



# The Messenger

A newsletter of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Matthew  
... a friendly household of faith

November - December 2008

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## People, Look Up...

It was not so long ago when we celebrated the life of all the saints of God, with the lessons focusing on the fulfillment of our baptismal covenant, when all God's people will gather around his throne in heavenly glory. Themes relating to the "last days" continued through the remaining weeks in the church year, pointing to the return of our ascended Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, at end of the age when he shall reign in eternity as Lord and King.

Now comes Advent. Advent marks the beginning of the new Church Year, and now we are presented with themes of faith, hope, love, and joy stemming from the messages of the prophets of old and from our Lord, himself, during his ministry on earth. "Look up," in joyful expectation is the message of hope for all who wait and prepare for the Day of Fulfillment of God's promises.

Advent tells us about the need for a Messiah and of his coming to set people free. That need is ever present in every generation. In the fullness of time, Jesus, the Messiah, was born in Bethlehem and we rejoice at his incarnation in the world at Christmas and in us, in our baptism, for he is called Emmanuel.

While we patiently await our Lord's return we remain steadfast in faith, hope, and love as the Church continues to joyfully gather for worship around the Word and Sacrament and to serve our neighbors. It's just the right time to reaffirm your resolve; it is the time for new beginnings.

Happy Advent! And a blessed Christmas to you!

Pastor Peter Debra

## Book Discussion Group

The monthly Book Discussion Group has gotten off to a great start with Dr. Ruth Zerner leading the sessions. During the months of October and November discussions centered on the book, *Strength to Love*, by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Over the next two months, participants will read Bonheoffer's *Life Together*.

Discussions are held on the third Friday of the month at 7pm. Soup and sandwiches are served at 6pm. You can still join this lively and interactive group in its readings and sharing of insights and reflections.

## Sunday School to visit elderly member

On Sunday, December 21, following our 1:30pm worship, the Sunday School children, dressed in costumes depicting shepherds and angels, will visit Helen Loughran, a member of St. Matthew and a resident of St. Patrick's Home for the Aged, in the Bronx. A short program has been planned for the visit by Sunday School teacher and Superintendent, Dr. Ruth Zerner, which will include the reading of the Nativity story and singing of familiar carols. This program will also be presented during our worship liturgy on the First Sunday after Christmas, December 28. Please see the December schedule of events on the next page.

## New Members

God has blessed our *household of faith* with the reception into membership by transfer of our sister in Christ, Helen Smith from Mt Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, VA. Helen brings to us her many gifts, having served the Lord's church for many years during the pastorate of her husband, Lee, who now rests from his labors.

Following a period of catechetical instructions, Tiffany Enjoli Knox was joined to the mystical body of Christ and received into our membership through Adult Baptism. Praise God for the gift of regeneration by water and of the Holy Spirit, through which he makes us his new creation and heirs of his kingdom of glory.

We welcome Helen and Tiffany, wholeheartedly, into our fellowship where we worship and serve God in grateful response to his love for us in Jesus Christ.

## Christmas Fair

The annual Christmas Fair at The Cornerstone Center is on Saturday, December 13. St Matthew, will again have two tables in completing our final fund-raising event for the year. We need volunteers for this event, whether for one or two hours, so that no one person is burdened with the demands of the day's event. Please speak to Ocie Ellis or Queenann Charles about getting involved. We welcome donations of kind for sale at the Fair.

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Explore your church family  
Take time to meet someone  
each week

## **Happy 90<sup>th</sup>...**

On All Saints Sunday, November 2, the worshipping congregation of St Matthew celebrated the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of our oldest member, Norma McNeil. It was truly a time to thank God for the gift of life as we remembered all the saints of God - those who rest from their labors and those who continue on their faith journey to our Father's house in glory.

Others who celebrated birthdays in November were: Queenann Charles (2<sup>nd</sup>), Norma Harris (10<sup>th</sup>), Claire Sampson (14<sup>th</sup>), Leann Debra (23<sup>rd</sup>), Jacqueline Ramsaran (23<sup>rd</sup>), and Pastor Peter Debra (29<sup>th</sup>).

December Birthdays: Angela Goodman (8<sup>th</sup>), Edna Waller (20<sup>th</sup>), and Maryann LeBron (25<sup>th</sup>).

