

# KOUNTZE MEMORIAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

## A CITY-WIDE CHURCH WITH A WORLD-WIDE MINISTRY

Olaf Roynesdal, Senior Pastor  
Shari Duminy, Associate Pastor  
H. Ashley Hall, Associate Pastor  
Inba Inbarasu, Visitation Pastor

2650 Farnam Street  
Omaha, NE 68131-3616  
402-341-7761

January 31, 2021

9:00 AM

FOURTH SUNDAY after THE EPIPHANY



*The Presentation of Our Lord is referred to in some corners of the church as Candlemas because of an ancient tradition of blessing all the candles to be used in the church in the coming year at the mass celebrated on that day. It was a way of underscoring the truth of Simeon's confession that this baby Jesus was "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" and a light for glory to Israel. Let the light of every candle in church be a little epiphany of the love of God for all people in the person of God's son, Jesus, the light of the world*

# GATHERING

## PRELUDE

*Mark Jones, organ*

## WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

*(stand)*

## CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

**P** Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God, Father, † Son and Holy Spirit, whose voice is upon the waters, whose mercy is poured out upon all people, whose goodness cascades over all creation.

**C** Amen.

**P** Let us confess our sin, trusting in the abundant grace of God.

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

**P** Holy God,

**C** you search us and know us.

**You are acquainted with all our ways.**

**We confess that our hearts are burdened by sin—**

**our own sins and the broken systems that bind us.**

**We turn inward, failing to follow**

**your outward way of love.**

**We distrust those who are not like us.**

**We exploit the earth and its resources**

**and fail to consider generations to come.**

**Forgive us, gracious God,**

**for all we have done and left undone.**

**Even before the words are on our tongues, you know them;**

**receive them in your divine mercy. Amen.**

**P** How vast is God's grace! Through the power and promise of † Christ Jesus, our sins are washed away and we are claimed as God's own beloved. Indeed, we are forgiven. In the wake of God's forgiveness, we are called to be the beloved community living out Christ's justice and the Spirit's reconciling peace.

**C** Amen.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1</b> In his temple now behold him,<br/>see the long-expected Lord;<br/>ancient prophets had foretold him,<br/>God has sent the promised Word.<br/>Now to praise him, his redeemed<br/>shall break forth with one accord.</p> <p><b>2</b> In the arms of her who bore him,<br/>virgin pure, behold him lie,<br/>while his aged saints adore him,<br/>ere in perfect faith they die.<br/>Alleluia! Alleluia!<br/>Lo, the incarnate God Most High!</p> | <p><b>3</b> Jesus, by your presentation,<br/>when they blessed you, weak and poor,<br/>make us see your great salvation,<br/>seal us with your promise sure;<br/>and present us, in your glory,<br/>to your Father, cleansed and pure.</p> <p><b>4</b> Prince and author of salvation,<br/>be your boundless love our theme!<br/>Jesus, praise to you be given<br/>by the world you did redeem,<br/>with the Father and the Spirit<br/>God of majesty supreme!</p> |
|--|--|

Text: Henry J. Pye, 1825-1903, alt.

### APOSTOLIC GREETING

- ☐ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- ☑ **And also with you.**

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

- ☐ Almighty and ever-living God,
- ☑ **your only-begotten son was presented this day in the Temple. May we be presented to you with clean and pure hearts by the same Jesus Christ, our great high priest, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

# WORD

(sit)

## FIRST READING

**Malachi 3:1-4**

*This reading concludes a larger section (2:17—3:5) in which the prophet speaks of the coming of the God of justice. Malachi looks for that day when the wondrous power of God will purify the priestly descendants of Levi who minister in the temple at Jerusalem.*

**S**ee, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. <sup>2</sup>But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; <sup>3</sup>he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. <sup>4</sup>Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

☐ The word of the Lord.

☑ **Thanks be to God.**

## PSALM 84 (read responsively)

<sup>1</sup>How dear to me is your dwelling,

O LORD of hosts!

<sup>2</sup>**My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.**

<sup>3</sup>Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young,  
by the side of your altars, O LORD of hosts, my king and my God.

