



The Bethlehem Star

July 2026



250 Years of Freedom

Our country is celebrating 250 years on this 4th of July, 2026. We are a special country based on life, liberty, truth and justice for all. I read a sign the other day saying "Freedom isn't free." The USA is a beacon to countries all over the world. Refugees come here for new economic possibilities, freedom of religion, safe havens from oppressive governments, and to start a new life. The Lutheran church has been a reformation haven for our ancestors from Europe (Germany, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and others).

Today's world is chaotic and challenging in many ways. I am encouraged by leaders in our world who offer hope. We must not give up. I am very impressed by strong leadership in today's world which speaks truth to power and will never give up on the ideals of a free America. We have a visionary church in which the ELCA joins in reaching out to our partners around the world to help them to be the best they can be. We need each other. Sharing ideas, compromising and finding the best fit for all is worth the hard struggle.

Lynn and I just got back from a Lutheran World Federation Mission to Zimbabwe and South Africa. We are very proud of the leadership we experienced from Rev. Dr. John Eggan and Emilie Bouvier, our US representatives who led the ministry, but also the leadership we embraced from our African brothers and sisters, Rev. Elitha Moya and three Bishops, Mhaka, Dube, and Sibanda. The residents face huge challenges like shortage of food, education, housing, medical support and infrastructure. These brave partners of faith center their lives around the church. The church builds schools which offer trade skill training, computer labs and grade school and high school opportunities. On top of these basics, they give their students a vision of how their life can be. For instance, we spoke to a talented young college student, Thomas, who is studying to be a doctor because his own mother lost three babies from complications because she had no access to a hospital. Thomas said, "I want to become a doctor so other people do not have to suffer like she did. I will return to my own village, when I am finished with my medical training." The church in Zimbabwe found scholarships to make his dream come true.

There was another young lady who came through their village school system and wants to become a lawyer. Mary said that her pastor told her she could be whatever she wants to be in life if she gets good grades and works hard. He said that he would find a scholarship for her when the time came. Mary wants to give a voice to those around her who feel they have no power and are caught in the tradition of their tribes. For instance, when the young women reach the age of being able to bear children, they are expected to be married off, take care of the household and obey the man of the house. She is a part of a church sponsored program to keep girls in school

The churches are supported, in part, by the Lutheran World Federation, which provides worldwide support. Some of the countries included are the US, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Germany. I am very proud of our Lutheran partners in the LWF who are supporting countries like Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Indonesia and India. It's not just about the giving of money and supplies but it raises awareness of the courage shown, progress made and the profound faith expressed in everyday living in these countries in a lifestyle very different

from ours. Our brothers and sisters in these places do not have much in the way of possessions, food and money or even political power. What these people of faith have is daily living in the Shadow of the Almighty Ps 91:1. They are joyous in spite of their poverty. These saints are truly dependent upon God and not distracted by worldly things. They remember the great first commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself." We can learn something from their faithful living. We live in a world of great distractions from materialism and self enhancement. You and I can be the light of Christ to one another in a challenging world.

The Gospel is our roadmap of wisdom, truth, understanding and hope. Scripture tells us not to fear, with the living Christ by our side. We need not fear those things which can destroy the body or our possessions. We must fear those that can steal our soul. Matt 10:28

Jesus is our King of Kings. Amen

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Bob Hansen

Pulpit Schedule

July

5 Pastor Sharon Rogers

12 Pastor Bob Hansen

19 Pastor Sharon Rogers

26 Pastor Bob Hansen

July Birthdays

2 Donna Rae Ewing
6 Gary Brooks
9 David Farley
10 Robert Ewing
15 Malena Graddy
19 Kimberly Martin
20 Taylor Zak
25 Edward Sisler
28 Heather Ewing



Feed My Sheep Food Pantry

The **May** clients served are as follows:

	2026	2025
Households	416	498
Individuals	1217	1532
Children	294	481
# of Pantries	8	9

Congratulations

On Monday, May 18th, Erick Lambert and Dawn George in a small ceremony decided to make it official and tied the knot. Congratulations, Erick and Dawn! May God guide you through your new journey together and bless your union.



