

Living Faith

Lenten Season at Faith

Ash Wednesday

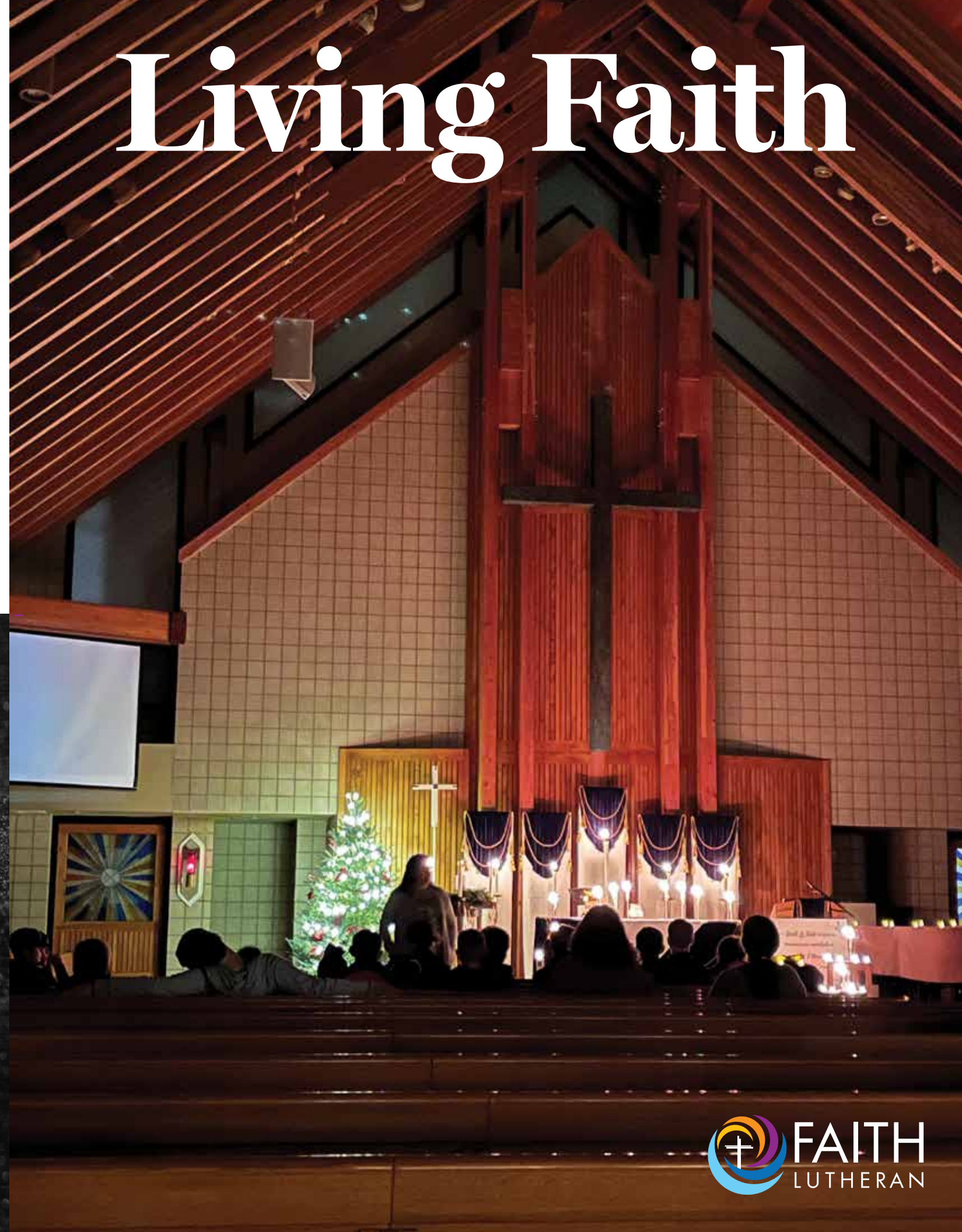
February 14th – Services at noon, 5:15 & 7pm.

Soup Suppers

Weekly on Wednesdays, February 14th – March 20th.
5:30-6:45pm, free will offering.

Lenten Sermon Series

Fierce and Faithful Women
Sundays 9 & 10:30am, Wednesdays 7pm.



Here & Now

In his simple telling of the Christmas story in *The Life of Our Lord* written in 1846, Charles Dickens begins, “[Jesus] was born, a long long time ago—nearly two thousand years ago—at a place called Bethlehem.”

It is inevitable that we feel the distance of “a long long time ago” when we come to the Christmas story each year. It happened over there and back then, far away. It is an old story set in a place and time very different from our own.

