

Travel the Christmas Story

Drive-to Scenes of the Nativity at Duluth-Area ELCA Congregations

We're so excited to have a drive-through telling of the nativity story as a project of some area ELCA congregations. Our goal was to have each congregation display a part of the story so that we can have a fuller experience of this sacred story with Bible readings, reflections, and prayer at each site. Thanks to everyone who pitched in.

With great joy, we invite you into Advent and the Christmas season.

Scene 1: Angels visit Mary and Joseph

Elim Lutheran – 6101 Cody Street, Duluth

The display is located in the church's upper parking lot, entrance located at the corner of 61st Avenue West and West 8th Street.

Scripture

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son Matthew 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

Artist Statement

"Do not be afraid." While reading the Annunciation, those words seemed to leap off the page. First, they were shared during the angel's message to Mary. And then, again, there they were when the angel visited Joseph. During their time of uncertainty, questions, and fear, the angel, this messenger of God, brought words of comfort and reassurance. We chose to focus on this as it is a message we need to be reminded of and to take comfort in today during our own uncertainties, questions, and fears.

Connect with Elim

Facebook: ElimDuluth

www.elimlc.com

Display made by Roy Ober and Deb & Noah Westerberg

Scene 2: The Empire Calls for a Census; Mary and Joseph Travel to Bethlehem Our Savior's Lutheran Church — 4831 Grand Avenue

Enter in from Grand Ave and stay to the left near Faith Haven Apartments. Then turn to enter the church's lot and travel from the office door entrance moving through the display towards Grand Ave.

Scripture

Luke 2:1-5

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered.

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

Artists' Statement

Our display highlights the travel this family was forced to make because their homeland was occupied by the Roman Empire. This would have meant a very pregnant Mary had to walk (or ride) around 70-90 miles. That would be like walking from here to Toftel!

Take out your phone and map the longest trip you've taken. How many miles was it? Did you travel by car or another mode of transportation? Where did you go? How long did it take? Who made that journey safe and comfortable for you?

Joseph and Mary's journey calls to mind all those who are forced to travel today. Some flee abuse in their homes and aren't sure if they will find a safer place. Some flee violence in their nation and hope to find refuge. Some travel in hopes of opportunities that will provide for themselves and their loved ones. Remembering that it was our Lord's family who was also on the move grows our compassion and turns our hearts and actions towards those who are forced to move today.

The image of a pregnant mother and her betrothed alone on the road highlights their vulnerability and powerlessness under the empire. We do not live under foreign rule, as Mary and Joseph did. We have the power to shape the policies of our nation towards care for those who are most vulnerable.

Who are the people who are vulnerable today as they travel?

This year, I'm especially mindful of people who are on the move daily to secure their basic needs and keep warm. There are many in the Duluth community who do not have safe, permanent housing. It doesn't always have to be this way. Learn about the work of some of our partners who engage in supportive options: [Stepping On Up \(steppingonupduluth.org\)](http://steppingonupduluth.org) [Welcome to CHUM Nonprofit in Duluth, MN \(chumduluth.org\)](http://chumduluth.org) <https://lifehouseduluth.org/> [Transitional Housing for Youth in Duluth | Lutheran Social Service of MN \(lssmn.org\)](http://lutheran-social-service.org)

This season, we not only honor Jesus through our decorations and celebrations, but with our active work for the well-being of all God's creation.

Prayer

God, with these decorative lights, we remember that you brighten our paths. Give us courage in whatever difficult journeys we may be on right now. Travel alongside us. We remember that you illuminate all that is hidden in shadow. Help us to see those who are most vulnerable, to recognize their humanity, and honor them as your beloved ones. Shine through our works of compassion, generosity, advocacy, and love. Amen.

Connect with Our Savior's

Worship Sundays at 9am; Christmas Eve at 4pm; Christmas Day at 9am

Website: oursaviorsduluth.org

Find us on Facebook: Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran Church

Subscribe to our livestream on YouTube: Our Savior's Lutheran Duluth

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Scene 3: Jesus is born

First Lutheran Church — 1100 E Superior St

If heading east on Superior toward 12th Ave E, take the first right after the church building into the parking lot. The nativity scene will be located just underneath the star to the left of the awning of the church's entryway. You won't be able to miss it!

Scripture

Luke 2:6-7

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Our theme this year taken from A Sanctified Art is "From Generation to Generation." The theme is taken from the Magnificat- Mary's Song in Luke 1:48 b-50:

*Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him*

from generation to generation.

Find the QR Code in the manger and pick up one of the cards. The QR code will take you to our hymn *From Generation to Generation* to the tune of *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly*. It covers all four Advent themes. Here are the words:

Refrain:

Generation to generation, we have shared the Christmas story
of a baby in a manger, who was born in Bethlehem.

Hope is winging, peace now ringing

Joy we're singing, love he's bringing

Verses:

1. There is room for every story. There is hope through God's great glory
2. God will meet you in your fear. And bring peace both far and near.
3. We can choose a better way. And find joy in ev'ry day.
4. We see God in one another- as we learn to love each other.

Take a moment to sing the hymn. Depending upon which week you arrive here at the manger, there will be a different question for you to reflect upon. Write your answer on the card and tack it to the manger – the symbol of the place that held the Christ child who holds our hopes, our fears, our joys, what makes us feel loved and swaddles all of them and us with grace.

Week 1-- What gives you hope?

This week in our worship we read Matthew 1:1-17 which holds the family tree of Jesus. It is a list of Biblical persons, some whose stories we know and some whose stories we probably don't, but all these stories lead us to this story of Christ's birth among us – of hope enfleshed. How is Christ connected to the hope you wrote down?