In May our pantry volunteers, coordinator and office staff gathered for our annual appreciation luncheon. Everyone's dedication, your time, and hard work are very much appreciated here at Bethlehem. We celebrated with breakfast pizza for the ones who could come before pantry and subs and chips for the ones who could come after pantry. It was a fun day celebrating and enjoying lots of food. Thanks again to everyone!



AMERICAN HARMONIES

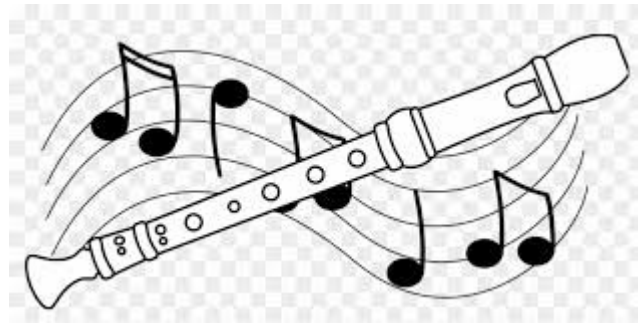
Crosswinds Flute Choir

Sunday, July 19th at 4 pm

Come get your daily dose of Flute!

Free Concert!

**Donations to the Bethlehem Food Pantry or
To the Crosswinds Flute Choir are appreciated.**



Free Senior Movie!