<sup>4</sup>**Happy are they who dwell in your house!  
They will always be praising you.**

<sup>5</sup>Happy are the people whose strength is in you,  
whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way.

<sup>6</sup>**Those who go through the balsam valley will find it a place of springs,  
for the early rains have covered it with pools of water.**

<sup>7</sup>They will climb from height to height,  
and the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

<sup>8</sup>**LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob.**

<sup>9</sup>Behold our defender, O God;  
and look upon the face of your anointed.

<sup>10</sup>**For one day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.  
I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.**

<sup>11</sup>For the LORD God is both sun and shield, bestowing grace and glory;  
no good thing will the LORD withhold from those who walk with integrity.

<sup>12</sup>**O LORD of hosts,  
happy are they who put their trust in you!**

## THE SECOND READING

Hebrews 2:14-18

*Jesus shared human nature fully so that his death might be for all humans a liberation from slavery to death's power. Here the writer uses the image of priestly service in the temple as a way of describing the life and saving death of the Lord Jesus. He is the high priest who offers his life on behalf of his brothers and sisters.*

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, [Jesus] himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,<sup>15</sup> and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.<sup>16</sup> For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham.<sup>17</sup> Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people.<sup>18</sup> Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

☒ The word of the Lord.

☑ Thanks be to God

(stand)

## GOSPEL ACCLAMATION



☒ The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke.

☑ Glory to you, O Lord!

## HOLY GOSPEL

Luke 2:22-40

*This story is a study in contrasts: the infant Jesus with the aged prophets; the joy of birth with the ominous words of Simeon to Mary; the faithful fulfilling of the law with the presentation of the one who will release its hold over us. Through it all, we see the light of God's salvation revealed to the world.*

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord<sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"),<sup>24</sup> and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

<sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.<sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.<sup>27</sup> Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,<sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

<sup>29</sup>"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

<sup>30</sup>for my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup>which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
<sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”  
<sup>33</sup>And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup>Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “*This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed* <sup>35</sup>so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

<sup>36</sup>There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup>then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup>At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup>When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

☐ The Gospel of the Lord.

☑ Praise to you, O Christ.

(sit)

## CHILDREN’S BLESSING

## SERMON

Pastor Hall

(stand)

## HYMN OF THE DAY

“Abide, O Dearest Jesus”

ELW 539

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>1 Abide, O dearest Jesus,<br/>among us with your grace,<br/>that evil may not harm us<br/>nor we to sin give place.</b></p> <p><b>2 Abide, O dear Redeemer,<br/>among us with your word<br/>and thus now and hereafter<br/>true peace and joy afford.</b></p> | <p><b>3 Abide with heav'nly brightness<br/>among us, precious Light;<br/>your truth direct and keep us<br/>from error's gloomy night.</b></p> <p><b>4 Abide with richest blessings<br/>among us, bounteous Lord;<br/>let us in grace and wisdom<br/>grow daily through your word.</b></p> <p><b>5 Abide, O faithful Savior,<br/>among us with your love;<br/>grant steadfastness and help us<br/>to reach our home above.</b></p> |
|---|---|

Text: Josua Stegmann, 1588-1632;  
tr. August Crull, 1845-1923

## THE APOSTLES' CREED

☞ With the whole church, let us confess our faith.

☞ **I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

**Response:** ☞ Lord, in your mercy, ☞ **hear our prayer.**

*(In our prayers today, during a time of silence, pray for those listed below and for others according to their needs)*

**Sympathy:** to the family and friends of Betty Bass; to the family and friends of Joanie Hoke, daughter of John Waterman

**Thanksgiving:** for the baptism of Louis Stephen Urlaub, son of Stephen and Jennifer Urlaub

**Illness:** Lois Andresen, Shelley Bergmann, sister of Shannon Picha, Richard Bock, Kristin Boe, Don Burton, Myrna Carter, Mike Cswerko, Zella Duchman, Carol Duncan, Mike Edris, Rodney Edwards, Richard Holzer, Karen Jacobson, Renee Johnson, Marcie Lafleur, Mary Olson, Toby Rees, Gary Rodene, Judy Ryan, Sheri Tipton, Dorothy Vancaster, John Waterman, Darlene White, Robert Whitehead, Joanne Worm

