

Grace Notes



Monthly Publication of the Congregational Activities of Grace Lutheran Church in Newton, NC

email: gracenalcnwton@aol.com

website: www.gracelutheran-newton.org

Church Office: 704-462-1035

Pastor Doug: (980)234-8848 pastorhefner@aol.com

9:30am Sunday School 10:30am Worship Service with Communion

Volume 229, Number 1

JANUARY 2026

“A Great New Year Goal:

Day by Day, Oh Dear Lord, Three Things I Pray:

To See Thee More Clearly, Love Thee More Dearly, Follow Thee More Nearly”

A New Year’s Message from Pastor Doug Hefner

Happy New Year! As we begin another year, we give thanks and praise to God for the blessings of the year past and the promise of the year to come. At this time of year many begin to reflect upon areas of growth and change that they hope to see in their lives. As we leave the season of Christmas and move into the season of Epiphany (“to make known or to reveal”), we see that our Lord Jesus grew from infancy to adulthood. We read in Luke 2:40 that Jesus, **“grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.”** In the same chapter, we get a glimpse of Jesus at the age of 12. Jesus was in “his Father’s house,” growing in his faith and understanding. Then we read in Luke 2:52, **“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people.”** We certainly want to grow in wisdom and faith and live in the grace of God as we enter the new year. In Christ we can – as we gather at the Father’s House (worship, Bible Study, Fellowship) and devote ourselves to the Father’s Business (ministry, service, and outreach). This is what being the Church is all about!

During my youth days and later on in college, **“Godspell”** was a popular musical about the life, ministry, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus based on the gospels of Matthew and Luke. It brought to life Jesus’ message of salvation in an exciting modern day perspective. Even recently the musical has appeared on Broadway and is a favorite for local acting companies. While there are many songs that became popular through the musical, **Day by Day** is the song that became the most popular as it almost made it into the top ten Billboard pop singles in 1972. Here are the words to **Day by Day**:

***Day by day Oh Dear Lord Three things I pray
To see thee more clearly Love thee more dearly
Follow thee more nearly Day by day***

In the musical, as Jesus proclaims His message of love and salvation, many begin to follow Him. His disciples and followers respond to Jesus' call and message by singing ***Day by Day*** to encourage one another to make these three things a priority in their lives. As Jesus calls us to follow and love Him, these words are a great reminder of who we are as the **Church, "Ecclesia" which means literally "the called out ones."** We are the ones called to see Christ more clearly through the power of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament, to Love Christ more dearly in worship, devotion, and serving, and to follow Christ more nearly as we live each day as God's people sharing the Good News of God's love in word and deed. This simple prayer is a great new year's prayer for each of us!

Jesus revealed or made known that He is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, and indeed "God with us." As Peter confessed these things about Jesus, Jesus said this in Matthew 16:18, ***"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock (this confession of faith) I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."*** Just after this conversation Jesus told the disciples that he would suffer, be crucified, die and rise for the Church, Christ's redeemed people. As sinners we know that we sometimes don't live like we are the Church, the body of Christ. In spite of that, the Lord calls us ***to be the Church that our Lord longs for and calls us to be.*** What would such a Church look like? That is what I would like to explore through Scripture and the sermon time during the season of Epiphany.

The word "Church" appears in the New Testament 120 times. Jesus is the head of the Church, the body of Christ as we see in Colossians 1:8 ***"And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."*** In Acts we see that the Church is formed by the power of the Holy Spirit to be the body of Christ in the world. We see that the Church prays, worships, serves, relies on God's Word, witnesses, and gives generously (Acts 2). The Church was purchased by Christ's blood and he calls us to shepherd one another: Acts 20:28 ***"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."*** St. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12:28 that the Church is gifted for service: ***"And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues."*** The Church is generous in showing the proof of

love in 2 Corinthians 8:24 - *Therefore show to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.* St. Paul reminded Timothy that the Church is called to conduct itself in love and faith as he wrote in 1 Timothy 3:15 *“I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”*

As we seek to be in Christ *the Church that our Lord calls for us to be*, we will bring glory to God and build up God’s people in the new year. Thanks be to God for a great year in 2025. Hopefully it was a year that we grew in faith and in many other ways. But the process of growing in faith and in Christ-likeness is not done as St. Paul reminds us in Philippians 3:12-15 (the Message): *“I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back. So let’s keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us.”* As we move into the year 2026, let us keep our eyes on Jesus our Lord and seek to grow in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit! Let us seek *to be the Church the Lord calls for us to be* as we See Christ more clearly, Love Christ more dearly, and Follow Christ more nearly, day by day! A blessed new year to you!

Peace, Love and Joy, Pastor Doug Hefner

Epiphany Sermon Series:

Making Christ Known: The Church Our Lord Calls Us To Be!