Week 2-- What are you afraid of?

This week in worship we read of Angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she will bear a son. Gabriel says these comforting words that we hear throughout the Christmas story and throughout Scripture- "Do not be afraid." How do these words speak to the fear that you wrote down?

Week 3-- What brings you joy?

This week in worship we read the story of Joseph being informed that his betrothed is pregnant and not by him. He, too, hears the words: "Do not be afraid." He has choices before him and chooses the way of grace over condemnation. He does not cast Mary out but remains with her and raises her child as his own. This brings rather than heartache to Mary, to him and ultimately to the world. How is the joy of this birth connected to what brings you joy?

Week 4-- What makes you feel loved?

This week in worship we read the story of Mary visiting her cousin, Elizabeth. They are both pregnant, Elizabeth with John the Baptist; Mary with Jesus. Elizabeth is so welcoming of Mary that even the baby in her womb leaps for joy and she speaks a blessing over Mary who surely feels mightily loved with this reception. How is what makes you feel loved reflected in this story?

For each week—

We welcome the Christ child into the world and into our lives; as we welcome so are we welcomed with our hopes, our fears, and our joys and sent out into the world to be Christ's loving, welcoming presence to all. May it be so. Amen.

Connect with First Lutheran:

All are welcome to worship with First Lutheran: faithlovecommunity
fcduluth.org [facebook.com/fcduluth](https://www.facebook.com/fcduluth)

Lessons and Carols Sunday, December 18th 3:00pm
Blue Christmas, The Longest Night, Wednesday Dec. 21st, 6:00pm

Christmas Eve Worship
All 3 livestreamed; 5:00pm radio
KDAL 610AM / 103.9 FM
Family Service 3:00pm
Candlelight Service 5:00pm and 10:00pm

Christmas Day 10:00am
KDAL 610AM/103.9FM

Epiphany Celebration Sunday, January 8th 8:30am and 11:00am
Prayer for All the Nations
8:30 radio; both livestreamed

Scene 4: Angels visit the Shepherds in the Fields Kenwood Lutheran Church — 2720 Myers Avenue

Scripture

Luke 2: 8-14

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!"

Artist's Statement

The story of the shepherds is quite unique since the very nature of the shepherd's life is so very solitary. In the nativity it is these unlikely heralds that God uses to share the good news that God is in our midst.

Immanuel: God with us. The shepherd's terror at the appearance of the angel's announcement become the triumphant acclamation of God's savior born to take away our sin. The display hopefully captures a bit of both the terror and the sense of hopefulness that is at the heart of their story, as well as ours.

A Shepherds Prayer

Oh gracious God, the nights can be dark, silent and cold, but your love for us breaks in and shines its light to awaken and warm our hearts. May shepherds of every age both fear and proclaim your son's birth and guide us into your son's presence. May they give voice to the good news, that all people are loved and saved by your grace. Assure in us the hope that all may live under the gentle rule that brought the baby Jesus into our world. We ask this in Jesus name! Amen.

Connect with Kenwood

Kenwood is worshipping virtually these days, but there are many opportunities to participate in their ministry activities. Join us by checking our online schedule @ Kenwoodlutheran.org

Have a blessed week and a wonderful Advent/Christmas season!

Scene 5: The Visit of the Magi & The Holy Family Escape to Egypt Grace Lutheran Church — 5454 Miller Trunk Hwy, Hermantown

Scripture

Matthew 2: 1-15: The Visit of the Magi

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The Escape to Egypt

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

Artists' Statement

Our display is essentially 3 sections of the story woven together... they will all be near one another in front of the church

1. First, you will see the 3 Magi bearing gifts guided by the star—we remember that God guides us on the way as we use our gifts for God's mission in the world. We can think about how we might especially be called to follow Christ to help our neighbor in need.
2. Next, the Manger scene with star overhead. Mary and Joseph kneel next to the manger (which is made into a box to hold donations for CHUM). Tonight, you are invited to leave a gift for our neighbors at the manger of Jesus if you are able. Grace Lutheran Church is doing a special collection of items for CHUM during the Advent/Christmas season to support their health care and outreach ministries.

CHUM is a community of faith working together to provide basic necessities, foster stable lives, and organize for a just and compassionate community. They do this by providing emergency shelter, three food shelves and outreach to individuals living on the street, under freeways or in the woods in the Duluth area. Grace Lutheran is one of the 40 churches making up the community of faith that supports CHUM.

CHUM currently has a need for the following items:

- New underwear, boxers, bras, socks (a dark color)
 - Deodorant, Tampons, Hand warmers, Chapstick, Candles
 - Heavy winter coats, Winter boots, Winter hats, gloves, and scarves
3. Finally, the display includes an angel along with the holy family fleeing to Egypt—we remember that God is with all who face danger and uncertainty in our world. As the holy family fled to another country, we keep all refugees in prayer. We pray for God's peace and safety for all those who live in fear.

Prayer

Lord God,

Be with us on the way as we seek to know and worship you. Guide us with the light of Christ into your presence and help us to respond to your love with glad and generous hearts for the sake of our neighbor in need. Be with us when we are fearful, when the dangers and uncertainty in this world surround us.

Keep watch over us and bless us with your peace and a safe place to rest.

Amen.

Connect with Grace:

All are welcome to join us for worship! Grace Lutheran offers weekly worship on Sundays at 9:30am and Wednesday nights at 6:30pm. Services are also streamed on Grace's Facebook page. Check out our website for weekly faith resources for families to use in your home.

Join us for our Christmas Eve services at 2pm and 4pm as we celebrate the birth of Jesus!

www.facebook.com/gracehermantown www.gracehermantown.com