**Other Prayers:** *Those serving in the military* – Amy Dyer, Brennan Hron, Wyatt Johnson, Josh Kropenske, Michael McNeill, Daniel Milstead, Cody Ray, Sheldon Skovgaard, Michael Vutov, Joel Woosley

**Other Prayers:** *Those serving in mission* – Rev. Chandran Paul Martin, India; Dr. Stephen & Jodi Swanson, Tanzania; Rev. Rachel Ringlaben, Argentina; Meghan Brown Saavedra, Mexico; and Dan & Ginny Rath, international translators

**Other Prayers:** *Seminarians*—Adam Klinker, Katie Larson, Giselle Loucks, Justin Perkins

## WE SHARE GOD’S PEACE

**P** The peace of Christ be with you always.

**C** **And also with you.**

*As we share the peace today – and you do so in your home – You are invited you to contact a fellow member by phone, email or letter. You can do that today or any time during the week. Pick someone from the church directory. We could email each other or call each other during this time when we cannot meet. Then each week select another person to contact. Try to make it someone you don’t really know and get acquainted with them. Always be sure to leave your address, email, and phone number on your message in case they do not have a directory. Talk to people you know and get the names and addresses of those who might not have directories and try to contact them. By the time we meet again we will have made many new friends.*

## MEAL

(sit)

### THE OFFERING IS RECEIVED

*Please Support the overall ministry of Kountze Memorial during these difficult times. If you are visiting with us today, please do not feel obligated to participate in this portion of worship. If you would like, use the QR code scanner on your smart phone to give online. If you are able, please mail in your offering or donate on-line. Thank you!*



### OFFERTORY MUSIC

“Thy Word”

Michael W. Smith & Amy Grant  
Dayle Johnson, *soloist*  
Jean Johnson, *accompanist*

### THE TABLE IS PREPARED

(stand)

### OFFERTORY HYMN



Cre-ate in me a clean heart, O God, and re-new a right  
spir-it with-in me. Cast me not a-way from your pres-ence, and take  
not your Ho-ly Spir-it from me. Re-store to me the joy of  
your sal-va-tion, and up-hold me with your free Spir-it.



## OFFERING PRAYER

- P** O God,  
**C** receive these gifts as you receive us: like a mother receives her child, with arms open wide. Nourish us anew in your tender care, and empower us in faithful service to tend to others with this same love, through Jesus Christ, our saving grace. Amen.

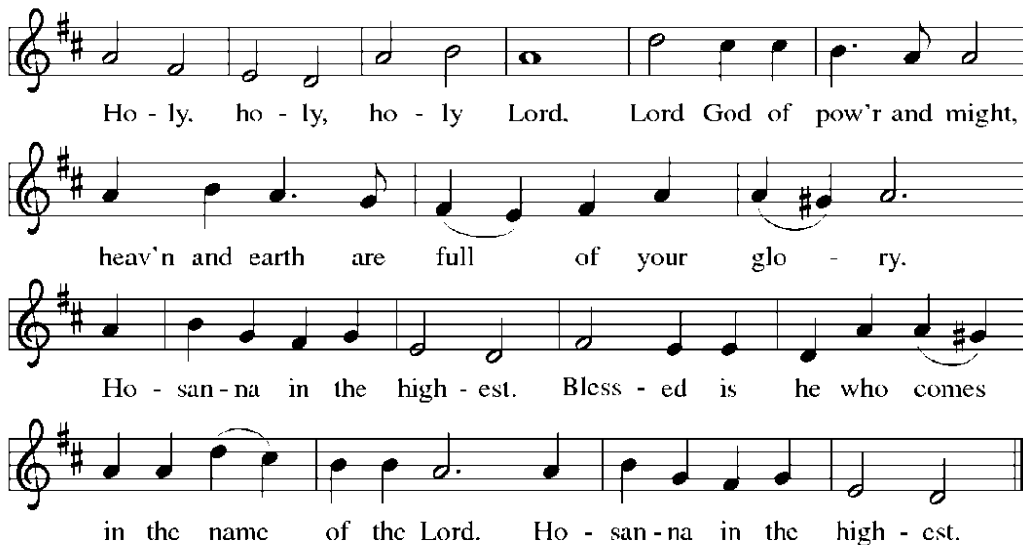
## HOLY COMMUNION

- P** The Lord be with you.  
**C** And also with you.
- P** Lift up your hearts.  
**C** We lift them to the Lord.
- P** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**C** It is right to give our thanks and praise.

