He sees our failures. He sees every moment we deny Him. Yet He still speaks the same word He spoke to the disciples on Easter evening: “Peace be with you.”—John 20:19. Peace won by the cross. Peace proclaimed by the empty tomb. Peace given to sinners who cannot save themselves.

Yes, You Were There

Yes, you were there when Christ was crucified.

Yes, you were there in Peter’s denial.

But by God’s grace, you will also be there when the risen Christ calls His people home.

For the One whom we betrayed is the same One who died and rose again to save us.

And that is the mercy of Easter.

Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

In the Peace of our Crucified and Risen Lord, Pastor Ben Hollingsead

HE IS RISEN!

We invite you to
ST. JOHN'S
LUTHERAN CHURCH LCMS

MAUNDY THURSDAY Thursday, April 2 at 6:00PM

GOOD FRIDAY Friday, April 3 at 1:00PM

TENEBRAE Friday, April 3 at 7:30PM

EASTER SUNDAY Sunday, April 5 at 7:00AM & 9:00AM

Mark Your Calendar



All are invited to the
ST. JOHN'S

Spring Luncheon

*Meatballs, Breadsticks,
Salads & Desserts*

THURSDAY
APRIL 16TH

11AM - 1PM

\$12 per person

ST. JOHN'S SPRING LUNCHEON – EVERYONE WELCOME!

We warmly invite everyone in our congregation and members of the community to join us for the St. John's Spring Luncheon.

To help make this event a success, please sign up in the Narthex to bring salads and bars to share or to help the day of the event. The money raised from the luncheon will go toward purchasing additional silverware for church meals and helping with the cost of the new furnace and A/C unit at the parsonage.

Events like this are always special because they bring people together in fellowship. They also remind us that it truly takes all of us working together. The planning committee can organize the day, but it's the participation of the whole congregation through food, time, and helping hands that makes the event welcoming and memorable.

If you are able, please consider signing up and contributing a dish. Every little bit helps, and when everyone pitches in, the work becomes lighter and the joy of the day grows. Thank you in advance for your support and for helping make this a wonderful event for our church and community.



Celebrating 100 years together

UPCOMING EVENTS



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SLIDESHOW

As we continue preparing for our upcoming Centennial Celebration, the planning committee is excited about the many ways we will remember and celebrate the life of our church over the past 100 years. One project we hope to include is a picture slideshow featuring photos and memories from throughout the decades.

To make this possible, we are looking for a volunteer (or a small team) who would be willing to gather photos and create a slideshow to share during the celebration. If you enjoy organizing pictures, storytelling through images, or working with presentation software, this could be a wonderful way to contribute.

The Centennial Committee has been working hard behind the scenes, but we also recognize that a celebration like this is truly a congregational effort. Simply put, the committee can't do everything on its own. We need members of our church family to help bring different pieces of the day together.

When everyone contributes their gifts and time, even in small ways, the work becomes lighter and the celebration becomes richer. Together, we are stronger and together we can make this Centennial Celebration a meaningful and joyful event for our whole church and community.

If you would be willing to help with the slideshow or would like more information, please contact Debbie or Joy for photo albums and Greta for digital photos.



INVITES COMING SOON

The Centennial Committee is designing a special invite that members can send to family members or friends that have members in the past to join in the celebration. Look for invites in mid April. They will be available on the table under the bulletin board in the Narthex.



CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION: SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13

Don't forget to mark your calendars. Continue to watch for more details.



ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

YOUTH NEWS



FAMILY DAY AT AITKIN LANES

Thank you to everyone who joined us at Aitkin Lanes for an afternoon of bowling and spending time together. It was nice to see so many families connecting, sharing a few laughs, and enjoying the day. We're grateful for everyone who came and helped make it a meaningful time for our St. John's community.



SAVE THE DATE: Meal Packing on April 25 at 10:00 am in Nisswa. Watch for more information coming soon.



VBS GOES ON AN IRISH ADVENTURE

Grab your shepherd's crook and join the fun! Our Irish-themed VBS kicks off July 27th through July 31st and you're invited. From 9:00 am to 12:00 pm daily we'll explore the green pastures of Psalm 23. Come discover the heart of the Good Shepherd and the lesson David lived by, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

Register at www.stjohnaitkin.org today! All lads and lassies age 4 through 6th grade are invited on our Emerald Crossing Adventure through Psalm 23. See you there!



ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH YOUTH NEWS



CONFIRMATION SUNDAY & QUESTIONING NIGHT

Come celebrate with us on Sunday, May 3, as Parker Espeseth, James Flerlage (not pictured), Paityn Hawkins, Finn Nelson, Henry Nicko, Evy Olson, and Isabel Spicer publicly profess their faith in Jesus as their Savior and are confirmed. The worship service will begin at 9:00 am. We also invite you to join us for **Questioning Night on April 29 at 7:00 pm** in the sanctuary, followed by a cake reception. It's a wonderful opportunity to learn, ask questions, and be part of their special journey!

