

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

EPISTLE

ADVENT 2023



1410 Ponce de Leon Avenue, Atlanta GA 30307 | (404) 378-4243 | stjohnsatlanta.org

“SEEING CHRIST IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS” ADVENT 2023



Advent Sunday Worship

December 3, 10, 17, 24 – 10:30 AM

Advent Wednesday Worship

December 6, December 13, and December 20

Dinner – 6:15 PM

Worship – 7:00 PM

This year we are starting with a soup dinner and fellowship before the worship service. Mercy Church will be joining us for the meal and worship. There is much excitement that Mercy and St. John's are able to be together again for Advent midweek services. The services are focused on prayer and are based around the Psalms, a way to bring a bit of order into our lives.

A congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that invites freely, loves unconditionally, and serves with joy

The Rev. Dave Helfrich

Interim Pastor

pastordave@stjohnsatlanta.org

Rolando Salazar

Music Director

rolando@stjohnsatlanta.org

Julie Strecker

Faith Formation Director

julie@stjohnsatlanta.org

Glen Eckman

Church Administrator

geckman@stjohnsatlanta.org

Clyde Payton

Sexton

PASTOR'S LETTER



Dear Members and Friends of St. John's,

The season of Advent is almost here. It is the first of six seasons of the Church year. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word meaning coming, or arrival. It began around 480 A.D. and historically involves three main emphases ...

1. The coming of the Christchild in Bethlehem
2. The arrival of Jesus into the hearts of Christians
3. The awaited coming of the Risen Christ in the Parousia, the final reign of Christ.

In France in the 4th century, it was known as St Martin's Lent, because the 40 days began on November 11, St Martin's Day. It was used as a time of preparation for Baptism; and how the arrival of Jesus changes not only the world but every believer in the world.

Today, Advent tends to be a time both of expectant waiting and preparation, both for the arrival of the baby Jesus and the coming of the Risen Christ in all His glory. So how will we use this upcoming Advent season?

What does expectant waiting mean for us?

What are we expecting God to do?

Whatever God is going to do, will God do it through us, in spite of us, or both?

How do we wait?

Passively – sitting back in our easy chairs and expecting God to do God's thing?

Or actively – joining with God in creating the new world that God is building?

What does preparation mean for us?

How are we preparing our lives, our hearts to receive God?

How are we at work in our homes, our churches, our world to prepare for God's coming?

Advent is not just a prelude to Christmas. It is an expectant waiting and preparing FOR the baby who comes at Christmas. And perhaps the more we expectantly wait, the more we prepare, the more God's coming will change our lives and transform our world.

Let it be so, O God. Let it be so!!

In Christian Love,

Pastor Dave

“SEEING CHRIST IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS” ADVENT 2023



In reading the texts as preparation for Advent, the Worship Committee noticed that there was a great deal of chaos throughout the scriptures. And while Advent is traditionally a time of waiting and expectation for the birth of Jesus, God/Christ is already present with us in the texts.

With so much chaos going on in the world in the way of wars, natural disasters, mass shootings, etc., sometimes we do wonder where God is in all of it. Even in the chaos that can run rampant in our lives, we may ask if God even notices what we are going through.

Why doesn't God do something to make things better?

The thing is, we don't know what God is up to, but looking at scripture, we know that God is always with us. God is with us in the chaos that is our lives; in the chaos that is throughout the world; in the chaos that we can't control.

As we focus on God this season, and the impending birth of Christ, we will try to find a little bit of order in all of the chaos. But to find the order, we need to go through the chaos. We will be bringing a bit of the order through chaos in each of our Advent services.

At the beginning of each worship service, the members of the congregation are invited to say aloud the chaos that is either going on in your life, or the world around you. It can be as general or specific as you like. Keep repeating the word, phrase, or sentence, and each time you repeat it, say it softer. Keep repeating the word, phrase, or sentence until you hear the chime. Then we will sing an opening chant to center us, and bring a bit of order to the chaos.

Christ is in the midst of our chaos. We just need to keep our eyes open so we can see him.