Despite the best efforts of Christmas pageants, live nativities, and Hollywood adaptations, the Christmas story still seems antiquated if not a little weird (consider the virgin birth and a group of traveling astrologers creeping on infant would-be kings).

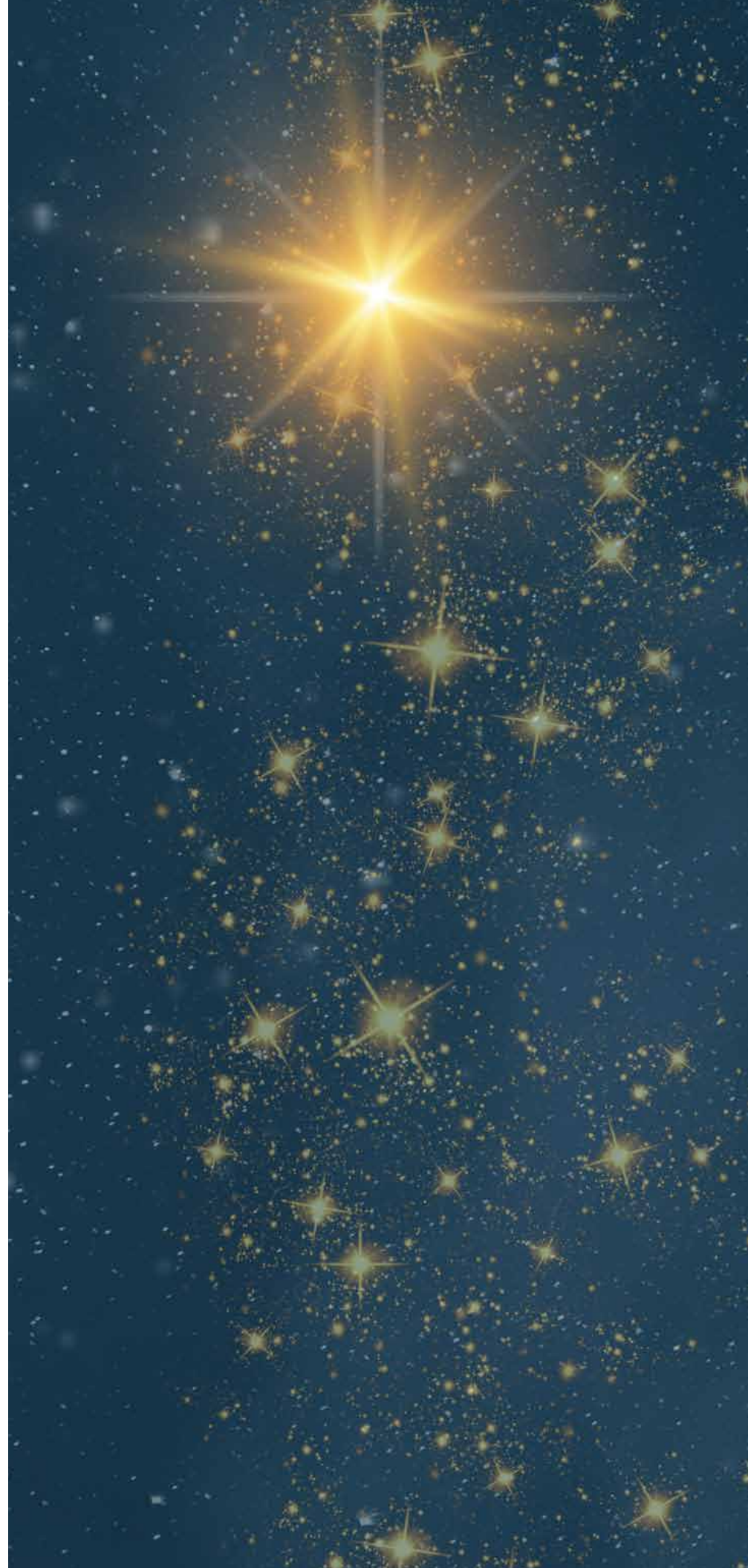
If we press past the rose and green-colored glasses of nostalgia, we may even find ourselves questioning this story’s relevance. How does the birth of a baby more than 2000 years ago matter here and now?

And yet, every time I step back and seriously reflect on this story, I’m astounded: The Word of God took on human flesh and set up camp as a human living in community. Let that sink in. God came to live among us as one of us to experience the fullness of human life through Jesus. This is what the church calls the incarnation.

This incarnation is a great story. That’s why Dickens, the great storyteller, wrote, “My Dear children, I am very anxious that you should know something about the History of Jesus Christ. For everyone ought to know about Him.”