ON APRIL 29, WEAR NICE CLOTHES FOR PICTURES & QUESTIONING



UPCOMING DATES:

- **Bagging Groceries** at Paulbeck's Market: April 4 from 10am – 2pm
- **Leadership Meeting** on April 12
- **MN Bible Bowl** on April 18: Team consists of Jace Novotny, James Flerlage and Addison Hollingsead



**LUTHERAN
ISLAND
CAMP**

CAMPERSHIPS AVAILABLE

St. John's is providing \$100.00 or one half of the cost of camp (whichever is greater) for any of our children that would like to attend a summer program at Lutheran Island Camp. You can go online to the camp website (www.islandcamp.org) to check on the summer camp possibilities. If you have any questions, you can call Debbie Schultz, 218-839-4322.

If you would like to donate toward this, please place your gift in an envelope marked: "LIC Camperships" and place the envelope in the offering plate.

SUMMER IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER!

What's Up at St. John's Church?



QUARTERLY VOTERS' MEETING – APRIL 26



The St. John's Quarterly Voters' Meeting is scheduled for **April 26** following our 9:00 am worship service. All new members and confirmed members (age 19 or older) are encouraged to attend and eligible to be voting members.

Come, let your voice be heard, and be a part of the decision-making process of this church. Our church thrives when we come together on big decisions.

Church Council / Leaders will meet on Thursday, April 9 at 6:00 pm to finalize the agenda for the Voters meeting.

The Deacons will meet on Thursday, April 16 at 6:00 pm



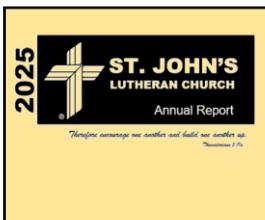
WAYS TO GIVE

We give because we are made in God's image, and He is a giver. We strive to be a generous church because we serve a God who has been so generous with us. Thank you for partnering with St. John's Lutheran in helping us to share Christ, serve Christ, and grow in Christ's love.

While most members give each with designated envelopes, we also offer an online/mobile app option.

ONLINE: Go to our stjohnaitkin.org under the "More" tab click on "Donate". Under the ONLINE box there is a box "Give Online" box to click. Follow instructions from there.

MOBILE APP: Download the free Vanco Mobile Faith Engagement app from the App Store or Google Play. Find St. John's Lutheran Church by our name or zip code (56431). Donate using your checking account.



ANNUAL REPORT

Annual Reports were distributed in church mailboxes in early February. If you are not local and would like to receive an Annual Report, please contact the church office at 218-927-3170.



APRIL BIRTHDAYS

Blessings on your special day!

Rob Williams	04	Nicole Nicko	13	Joy Janzen	23
Kristi Just	05	Brendan Lovsness	14	Fritsie Lamke	23
Brent Landrus	06	Kevin Glanz	17	Thomas Flerlage	25
Brittney Wold	06	Collin Wilke	17	Shirlee Haugly	25
Zachary Lovsness	07	Madison Slette	19	Dick Buhlmann	27
William Remmert	07	Ben Solien	19	Jane Kiphuth	27
Alyssa Christian	09	Amber Sinchak	20	Paula Soderquist	27
Lisa Flerlage	09	Kathy Pearson	21	Michael Bauer	30
Andrew Elmquist	12	Chris Olesen	22	Spencer Redmann	30
Nicole Brown	13				



TRUSTEE REPORT

Parsonage:

A plugged sewer pipe at the parsonage prevented the kitchen sink from draining to the main stack. The old cast-iron pipe was augered, removing several cast-iron fragments left from a previous repair. If the problem continues, the pipe will be replaced.

One of the new carbon monoxide/fire alarms in the parsonage was found to be defective and has been replaced.

Sanctuary:

When the foam padding in the sanctuary kneelers at the front of the church was replaced, electrical wiring and outlets were installed along the altar side. Work is now underway to connect these circuits to the existing panel, and they should be ready for use by Easter.

SPECIAL THANK YOU

It's been a busy and productive time at St. John's! Over the past few months, members of our congregation have come together to paint, repair, clean, and coordinate the installation of new shades in the Narthex, Kitchen, and Fellowship Hall. This past week, the painting was completed and it truly looks like a brand new church! A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has gone above and beyond to help care for our church home. Your time, effort, and dedication make all the difference. We are so grateful. None of this would be possible without the support of our amazing congregation.