The Worship and Music Team

Craig Storlie, Chair

craigstorlie@bellsouth.net

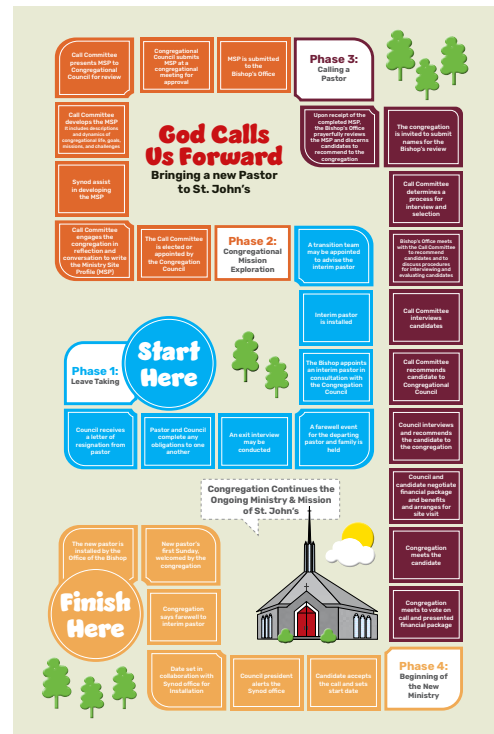
THE ST. JOHN'S CALL COMMITTEE GLOSSARY

Call Committee

The St. John's Call Committee consists of eight members chosen by the Council's Executive Committee for their diversity and their commitment to the work required to call a new pastor. The eight members are Paul Arne, Marsha Goerss, Gwyn Herbein, Martin Jessiman, Ella Myers, Adam Renner, Diana Robinson, and Francoise Wackenhut.

Mission Site Profile

The work required by the synod and accomplished by the Call Committee that states who and what our congregation is about. Only the chairman, Martin Jessiman, communicates regularly with our synod liaison, Pastor Jonathan Hemphill. We also submitted to the synod a series of pastors' names who were recommended by members of the congregation and former interns/pastors. These people may not all be considered by the synod, or may not be interested in being called to St. John's.



Appreciative Inquiry Process

The series of questions developed by the call committee and addressed to every member of the congregation, regular visitors, shut-in members, and members who recently moved away. All were invited to gatherings in small groups to facilitate the conversation in person and via Zoom. The call committee also conducted interviews of church committees (Worship & Music, Learning, Outreach, Congregational Care, Property); St. John's choir; staff members; small groups (Book Club; Seek, Love, Walk), affinity groups (parents of young children, parents of youth, LGBTQIA). At this point, we are almost through with the appreciative inquiry process. The next step is to write the Mission Site Profile and submit it to the synod.

Next phase

Once we turn in the Mission Site Profile, we initially receive the names of six potential pastors to interview. The process for the call committee becomes confidential as the group cannot communicate any input on the pastors. Other names can be provided to us by the synod if need be.

Please pray for the Spirit of God to show us who our next pastor will be! Thank you to everyone who has participated so far. If you have anything else you want us to know, please feel free to email us at callcommittee@stjohnsatlanta.org.

PULSE BEAT ON PROPERTY

Check out these highlights from the Property folks:

- **Sanctuary heat pumps** working as expected!
- **Steeple repair** information-gathering continues, including repair plans, costs, and options for liability insurance coverage.
- Proposals for **sanctuary carpeting and pews** are being entertained from Sharpe's Church Interiors and Woods Church Renovations. A third possibility is for St. John's to hire individual contractors on its own for 1) woodwork, 2) pew upholstery installation, and 3) carpeting installation.
- **Stonehenge mansion windows** are in great need of TLC. Property Committee members are assisting in prioritizing which windows are in most urgent need of repair or replacement. Estimates for the work will follow.
- At its August meeting, St. John's Congregation **Council voted to hire Craig Storlie** for property assistance 8 hrs/wk. He began September 1st. More about Craig and this new position will be shared by the Personnel Committee.



Property would like to add to our current list of skilled building repair people. If you have a person or firm to recommend, please let Doug Robinson and/or Church Administrator Glen Eckman know:

Plumber
Electrician
Locksmith
Roofer
Alarm

Complete property reports, including work and cost estimates, can be found along with monthly Council minutes in our archives at www.stjohnsatlanta.org/documents. Contact the church office (404-378-4243) for the password.

Doug Robinson, Property Chair
doug@eagleeyebooks.com

OUTREACH UPDATE



The St. John's **hospitality breakfast station** has experienced significant growth throughout the summer and early autumn, and we couldn't be more thrilled about it! On any given Friday, we now serve about 20 neighbors in need, and this expansion has been made possible through the generous support of additional helping hands. Of course, we warmly welcome anyone else who'd like to join our cause.

We also just had an early start to the **overnight freeze shelter** season, on November 1st and 2nd in response to an unexpected early cold spell. Thanks to the dedication of numerous volunteers who stepped up on short notice, the event was a tremendous success. This ministry experience is not only fulfilling but also deeply gratifying as it allows us to support our homeless neighbors during the harsh, cold nights.