Yet, as good a story as this is, what’s even more significant is what the incarnation reveals about the character of the living God. The God of Christmas shows up in the flesh right in the middle of everything.

And this hasn’t changed over the intervening 2000+ years. Through the Holy Spirit, the incarnation moves from a merely historical, one-time event to become an ongoing reality. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ continues to take on flesh, working among us and in us.



When we look to Jesus’ birth (a long long time ago), it redirects us to the present where God is taking on flesh now. This story urges us to ask: Where is new life taking root where life seems impossible? Where are we wondering, longing, and seeking hope in our world? Where is world-changing good news showing up?

And, Faith Lutheran, this story calls to us. It asks how we will participate in the incarnation of God in Jesus. How will God show up in the flesh through us?

I challenge you this holiday season to shift your gaze, to be, what Barbara Brown Taylor calls, “a detective of divinity.” Don’t look back so much. Look around. Wonder. Investigate. Ask. And be open to the possibility that God might take on flesh in you.

Because God is showing up in the flesh when and where we least expect it: Here and now.

By Pastor Adam White



Christmas Eve at Faith Lutheran

DECEMBER 24

10:30am Children & Family Worship

5:00pm Lessons & Carols with Faith Choir

7:00pm Candlelight & Communion Worship

DECEMBER 31

9:00am Worship

Power of Community

As we enjoy the festive holiday season, our community is buzzing with the Christmas spirit. The Faith youth group, also known as GLOW, has once again embarked on a sweet intergenerational service project. In recent years, the high school youth group has built gingerbread creations and brought them to seniors to share the holiday spirit.

Paul Ericsson and Kim Sop, longtime volunteers with the youth group, led the project through making, rolling, and cutting the gingerbread. Paul first brought this sweet idea to Faith as a ministry he began in several other congregations. “It is a great opportunity for the youth to have fun and explore their creativity, and then share it with the community,” Kim shared.

Pastor Jim Demke, Faith’s Visitation Pastor, came to youth group and shared with the students about the people who would receive their gingerbread houses. The list included couples and individuals who ranged from those brand new to Faith and the Waconia area to longtime members. The aim was the same: To connect students with older adults who could use extra joy and care this season.

Supplied with gingerbread, icing, candies, and an abundance of holiday spirit, the youth group set out to craft gingerbread houses, churches, barns, and chalets, transforming simple ingredients into works of art. Once completed, the gingerbread houses were on display at Faith. Then, the youth group delivered the gingerbread creations with cookies and carols.

This intergenerational service project goes beyond the creative and fun decorating process; it’s about building bridges between generations. The aim is to not only bring joy to both the young and the elderly but also foster a strong sense of community and connection. Our hope is to brighten their holiday season and also make them feel valued and connected to the larger community.

This intergenerational service project exemplifies the transformative power of community, creativity, and service. We have the power to bring joy *now*, to offer comfort *now*, and to celebrate Emmanuel, God with us, *here and now*.

By Pastor Katie Escalante



SPARK Christmas Program



GLOW Gingerbread Event



Rosette Workshop



Waconia Community Thanksgiving



Faith Fan Club

Emmanuel: God With Us

Why wait? Quite often in our lives, the waiting finds us. We don't ask for it, nor do we always embrace it. The waiting itself can be a major distraction. We don't like the pain, worry, or anxiety that can be associated with the wait, so we find ways to fill up our time and thoughts. All the while, God remains by our side with His outstretched arms and steadfast love hoping we will look up from our phones or put the chores on hold just long enough to spend some much-needed time with Him.

Sometimes we are waiting for God's presence, but we just can't feel it. On other occasions, we feel aggrieved so we shut Him out. Maybe the test we studied really hard for didn't go well. Maybe we didn't get the job or promotion we worked so hard to get. Maybe we are grieving the loss of a loved one. For our family, this feeling was never more present than in our journey to parenthood.

Even when we feel abandoned because our prayers are not being answered in the way we think is best, God is with us.

Long before the desire to start a family, we knew that having biological children would be a struggle for us. This held true, and was an incredibly taxing experience for us physically, emotionally, and socially. Years filled with anxiety and heartbreak finally led way to God blessing us with two amazing boys, Asher and Evan.

We fully recognize how lucky we are to have our boys and are fully aware that not everyone always gets what they want. Regardless of the highs and lows, joys and sorrows, God meets us wherever we are and in whatever condition we reside. Throughout all of the impatience, hope, and grief associated with our journey to parenthood, God was truly by our side throughout. He gave us support through connection with a whole group of people experiencing the same situation and emotions we were living with. He gave us the resources and job flexibility to undergo multiple medical check-ups and procedures. Most of all, He gave us support and comfort through each other. Though it was sometimes difficult to see in the moment, it's crystal clear to us now that God was working in our lives the entire time.



