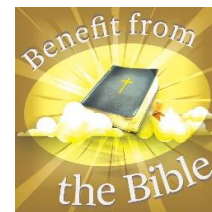




# Bethlehem Lutheran Church

Truth — Forgiveness — Assurance — Peace — Guidance

Everyone Is Invited to Benefit!



January 9, 2025

## Dear Supporters of Bethlehem!

I don't know what each of you gave to Bethlehem in 2024, but collectively you have given enough to meet our budgeted expenses and beyond – **THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH!**

In 2024, four of our members died confessing faith in Jesus and six of our inactive members requested to be removed, but eleven became active new members – **Thanks be to God!!!**

These are our goals at Bethlehem for 2025 and beyond:

- Continue to believe the whole Bible!
- Preach and teach in ways that are understandable and relevant!
- Do our best to care about every member – active, shut-in, and inactive!
- Do whatever we can to reach those in our community with the bad news of sin and the good news of God's gift of heaven through godly sorrow and trust in Jesus for eternal life!

Unfortunately, in the United States and around the world, many Christian Churches are declining and closing. Here are some reasons:

- National Christian Foundation: “Among non-churchgoers who self-identify as Christians, the predominant reason offered for not attending worship services is that they practice their faith in other ways.” – But the Bible says: **Hebrews 10:25** “[Let us not forsake] our own assembling together, as is the habit

of some...” Let us do what Jesus said: “...seek **first** His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

- The Guardian: “One of the top answers was church members seem to be judgmental or hypocritical.” – Therefore, let us remember our own sins, be thankful for God's gift of forgiveness, live as Bible-believing Christians, and show genuine love to others.
- Gallup News: “This decline is largely driven by the increase in the percentage of Americans with no religious affiliation,” increasing from 9% to 21% over the past 20 years. – That's sad! The one true God:
  - **made** us,
  - **loves** us,
  - **provides for** us, and
  - **saved** us,yet, sadly, many are deceived, unaware, or uninterested☹.
- The Great Disconnect: “A focus on ritual over relationship, dogma over discipleship, and performance over presence can leave believers feeling disillusioned and disheartened.” –
  - Dear Bethlehem, our **ritual** or **liturgy** is very connected to the Bible. ➡

*I'm planning to teach through those connections in 2025.*

**Doctrine**, that is, **truth** is very important. Jesus said: "...you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32).

- But **relationships** and **discipleship** are *essential*. The essence of salvation is a relationship with God and Jesus (John 17:3); when we know them, then we – *with each other* – are brothers and sisters in Christ. Then, knowing what we know about sin and salvation, we are called to share it with others, that is, *to disciple them*. Dear Holy Spirit, help us, use us!
- The Great De-Churching: The top three reasons why people left:
  - **They moved.** – So, invite new people who move into your neighborhood to try your church.
  - **Attendance was inconvenient.** – *Wait!* The Son of God ♥ left heaven, ♥ put on flesh, and ♥ died for us, *yet it's too inconvenient* 😊! When people understand and believe, they will – in most cases – have a desire to figure out a way to faithfully attend, receive, and rejoice! Dear LORD, *please help those who are struggling!*
  - **Family change – marriage, divorce, remarriage, etc.** – Sometimes change can be embarrassing, but this is a good way to look at the church: **It's NOT a museum for saints, BUT a hospital for sinners.** Thanks be to God that week after week we are compelled to gather to:
    - Give our sins to our Great God and receive the assurance of His forgiveness!

- Unload our burdens at His feet, and then walk away lighter, happier, and content!
- Hear the bad news of sin and the good news of the gospel!
- Grow in understanding how to apply God's word to our lives!
- Depart in peace, confident that ♦God is in control, ♦His blessing is upon us, and ♦He will carry us through the next week of our lives!

#### Conclusion:

I don't know what's going on in your life, but I'm here to help. If you want me to pray for you, visit you, give you Biblical guidance, etc., please let me know.

- If you are already being faithful – *thanks so much!*
- If things of lesser importance are keeping you away – *please repent!*
- If you have a concern about how we are proceeding **or** an idea for improvement – *please let me know!*
- For those we know who are struggling – *let us do what we can to help!*
- For myself, the Leadership Team, and the Pastor Team – *please pray for wisdom, guidance, and strength, so that the LORD is honored, and His blessing continues to rest upon our work in His kingdom!*

**Thanks again!**

**All the BEST to you and yours in 2025!**

Sincerely,

*Pastor*

Rev. Robert Green