## PREFACE FOR EPIPHANY

- P** It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. By the leading of a star he was shown forth to all nations; in the waters of the Jordan you proclaimed him your beloved Son; and in the miracle of water turned to wine he revealed your glory. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

## SANCTUS



Ho - ly. ho - ly, ho - ly Lord. Lord God of pow'r and might,  
heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry.  
Ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes  
in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

## THE WORDS OF INSTITUTION

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

**P** Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us all to pray:

**C** **Our Father, who art in heaven,**  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,  
forever and ever. Amen.

## INVITATION TO COMMUNION

**P** Holy Beloved: here is bread; here is wine. Here is Jesus.

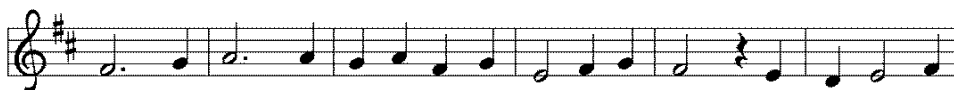
**C** Come and be fed.

## DISTRIBUTION

*All baptized Christians who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and his Real Presence in, with and under the bread and wine, are welcome to the Lord's Supper. We believe that this is the Lord's table and is he who invites you. So you who are strong in faith, come with gratitude. You feel weak in faith, come to be strengthened. And you who feel you have no faith, come so that the God of steadfast love will touch your heart with hope and joy.*

(sit)

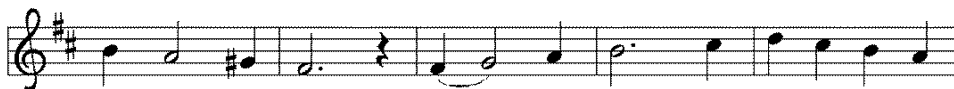
## AGNUS DEI



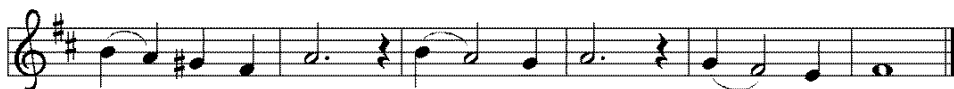
Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on



us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have



mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the



sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

- 1** Now we join in celebration  
at our Savior's invitation,  
dressed no more in spirit somber,  
clothed instead in joy and wonder;  
for the Lord of all existence,  
putting off divine transcendence,  
stoops again in love to meet us,  
with his very life to feed us.
- 2** Lord, as round this feast we gather,  
fill our hearts with holy rapture!  
For this bread and cup of blessing  
are for us the sure possessing  
of your loving deed on Calv'ry,  
of your living self, our vict'ry,  
pledge of your unfailing presence,  
foretaste here of heav'nly gladness.
- 3** Lord, we share in this communion  
as one fam'ly of God's children,  
reconciled through you, our brother,  
one in you with God our Father.  
Give us grace to live for others,  
serving all, both friends and strangers,  
seeking justice, love, and mercy  
till you come in final glory.

Text: Joel W. Lundeen  
Text © Joel W. Lundeen, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

*"My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness"*

ELW 251

- 1** My soul proclaims your greatness, Lord;  
I sing my Savior's praise!  
You looked upon my lowliness,  
and I am full of grace.  
Now ev'ry land and ev'ry age  
this blessing shall proclaim—  
great wonders you have done for me,  
and holy is your name.
- 2** To all who live in holy fear  
your mercy ever flows.  
With mighty arm you dash the proud,  
their scheming hearts expose.  
The ruthless you have cast aside,  
the lowly throned instead;  
the hungry filled with all good things,  
the rich sent off unfed.
- 3** To Israel, your servant blest,  
your help is ever sure;  
the promise to our parents made  
their children will secure.  
Sing glory to the Holy One,  
give honor to the Word,  
and praise the Pow'r of the Most High,  
one God, by all adored.