If you're interested in learning more or getting involved, please feel free to reach out to Ann Lillya lillyamc@rocketmail.com or Adam Renner adam.der.renner@gmail.com via a conversation or email. Keep an eye on the Weekly Update for regular briefings!

Et in Terra Pax, Peace

On Earth, is the text to the second movement of our upcoming presentation of Vivaldi's *Gloria*, presented as part of worship on Sunday, December 17th. This text feels even more relevant this year with all that is happening in the world.

The music is set in a brooding b minor key, in complete contrast to the opening first movement which rejoices in a thrilling key of D major. There are rays of hope in the movement, even in b minor, and the chorus and orchestra swell and swell to a crescendo

that to me has always felt as a depiction of the heavens opening up for all to see and hear.

Part of church musician life means rehearsing upcoming seasonal music very early. Members of our choir have been rehearsing *Gloria* since September 16th! They generously give up early Saturday mornings and Sunday afternoons a few times per month, in addition to regular Wednesday evening rehearsals and Sunday morning services. When you can, take a moment to express your thanks to members of our choir and instrumentalists for all their work in leading worship with us each week. They are each a gift to us all!

I would also like to have you mark your calendars for a very special evening on December 15, 8:00 PM. Many of you attended the concert last December, and we would love to see you there again. This year's "I'll Be Home for Christmas" concert will feature soprano Tiffany Uzoiye, a dear friend of mine and a singer I have collaborated with on numerous occasions. Tiffany and I will be joined by Marietta native and Broadway star Billy Tighe who has been featured in numerous Broadway and national tour productions. St. John's members can attend the concert **for free** by emailing me your reservation. I will also be searching for a few volunteers to help at the doors, to usher, and to assist with hosting this event. Please contact me if you are interested in assisting.

And as always, if you are interested in joining us in the choir, even for a special Sunday here and there, or our bells, children's chorus, or leading musically in any way, please reach out to me at rolando@stjohnsatlanta.org. We would love to have you join us!

Musically,

Rolando



WE'VE GOT LEARNING ON OUR MIND!



Lunch & Learn (starts at noon)

November 19: Pastor Justin Eller and Allison Lizdas talk about the situation they witnessed on the Southern border. Pastor Eller preaches at our worship service. (*Potluck – bring a dish to share*)

December 3: Lunch & Learn with Kids: An Intergenerational Advent Time – We will create Advent Calendars. (*BYO Lunch*)

January 28: Françoise Wackenhut and Adrainne Gray speak about their experience in the Holy Land. (*BYO Lunch*)

Seek, Love, Walk

December 18: Annual holiday gathering with St. John's Book Club, 6:00 PM on Monday, December 18, at the home of Bernie and Françoise Wackenhut. Details to come.

Adult Sunday School

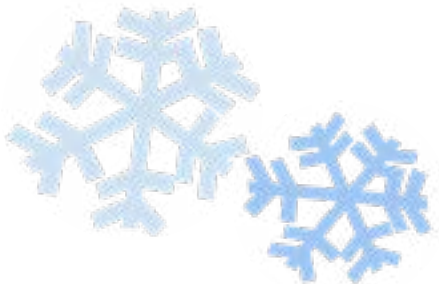
New classes in the next three months!

November 19, 26: Continuing Paul among the Thessalonians being taught by Martin Jessiman

December 3, 10, 17: New to St. John's or new to the Lutheran Sunday service? Come and learn about Lutheran Worship! taught by Françoise Wackenhut. We'll learn about liturgy, Lutheran Worship, and St. John's practices that make us unique.

January 7, 14, 21, 28: The Augsburg Confessions taught by Pastor Dave.

For more information about Learning or to volunteer, contact Chair Jonathon Huber, jonathondhuber@gmail.com.



C O PERSONNEL P E R

Hello and welcome to the Personnel Corner of the Epistle. St. John's has a Personnel Committee that includes the following volunteer church members: Gary Uhl (Chair, garyuhl1@gmail.com), Dick Henneman, Gwyn Herbein, Francoise Wackenhut and Rick Goerss. We carry out the personnel related tasks that are outlined in our church documents. In each upcoming Epistle publication, we plan

to include information about our paid staff — and we begin by shining the spotlight on our Music Director, Rolando Salazar.

Mr. Rolando Salazar serves as the Music Director at Saint John's. He started in this role on March 1st of this year after the retirement of our previous Music Director, Jeanette Burgess. A comprehensive job search was conducted, and it resulted in Rolando joining our staff.

Mr. Salazar completed his education and training at Georgia State University and West Texas A&M University. He has extensive work experience in the church setting, including at Grace UMC (Atlanta), First Presbyterian Church (Atlanta) and at Polk Street United Methodist Church (Amarillo, TX). During his time at those churches, Rolando worked with a variety of choirs that included a wide range of ages from youth to seniors.