Happy Birthday! We pray that great joy and gladness may be yours on your special day.

## **Stewardship Sunday**

It is that time of the year when congregations discuss the topic of **Stewardship** as they look at their finances and prepare budgets for the New Year. Stewardship Sunday at St Matthew was on Sunday, November 16.

The congregation, through a homily/bible study presentation was led in exploring the teaching and understanding of Christian Stewardship. Using the definition: **CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes**, the Biblical truth was highlighted - that all the baptized are managers (stewards) of the gift of life, and of all things given them by God (the owner of everything), to whom we are accountable for their use.

Reference was made to the prophet Malachi who revealed the shocking and sad reality - that one can be guilty of robbing God. Please read Malachi 3:8. Much introspection must be done on our part in this regard. Might unused offering envelopes for the year 2008 be one way worshippers can know how well they have managed and given back to the Lord what he first gave them as a blessing?

Notwithstanding the challenges that we all face as a nation at this time of a recession, and of unaccustomed austerity, personal or otherwise, the church's ministry continues and we are God's stewards who are committed to doing our part in joyful response to God's love for us.

Closing thought: *As maturing stewards we want to do the right things for the right reasons and strive for excellence in all we do.*

## **We Will Work Side By Side**

Lay involvement in the worship life and congregational activities of the church is not only vital to growth, but is also necessary in the use of God-given gifts with which each child of God is equipped, for the benefit of the worshipping and wider communities. A Commitment Form has been prepared for members to indicate how they might use their gifts in the New Year.

Please, prayerfully, consider one or more ways to serve the Lord's Church, through your faith community here at St. Matthew, as you manage the gifts of time, talents, and treasures that are bestowed upon you by God, the Holy Spirit.

## **Church Directory**

We are updating our Church Directory for the year 2009. For members/households that are already listed, please provide any new information (phone number, email, etc.) that is available. A *Membership Profile* form is to be completed and returned, which will be used to update the directory and then kept on file. We would appreciate your cooperation in this regard so that the 2009 edition of directory can be ready for distribution at the congregational meeting on Sunday, January 25, 2009.

## **Unpaid debt**

Members and friends continue to contribute toward the \$25,000.00 unpaid debt that was a loan from the Lutheran School's Association to pay salaries in August 2005. Contributions totaled over \$2500.00 to date. A special *Thank You* to all who have given toward this effort. More envelopes are available.

## **Sherman Avenue property demolished**

Since the circulation of last issue of *The Messenger*, the Sherman Avenue property, where St Matthew Church and School were located until June 2006, was demolished. This vacant lot, which is now owned by the New York City Board of Education, will soon have a five-storey elementary school built to alleviate the over-crowding of classrooms in our neighborhood schools.

## **Blessed are they who mourn...**

"...They shall be comforted," says Jesus. We pray for the comfort and strengthening of faith of our sisters in Christ: Lois Bowman, on the passing of her husband, John Bowman; and Sylvia Gillett and Renée Martinez, who mourn the passing of daughter and aunt respectively, Alma Gillett.

## **Thank Offerings received**

- A thank offering was received from Dr. Ruth Zerner, to the glory of God and in memory of John Bowman.
- A thank offering was received from Pastor and Mrs. Paul and Gertrude Schulze, to the glory of God for renewed health.

## **December Schedule**

**Sat. Dec 13:** Christmas Fair at OSA.

**Sun. Dec 14:** Worship at 1:30pm. **PLEASE NOTE CHANGE IN TIME**

**Fri. Dec 19:** Book Discussion Group – 6/7pm

**Sun. Dec 21:** Following the 1:30 liturgy, Sunday School to visit Helen Loughran at St. Patrick's Home for the Aged.

**Wed. Dec 24:** Christmas Eve worship at 7pm

**Thurs. Dec 25:** Christmas Day worship at OSA at 9am

**Sun. Dec 28:** Children's program during 1:30 pm worship – to be followed by Christmas dinner and fellowship

**Wed. Dec 31:** New Year's Eve worship at 7pm

## **Congregational Meeting**

The annual Congregational Meeting for the New Year will be held on Sunday, **January 25, 2009** following the 1:30pm liturgy. There will be election of officers for the next biennium. Please make a special effort to attend.

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We invite you to submit articles and information for the January – February 2009 issue of *The Messenger*.