Text: *With One Voice*, 1995, based on the Magnificat  
Text © 1995 Augsburg Fortress.

(stand)

## PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

- P** Let your servants depart in peace, O Lord,  
**C** according to your word; for our eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory to your people Israel. Amen.

## SENDING

### BLESSING

- P** God, the creator strengthen you; Jesus, the beloved fill you; and the Holy Spirit the comforter ✠ keep you in peace.

### THREE-FOLD AMEN

### HYMN

*“O Lord, Now Let Your Servant”*

ELW 313

**1** O Lord, now let your servant  
depart in heav'nly peace,  
for I have seen the glory  
of your redeeming grace:  
a light to lead the nations  
unto your holy hill,  
the glory of your people,  
your chosen Israel.

**2** Then grant that I may follow  
your gleam, O glorious Light,  
till earthly shadows scatter,  
and faith is changed to sight;  
till raptured saints shall gather  
upon that shining shore,  
where Christ, the blessed daystar,  
shall light them evermore.

Text: Ernest E. Ryden, 1886-1981, alt., based on the Nunc dimittis  
Text © 1925 Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, admin. Augsburg Fortress.

### DISMISSAL

- P** Go in peace. Be the light of Jesus Christ.  
**C** Thanks be to God.

### POSTLUDE

*Mark Jones, Organist*

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## Special Notice

If you plan to attend Worship in person, please call/e-mail the church office no later than noon on the Thursday before the Saturday or Sunday you want to attend. Please note that the plans set forth are subject to immediate change. You may still join us for Worship on Cox channel 13 or live streamed at <https://www.kmlchurch.org/live-streaming/>



# KOUNTZE

Memorial Lutheran Church

2650 Farnam Street  
402-341-7761

Omaha, NE 68131  
[www.kmlchurch.org](http://www.kmlchurch.org)

**January 30 & 31, 2021**

## Kountze Food Pantry

### Volunteers Needed

**Mondays, 7:30 - 9:00 AM;**

**9:00 - 11:00 AM;**

**11:00 AM - 1:00 PM**

**Fridays, 4:00 - 7:00 PM**

The Food Pantry is greatly in need of volunteers that can work 7:00 AM - 9:30 AM. This is when we get our deliveries and the heavy lifting is done. We are moving approximately 10,000 pounds of food every week. That is a lot for 1-3 people. Many hands make light work! Please consider yourself, or anyone you can send to help. In addition, no one has stepped forward to volunteer to carry out food to the cars of our guests. The more people we have, the shorter time each person has to work in the cold. We have shopping carts to assist the volunteers, so you only have to lift into and out of the cart. You will be paid handsomely with coffee and Barb's cookies! Please consider helping them out by volunteering at the link below:

<https://form.jotform.com/200834787701155>

## Official Notice

### Annual Meeting

**Sunday, February 14**

**10:30 AM in the Sanctuary**

**(& the Fellowship Hall if needed)**

The meeting will be in-person and will also be live-streamed and zoomed.

A Question and Answer Session on the 2021 Budget (included in this February Good News) will be held on **Sunday, February 7 at 10:30 AM**. This will also be live-streamed. If you have questions regarding the budget



## Attendance and Giving

**Saturday Attendance: 14**

**Sunday Attendance: 9:00: 51**

**Total: 65**

**Online Attendance:**

**Pantry Guests Served: 291**

**Medical Clinic Guests Served: 27**

**Offering:**

\$9,021.00 (Regular) \$1,162.26 (Specials)

\$1,012.00 (Debt Reduction)

please email them to our treasurer, Tim Backora (tbackora@cox.net) or to Pastor Olaf (olaf@kmlchurch.org).

## Youth Summer Trip

Summer Trip Planning is in the beginning stages. A Zoom Meeting with youth and parents will be scheduled in February. A mailing will be sent out to all youth in the congregation telling of the date and options. If you are interested and did not get this letter, please inform the church office so one can be sent to you.