Mr. Salazar is also an accomplished orchestra conductor; for example, he has worked with the Georgia Piedmont Youth Orchestra. In addition, Rolando has been involved with the Musica Sacra Atlanta concert series and with the Bellingham Festival of Music in Bellingham, WA for several years. Lastly, he has an extensive history with The Atlanta Opera and will again serve as the Chorus Master for several productions.

We look forward to working with Rolando and appreciate everything he has contributed to our church community so far! Please reach out to him in person before or after service or at his email: rolando@stjohnsatlanta.org.



Rolando and Hank (*Rolando's the tall one*)

Dear St. John's Family,

Recently, like most of you, I have been involved with our call committee in the appreciative inquiry process. More specifically, I have been pondering the question of what brought me to St. John's, and if I am honest, I would have to say that my affection for St. John's began when I first attended an Easter Vigil back in 2008. Here I saw a congregation that came together, set aside differences, boldly embraced diversity, proudly proclaimed a mission guided by love that was expressed by caring for all of God's people. A place where the Holy Spirit bound people together to usher in a glimpse of God's beloved community. This was a place I wanted to be a part of, and I wanted to share with others.



I remembered after my first visit thinking how could such a sacred place exist on a property that once championed oppression, injustice and the abhorrent violation of human rights for minorities in general and African Americans specifically. Just across the street, we now have a historical marker lest we forget that a man of African descent brutally lost his life to domestic terrorism. In contrast, here is also the place where the Holy Spirit led our congregation in the early 2000s to not stand on the sideline observing history, but to take on the responsibility to ethically inform and shape history. As this year marks the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, may we remember the empowering "I Have a Dream" speech and in this space which harbors many stories, may we continually commit ourselves to "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God."

As we come to the close of another Church year, I am grateful for the opportunity over the past 18 months to have served as your congregational president. Although this time has brought about much change, I invite you to focus on the many reasons we have to offer thanksgiving. Sometimes work in the church is dramatic and quite engaging, but other times it can be rather ordinary and even mundane. I am thankful for all the members of our church who support the many ordinary tasks behind the scenes. To this end, I offer thanks to our church administrator, Glen Eckman, our church sexton, Clyde Payton, the members of our Church Council, our Personnel Committee, and all those who serve on a ministry team at St. John's. Your work may not always be apparent, but it is very much appreciated.

About a year ago we welcomed Rev. Dave Helfrich as our interim pastor, and what a tremendous shepherd he has been to St. John's. So I begin by thanking Pastor Helfrich. In addition, we have all been wonderfully blessed by our Music Director, Rolando Salazar. Our music program is in great hands, and I can only echo our choir in offering thanks for Rolando, and his commitment to St. John's. I would be remiss if I did not also offer thanks for Julie Strecker, our Faith Formation Director, who has developed an engaging ministry for our children during the Sunday service in addition to coordinating the "Lunch & Learn" segments just to mention a few of her accomplishments.

(continued on next page)

As I look ahead to 2024, I think we have a wonderful opportunity to share with others how God led us to St. John's and how this congregation has nurtured us. I am hopeful that 2024 is the year we can rededicate ourselves to supporting an active evangelism program at St. John's that begins with sharing who we are and why we are here. Also, this grand old mansion that serves as our church has a fascinating history of its own. However, it is in need of repair and refurbishment. Maybe this can be the year that renovations start again. If you have not joined a ministry team, I encourage you to prayerfully consider the following vacancies we will have next year: Evangelism Chairperson, Financial Secretary, Property Chairperson, and Youth chairperson. Please feel free to speak with me or any of our Council Members if you feel called to serve in any of these capacities. Now as we move into 2024, let us not be "anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let our requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Peace and Blessings,



Alcuin Johnson
Acting Council President

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CALLING ALL BOOKWORMS!

It's hard to believe the holidays are right around the corner. Relieve your stress with a good book and lively conversation. The St. John's Book Club meets on the **third Monday of each month**, at 7 PM, usually in a hybrid format: in person in the back room of **Eagle Eye Books** (2076 N. Decatur Road) and **online via Zoom**.

HOWEVER, on **November 20**, we will meet online only (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81116824220>) to discuss "The Last White Man," by Mohsin Hamid.



In December, we will take a break from reading for our **annual holiday gathering** with the Seek, Love, Walk group. We'll enjoy time together at 6:00 PM on Monday, December 18, at the home of Bernie and Françoise Wackenhut. Be on the lookout for more information and please contact Gwyn Herbein (gherbein@gmail.com) if you have questions.