9:30am Sunday School; 10:30am Worship Service with Communion

January 4, 2026: Celebration of the Epiphany- Isaiah 63:7-14, Psalm 111, Galatians 4:4-7; Matthew 2:1-23. Worshipping God and hearing God’s Word -What a great way to start the new year! As we anticipate the new year ahead, like the wise men or magi, we too will be led by the light of Christ. So come let us adore Him and honor Christ with the gift of a life lived for the Lord as we proclaim the good news in word and deed.

January 11, 2026: Baptism of Our Lord, “The Church is a Place of Grace!”, Isaiah 42:1-9, Psalm 29, Romans 6:1-11, Matthew 3:13-17. We start the Epiphany Season on January 6 (Day of Epiphany) and our first Sunday in the season is the Baptism of Jesus. Epiphany means to “make known or to reveal.” In Jesus’ baptism Jesus is made known as God’s Son as the heavens open up, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus and the Father says, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” In our baptism, our Lord identifies us as His beloved Spirit-filled sons and daughters! In Jesus’ baptism we learn

what our baptism into Christ death and resurrection is all about. We are God's baptized, Spirit-filled people. We will remember our baptism and recall what it means to be the baptized people of God.

January 18, 2026 Second Sun aft the Epiphany, The Church: Witnesses for Christ as We Walk with Him, Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

In our gospel lesson John the Baptist is a witness to Jesus when he says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Because of that witness, two disciples then go to Jesus to find out more. Jesus says to them, "Come and see." Then one of the disciples, Andrew, tells his brother Simon, "We have found the Messiah." And Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. As the Church we are to witness or make known Christ in our lives in word and deed so that others may come to know and put their faith in Jesus, the Lamb of God!

January 25, 2026 Third Sun aft the Epiphany, The Church: Following Christ to Be His Fishers for People, Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1-9[10-14]; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-25

In our gospel lesson Jesus calls the disciples to follow him. They are invited into a relationship with Jesus that will change their lives. Those who follow Jesus also fish, not just for fish, but for people as well. We go out and cast the net of God's grace and love bringing others to a saving relationship with the Lord. Let's go fishing!

February 1, 2026, Fifth Sun aft the Epiphany, Isaiah 58:3-9a; Psalm 112:1-9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 [13-16]; Matthew 5:13-20 The Church: Letting Our Light Shine.

Jesus continues his sermon on the mount by calling us to be salt and light in the world. Salt was a very valuable commodity back then. Sometimes people were paid in salt (old saying, are you worth your salt) in ancient Rome. Salt preserves food, flavors food, cures hides, and was used in cleaning and other processes. Light, like salt, also makes a difference. Light brings warmth, scatters the darkness enabling us to see, and brings life to the earth. To be salt and light for Jesus means we are called to make Jesus known to others so that His life and love will change the world.

Sunday School: We Continue "The Story" Finding Your Story in God's Love Story!

The Bible is central to our faith but many people are intimidated by its scope and size. The Story gives us a way to journey from Genesis to Revelation together in 31 Bible Studies so everyone understands God's story and how their story intersects with it. It is true that God's Word, the Bible, is "The Greatest Story Ever Told" and it is an amazing story of God's love for us! The Bible is also the best-selling book in history, but how

many people are actually reading it? A Gallup survey reports the average American household has four Bibles. However, research by Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008) found that only 16 percent of Americans read the Bible every day. At Grace we are hoping to reverse this trend! I believe that *The Story* is the right tool to increase Biblical literacy, helping readers understand God's story from Genesis to Revelation and how their own stories intersect with God's. We have finished the Old Testament, the first 21 Sessions. Starting on December 28 we will begin the New Testament with the following chapters: **New Testament: 22** The Birth of the King; **23** Jesus' Ministry Begins; **24** No Ordinary Man **25** Jesus, the Son of God; **26** The Hour of Darkness; **27** The Resurrection; **28** New Beginnings **29** Paul's Mission; **30** Paul's Final Days; **31** The End of Time

***The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.
Isaiah 40:8***

Vespers Service on Wednesdays Continue at 6:30pm

What a wonderful blessing it has been for our Church family to gather on Wednesdays for worship and Bible Study. We use the Vespers order of worship and the sermon time is a Bible Study that opens up the power and promise of God's Word for us. We lift each other up in prayer and we enjoy fellowship together! Fantastic – Right? So, come join us and be a part of this wonderful time of blessing. The service lasts for about 40 minutes and we finish no later than 7:15pm. If you need a ride to come, please let Pastor Doug know. Thanks

Upcoming Events

We Start back using the Story in Sunday School

Sun, 1/4/26 Celebration of the Epiphany of Our Lord (Matthew 2)

Wed, 1/7/26 Fred T Foard Senior Luncheon All Invited 12 noon at Hebron United Methodist Church in Vale

Sun, 1/11/26 The Baptism of Our Lord (Matthew 3:13-17)

Sun, 1/18/26 Grace hosts first service of Week of Christian Unity at 6pm, Dinner Following (we provide soup, sandwiches, dessert afterwards)

Wed, 1/21/26 Grace Senior Luncheon and Program 12 noon All Welcome

Wed, 1/21/26 Ebenezer hosts Christian Unity Service at 6pm, Dinner following

Sun, 1/25/26 Daniels Lutheran hosts Christian Unity Service at 6pm, Dinner following

Sun, 2/8/26 Friendship Sunday, Everyone asked to invite your friends to worship. We will have a special gift for friends who join us. The theme of the service and sermon will be about the blessings of Christian friendship!