## Register for Summer Camp!

All summer camp registrations are done on a secure online registration site called UltraCamp. You will need to create an account through UltraCamp in order to register. View the instructions document on the registration page and click the UltraCamp button to start the registration process. You will be transferred to our secure online registration site called UltraCamp. There, you'll set up an account to register your child. Go to <https://www.caroljoyholling.org/schedule> to schedule. Note: For the 2021 summer camp season, all deposits are fully refundable.

## Today at Kountze

**Altar Flowers** are given to the glory of God in appreciation of Robin & Jeff Perkins given by Richard Bock

## Online Sunday School

Lessons are videotaped and posted on the KMLC Parents Facebook page as well as our Kountze Facebook Page.

## Youth Forum

**Sundays, 10:20 - 11 AM**

All youth in grades 9-12 are invited.

**In-Person:** 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays at the church in Kountze Commons Link/Greenspace.

**Zoom:** 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays (email Pastor Shari if you would like the link)

**Adventures:** 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Month

## Jesus casts out unclean spirits.

These passages are related to the Lectionary texts for this Sunday.

Sunday	Mark 1:21-28	Jesus teaches in the synagogue
Monday	Deuteronomy 18:15-20	A new prophet like Moses
Tuesday	1 Corinthians 8:1-13	Love builds up others
Wednesday	Acts 16:16-40	Paul and Silas in prison
Thursday	Exodus 15:22-27	Bitter water made sweet
Friday	1 John 4:1-6	Testing the spirits
Saturday	Psalms 111	Praise for God's wonderful works
Sunday	Mark 1:29-39	Jesus heals many people

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taking  
faith  
home

*They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." Mark 1:27 (NRSV)*

### A Prayer for the Week:

Dear God, lead us to trust in your reign of justice and mercy that heals the wounded and lifts up the lowly through Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God. Amen.

### Mealtimes Prayer:

Loving God, help us to be mindful of your goodness, including this gift of food. Amen.

### A Blessing to Give:

May the Holy One of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, give you faith, hope, and love.

Discuss in your home, small group, or use for personal reflections:

- Think or tell about a time you were jealous.
- How is the feeling of jealousy harmful to you and others?
- What difference does it make that Jesus has power over unclean spirits (like jealousy) in our lives?

*Read:* Mark 1:21-28.

In the Gospel of Mark, this is Jesus' first recorded act in public ministry. It sets the direction and tone for Mark, and it is a doozy. In our modern world where data and verifiable research is relied on more than speaking about spirits—unclean or not—the narrative can lead to many understandable questions. However, the conclusion is clear: Jesus speaks and acts with an authority not experienced by the people in the Capernaum synagogue. All the people were amazed. The unclean spirits know who Jesus is, the Holy One of God. In Jesus' kingdom, such knowledge is not enough. He silences the unclean spirits. Jesus will be gathering followers like Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John (vv. 14-20) who will worship, serve, and place their trust in Jesus. He comes with the message and authority of God. Jesus presents the reign of God that breaks down barriers. He brings God's purity and holiness to people and places not reached before. It's the ministry and the message that will not be silenced. Jesus brought life-changing experiences to the people. What life-changing experience have you had?

*Pray:* **Almighty God, help us to witness to and be followers of your reign of love, reconciliation, and healing through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

In 1 Corinthians 8, it was not good enough that people had the right information, even the right understanding of the Christian faith. They needed to act out of love because "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Think of someone with whom you have differing opinions. Pray that you may be able to see beyond your differences and reach out to the other person with a spirit of love and a listening ear.

February 2 is the Church festival day for the "Presentation of the Lord." The festival recalls that forty days after his birth, Jesus was presented at the temple in Jerusalem. This festival is also known as "Candlemas" because of the tradition of blessing candles for use throughout the coming year. This is associated with Simeon's words about Jesus being "a light to reveal God to the nations." Choose a new candle to light and use this year as part of your devotions.

Then end with this prayer: **Lord God, thank you for giving us Jesus as a bright light in our lives. Bless us as we gather around this candle this year. May it remind us that Jesus is with us. Amen.**

**NEXT WEEK'S READINGS:** Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c  
1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39