What's in a Name?

Basic yet vital ... two adjectives that can describe any number of needs, concepts, and services. And it sums up congregational care but it doesn't give you many details about what congregational care is. It's a simple concept: Care for the members of the congregation, a vital and basic need. And there is a ministry team at St. John's whose mission is to do just that! It's conveniently named Congregational Care.

So ... how do we care for the congregation? Too many ways to share in one article but hopefully you have been a recipient of some of the care! Perhaps you have experienced a birth or health issue and received a meal. Maybe you have (or have had) a college student who received a care package to help them get through exams. Coffee fellowship falls under congregational care so if you have enjoyed that fellowship time, congregational care has touched you. If you have a child who was baptized at St. John's and is under 22, he/she/they have received baptismal anniversary cards. Similarly, members who are unable to attend services receive birthday and thinking of you notes to let them know that even if they aren't able to be with us, we are thinking of them. When the pandemic began and we were all isolated, the congregational care team made weekly calls for months to all the members of the congregation. We have continued to check in with calls and emails as covid has dragged on.

As we come out of the confines of the pandemic and the church engages in more activities, we look forward to more fellowship gatherings that have been on hold for a long while. We hosted our first gathering in September with the return of Women's Night Out. We had a potluck hosted by Ellen Yates at her neighborhood pool. Although the weather had taken a chilly turn, we had about 20 members attending! We enjoyed food and fellowship on the clubhouse deck. Many even dipped their feet in the water continuing the fellowship poolside! Look for more gatherings in the future and plan to join us!

These are just a few of the ways the congregational care ministry team strives to care for this amazing community. If these sound like something you would like to help with, please consider joining our team. We'd love to have you. If you have ideas for ways we can care for the congregation, please share them. If you need care, please reach out.

Email Adrienne Mather, our awesome chairperson, (amather513@yahoo.com) for more information and questions, and to join us!



Women's Night Out

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Nov. 19 9:15 AM Adult S. School 9:30 Children's S. School 10:30 AM Worship 12:00 PM Lunch & Learn (Potluck)	Nov. 20	Nov. 21	Nov. 22 Advent Wednesday 6:15 PM Dinner 7:00 PM Worship	Nov. 23	Nov. 24	Nov. 25
Nov. 26 9:15 AM Adult S. School 9:30 Children's S. School 10:30 AM Reign of Christ Worship	Nov. 27	Nov. 28	Nov. 29	Nov. 30	Dec. 1	Dec. 2
Dec. 3 9:15 AM Adult S. School 9:30 Children's S. School 10:30 AM Advent 1 12:00 PM Lunch & Learn (BYO Lunch)	Dec. 4	Dec. 5	Dec. 6 Advent Wednesday 6:15 PM Dinner 7:00 PM Worship	Dec. 7	Dec. 8	Dec. 9
Dec. 10 9:15 AM Adult S. School 9:30 Children's S. School 10:30 AM Advent 2	Dec. 11	Dec. 12	Dec. 13 Advent Wednesday 6:15 PM Dinner 7:00 PM Worship	Dec. 14	Dec. 15	Dec. 16
Dec. 17 9:15 AM Adult S. School 9:30 Children's S. School 10:30 AM Advent 3 Vivaldi's Gloria (during worship)	Dec. 18	Dec. 19	Dec. 20 Advent Wednesday 6:15 PM Dinner 7:00 PM Worship	Dec. 21	Dec. 22	Dec. 23
Dec. 24 10:30 AM Advent 4 7:00 Nativity of our Lord	Dec. 25 <i>Christmas</i>	Dec. 26	Dec. 27	Dec. 28	Dec. 29	Dec. 30
Dec. 31 9:15 AM Adult S. School 9:30 Children's S. School 10:30 AM Worship	Jan. 1	Jan. 2	Jan. 3	Jan. 4	Jan. 5	Jan. 6 <i>Day of Epiphany</i>
Jan. 7 9:15 AM Adult S. School 9:30 Children's S. School 10:30 AM Baptism of Jesus Worship	Jan. 8	Jan. 9	Jan. 10	Jan. 11	Jan. 12	Jan. 13
Jan. 14 9:15 AM Adult S. School 9:30 Children's S. School 10:30 AM Worship	Jan. 15	Jan. 16	Jan. 17	Jan. 18	Jan. 19	Jan. 20



CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP
CANDLELIGHT SERVICE
WITH HOLY COMMUNION
December 24, 2023
7:00 PM

EPISTLE TEAM

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NEXT EPISTLE

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