Friday, July 10th

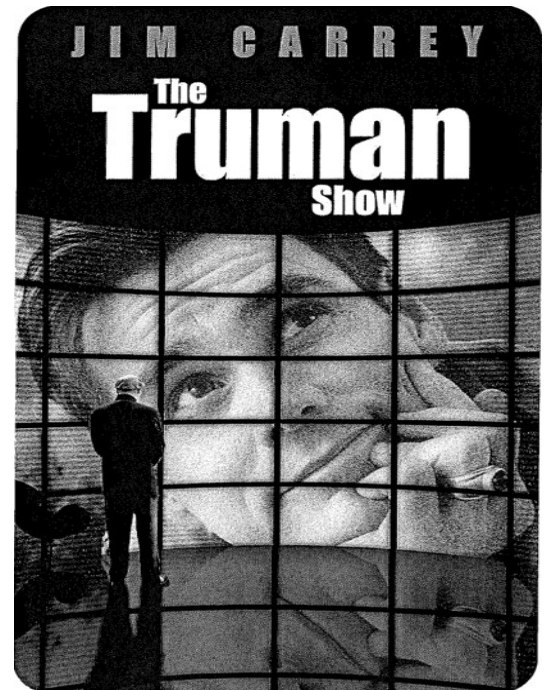
Doors open at 1:30 pm

at the Egyptian Theatre

135 N 2nd Street, DeKalb

**Call 815-754-1300 to secure your tickets
today!**

**Free movie and popcorn thanks to our
sponsor Home Instead.**



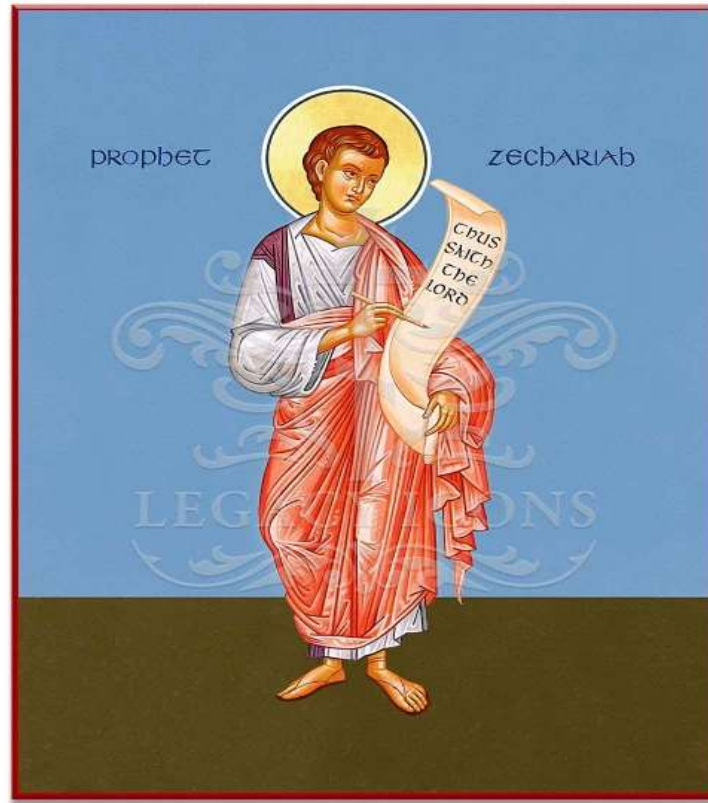
JULY 2026

Monday thru Thurs 8-1
 Phone: 815-758-3203
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 Facebook: bethlehemdekalb

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 8-1 Office Open 10:30 FMS Pick-up Noon-VAC Lunch 7-9 pm Crosswinds Flute Choir	2 8-1 Office Open 8:30 FMS Pick-up 9:30-11:30 FMS Pantry 10:30 Martha's Sisters	3	4 8:30/9:30 FMS Pick-up 
5 9:30 Worship US Semi- quintennial	6 7:30 FMS Delivery 8-1 Office Open 12:30 Cut-Ups	7 8-1 Office Open 3-5 FMS Pantry 7:00-9:30 HarmonEssence	8 8-1 Office Open 10:30 FMS Pick-up Noon-VAC Lunch 7-9 pm Crosswinds Flute Choir	9 8-1 Office Open 8:30 FMS Pick-up 9:30-11:30 FMS Pantry 10:30 Martha's Sisters	10	11 8:30/9:30 FMS Pick-up
12 9:30 Worship Pentecost 7	13 8-1 Office Open 12:30 Cut-Ups	14 8-1 Office Open 3-5 FMS Pantry 7 Church Council 7:00-9:30 HarmonEssence	15 8-1 Office Open 10:30 FMS Pick-up Noon-VAC Lunch 7-9 pm Crosswinds Flute Choir	16 8-1 Office Open 8:30 FMS Pick-up 9:30-11:30 FMS Pantry 10:30 Martha's Sisters	17	18 8:30/9:30 FMS Pick-up
19 9:30 Worship Pentecost 8 4 pm Crosswinds Flute Choir Concert	20 8-1 Office Open 12:30 Cut-Ups	21 7:30 FMS Truck 8-1 Office Open 11 Club 55 Pantry 3-5 FMS Pantry 7:00-9:30 HarmonEssence	22 8-1 Office Open 10:30 FMS Pick-up Noon-VAC Lunch	23 8-1 Office Open 8:30 FMS Pick-up 9:30-11:30 FMS Pantry 10:30 Martha's Sisters	24	25 8:30/9:30 FMS Pick-up
26 9:30 Worship Pentecost 9	27 8-1 Office Open 12:30 Cut-Ups	28 8-1 Office Open 3-5 FMS Pantry 7:00-9:30 HarmonEssence	29 8-1 Office Open 10:30 FMS Pick-up Noon-VAC Lunch	30 8-1 Office Open 8:30 FMS Pick-up 9:30-11:30 FMS Pantry 10:30 Martha's Sisters	31	

During the time of Pentecost, each month a summary of the chapters in the Bible being used for the First Readings will be highlighted throughout Pentecost. July has the chapters of Zechariah, Isaiah, and 1 Kings.