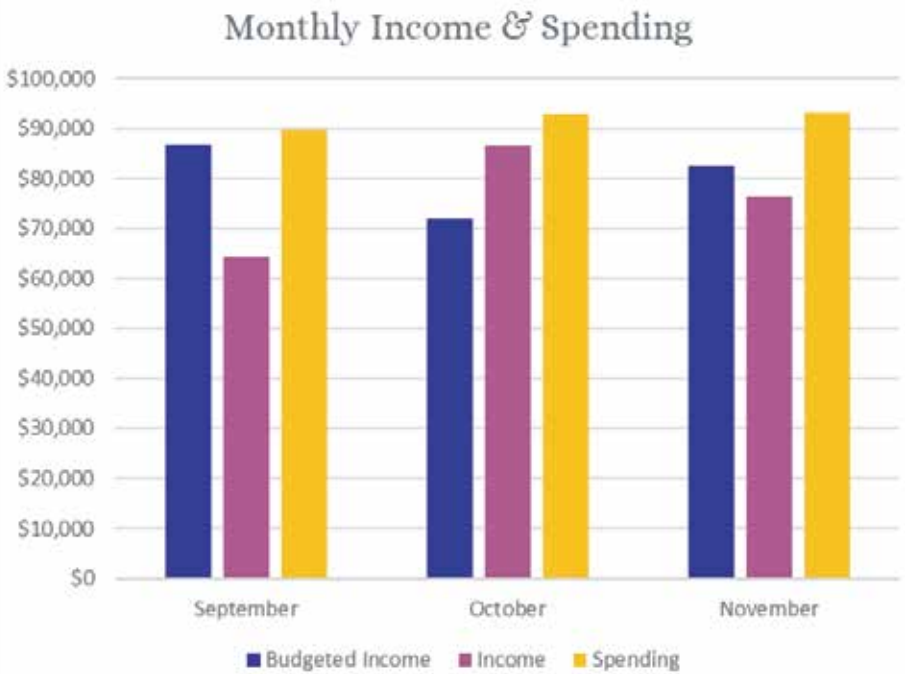
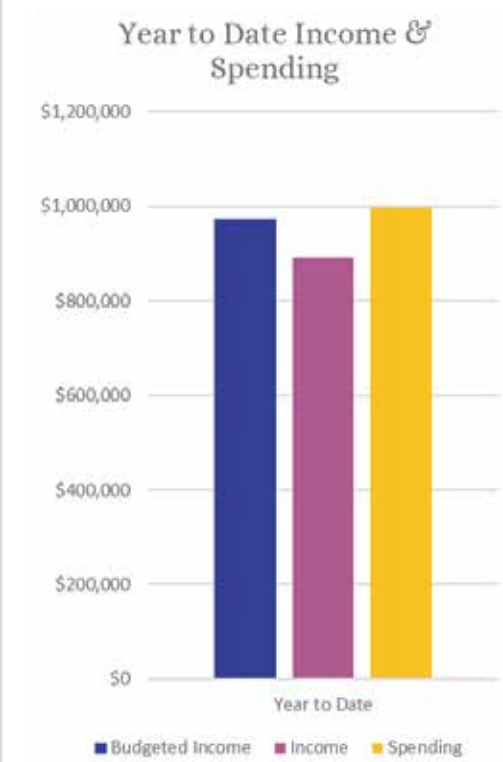
Even when we feel abandoned because our prayers are not being answered in the way we think is best, God is with us. Although our plans for building a family did not go as we imagined, looking back we wouldn't have had it any other way. The difficult journey has blessed us with a stronger marriage, two remarkable boys, and a deeper appreciation for all the blessings in our life.

Wherever you are on your faith journey this Advent season, know that Jesus is present in your life and wants nothing more than to strengthen His relationship with you. Meet Him in love, in prayer, and in each other. Have a very Merry Christmas!

By Nick & Kristi Luger

Financial Update

Through November, we've received \$82,458 less than we planned to receive, and we've spent \$6,631 less than we planned to spend.



Income as shown does not include \$85,916 from the Employee Retention Tax Credit the church received this fiscal year.

Come Worship with us!

Sundays @ 9 & 10:30am
Prime Time Wednesdays @ 6pm
www.waconiafaithlutheran.com
952-442-2101



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Pastor Katie Escalante
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