Sun, 2/15/26 Transfiguration Sunday

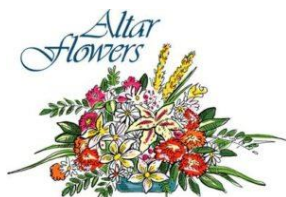
Wed, 2/18/26 Ash Wednesday Service, Imposition of Ashes/Communion

WORSHIP ASSISTANTS FOR JANUARY

❖ Lector	Stormy Shull
❖ Ushers	Chris Jarrett & Jack Parris
❖ Communion Assistants	Sheila Drum & Sherry Biggerstaff
❖ Altar Preparation	Cindy Bivens
❖ Offering Tabulators	Todd Childers & Jeff Scronce

*Please be mindful of your commitment to serve. If you are unable to fulfill that commitment, be reminded that it is **your** responsibility to find someone to serve in your place.*

FLOWER CHART FOR JANUARY



1/4	OPEN	1/11	OPEN
1/18	OPEN	1/25	OPEN

If you wish to place flowers on a given Sunday, please list your name on the chart in the narthex. *You are responsible for ordering the flowers from a florist of your choice.* The liturgical color of the day is listed to assist you in selecting flowers appropriate for that Sunday. Please notify the Church Office by the Tuesday prior to your selected Sunday to ensure correct information is printed in the bulletin.

ATTENDANCE AND GIVING TO OUR LORD'S WORK FOR DECEMBER

	11/30/2025	12/7/2025	12/14/2025	12/21/2025
Sunday School	10	8	11	9
Worship	39	45	44	44
General Fund Offerings	\$4,250	\$1,765	\$2,295	\$2,110

FRED T. FOARD SENIOR LUNCHEON will be held on Wednesday, January 7th at 12:00 noon at Hebron United Methodist Church. All are invited!

Below is the luncheon schedule for 2026:

January 1st	Hebron UMC
February 4th	Laurel Hill UMC
March 4th	Ebenezer UMC
April 1st	Sardis Lutheran
May 6th	Plateau Community Church
June 3rd	Grace Lutheran
July 1st	Wesley Chapel UMC
August 5th	Laurel Hill UMC
September 2nd	Ebenezer UMC
October 7th	Sardis Lutheran
November 4th	Plateau Community Church
December 2nd	Grace Lutheran

THE GRACE PRAYER BREAKFAST will be held on Saturday, January 10th at 9:00am at Four Peas in a Pod Restaurant on Highway 70 in Conover. Great food and great fellowship! Please come and bring a friend!

THE FINANCE COMMITTEE AND OFFICERS OF THE BOARD will meet on Monday, January 12th at 6:00 pm to hear a presentation from Fore Rembert of Benjamin F. Edwards Financial Group.

THE NEXT MEETING OF THE LEADERSHIP MINISTRY BOARD is scheduled for Monday, January 19th at 6:00 pm.

THE GRACE PRAYER LUNCHEON will be held on Wednesday, January 21st at 12:00 noon in Fellowship Hall. All are invited!

WORSHIP ASSISTANT VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED! - Please offer your services as a Lector, Usher, or Communion Assistant for the upcoming months. Worship Assistants help to make our worship experience more meaningful. If you would like to serve during a particular month, please notify Todd Childers.

ASHURE MINISTRY FOOD ASK for the month of January is canned soup or broth. We are doing great things at Grace in helping feed the hungry in our own community. Let's try to donate 2,000 pounds in 2026! That would be around 170 pounds per month. We can do it! Let's come together to help reach this goal! In 2025 the disciples of Grace donated 1,561 pounds of food to Ashure Ministry.

RIGHT NOW MEDIA

Grace would like to extend to you a free gift: Use of Right Now Media, which comes with 25,000 teaching videos and downloadable Bible Study guide resources for the whole family. There are resources for a wide variety of Bible Studies and for topics like marriage, parenting, men, women, finances, and youth/children. Follow this link to register: <http://app.rightnowmedia.org/join/glcnc>. Or you can set it up on your phone, iPad, tablet by texting GLCNC to 49775. You can use this resource on any smart device, including your TV.