The Prophet Zechariah

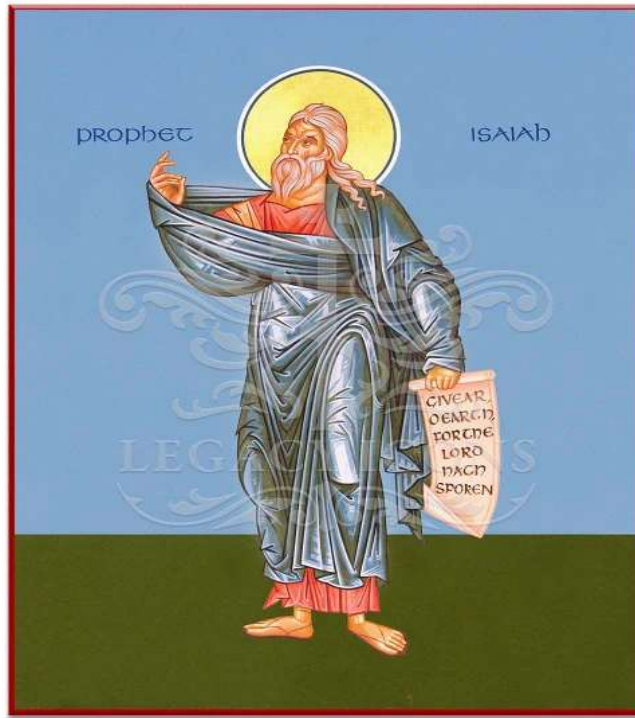


One important aspect of the ancient TaNaK order of the Hebrew Bible is that the 12 prophetic works of [Hosea](#) through [Malachi](#), sometimes referred to as the Minor Prophets, were designed as a single book called The Twelve. Zechariah is the 11th book of The Twelve.

Zechariah is set after the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. We are told in the book of [Ezra](#) ([Ezra 5:1-2](#)) that Zechariah and [Haggai](#) together challenged and motivated the people to rebuild the temple and look for the fulfillment of God's promises. Long ago, [Jeremiah](#) the prophet said that Israel's exile would last for 70 years ([Jer. 25:1](#); [Jer. 29:10](#)) and that afterwards God would restore his presence to a new temple. That's when God would bring his Kingdom and the rule of the messiah over all nations ([Jer. 30-33](#)). The dates at the beginning of this book tell us that the 70 years were almost up, but life back in the land was hard, and it seemed like none of these hopes were ever going to be fulfilled. The book of Zechariah offers an explanation about what went wrong.

The book has a fairly clear literary design. There's an introduction that sets the tone for a large collection of Zechariah's dream-like visions in chapters 1-6. The dreams are concluded in chapters 7-8 and followed by two more collections of poetry and prophecy in chapters 9-11 and 12-14, respectively. Let's dive in and see how it all works.

The Prophet Isaiah



Isaiah lived in Jerusalem during the latter half of Israel's kingdom period and spoke to the leaders of Jerusalem and Judah on God's behalf. Isaiah brought with him a warning about God's judgment, telling Israel's corrupt leaders that their rebellion against the covenant with God would come at a cost. Isaiah also said that God would use the great empires of Assyria and later Babylon to judge Jerusalem if they persisted in idolatry and oppression of the poor.

However, that dire announcement was also combined with a message of hope, as Isaiah believed deeply that God would one day fulfill all his covenant promises. He trusted that God would send a king from David's line to establish his Kingdom on Earth ([2 Sam. 7](#); [Ps. 2](#); [Ps. 72](#)) and lead Israel in obedience to the laws of the covenant made at Mount Sinai ([Exod. 19](#)). This was how God's blessing and salvation would flow outward to all nations, just as God promised to Abraham ([Gen. 12](#)). It's this messianic hope that compelled Isaiah to speak out against the corruption and idolatry of Israel and its leaders.

The book has a complex literary design, but there is one simple way to see how it all fits together. Chapters 1-39 contain three large sections that develop Isaiah's warning of judgment on Israel, culminating in an event pointed to at the end of chapter 39, the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of its people to Babylon. But chapters 1-39 also present a message of hope, that after the exile, God's covenant promises would be fulfilled. Chapters 40-66 pick up that promise and develop it further.

The Books of Kings



1 & 2 Kings

Although the books of 1 and 2 Kings are two separate books in our Bibles, they were originally written as one book telling a unified story. In the previous book of Samuel, David had unified the tribes of Israel into a single kingdom. God promised that [from David's line would come a messianic king](#) who would establish God's Kingdom over the nations and fulfill the promises made to Abraham. The books of Kings tell the story of the long line of kings that came after David, but none of them live up to the promise. In fact, they run the nation of Israel right into the ground.

The books are structured into five main movements. They begin and end with a focus on Jerusalem, first with Solomon's reign and the construction of the temple ([1 Kgs. 1-11](#)) and ending with Jerusalem's destruction and Israel's exile to Babylon ([2 Kgs. 18-25](#)). The story leading up to this tragedy makes up the three center sections. They explain how Israel split into two rival kingdoms ([1 Kgs. 12-16](#)), how God tried to prevent the corruption of Israel and its kings by sending the prophets ([1 Kgs. 17-2 Kgs. 8](#)), and how exile became an unavoidable consequence of Israel's sin ([2 Kgs. 9-17](#)).

As we celebrate the 250th Birthday of the USA, here are scriptures to remind us of our freedom:

1. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).

Jesus sets us free so that we can **remain** free.

In the book of Galatians, the apostle Paul was addressing a church that was struggling with a heavy yoke of religion. Paul encourages the Galatian church to remember why they received Christ in the first place—to be free from the “law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

2. You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh ; rather, serve one another humbly in love (Galatians 5:13).

Paul goes on to explain that freedom is not an excuse to sin. Instead, it’s a responsibility that should be used to serve others.

3. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life (Romans 6:22).

Paul again emphasizes the fact that freedom in Christ isn’t license to sin. In fact, the ultimate product of freedom is holiness and eternal life.

4. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2).

Paul preaches the pure gospel here—by dying on the cross, Jesus set us free from sin.

5. The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners (Isaiah 61:1).

The prophet Isaiah spoke a powerful message, fulfilled by Jesus several hundred years later. Jesus came to proclaim freedom for the captives—and His followers are called to do the same.

6. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17).

The presence of the Holy Spirit brings the freedom to approach God with boldness and confidence (2 Corinthians 3:12-13).

7. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32).

Jesus Himself said it—Ultimate freedom comes from knowing the truth about who we are, who God is, and what He has done for us.

8. Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free (Psalm 118:5).

***The bottom line?** The fourth of July is an awesome time to remind us of our freedom in Christ—and what that means for living a life that honors God.*



Northern Illinois Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Dear ones,

At the 2026 Northern Illinois Synod Assembly, nearly 380 lay leaders and rostered ministers gathered around the theme “Going Deeper: Naming, Claiming, and Proclaiming,

Together we explored some of the most important questions facing the church today and imagined what it means to be a future-focused church.

The deeper questions of faith, purpose and ministry may seem small at first, like a mustard seed, but God uses those seeds to grow more than we can imagine. Because of you, I see those mustard-seed moments throughout our synod every day.

Will you make a gift today to help this ministry continue to grow? Give now:

<https://give.tithe.ly/?formId=6b036760-6864-11ee-90fc-1260ab546d11&locationId=aee86c04-6dda-47a3-8715-ef39ee6de654&fundId=e6c05f2e-4156-4243-b9ac-8c168e8f0eef&amount=10000>

Because of you, in 2025 we:

- Supported and mentored 22 synod-authorized ministers serving 23 congregations.
- Accompanied 11 future pastors and deacons discerning God’s call to ministry.
- Raised more than \$500,000 for ELCA World Hunger.
- Awarded over \$26,000 in local ministry grants – mustard-seed dollars – to congregations with incredible local impact.
- And so much more.

This work happens because people such as you journey together and invest in the future of the church.

Today I invite you to continue this work by making a gift of \$50, \$100, or another meaningful amount. Through your generosity, you equip leaders, strengthen congregations, serve neighbors and proclaim the gospel in communities across our synod and beyond.

Did you miss the synod assembly, or would like to revisit it? Explore the **assembly highlights** on our website.

Together we are naming who God calls us to be, claiming our call as the beloved people of God and boldly proclaiming God's love in word and deed.

Thank you for your partnership and for helping us go deeper together

Walking with you,

+ Bishop Gene Zden
