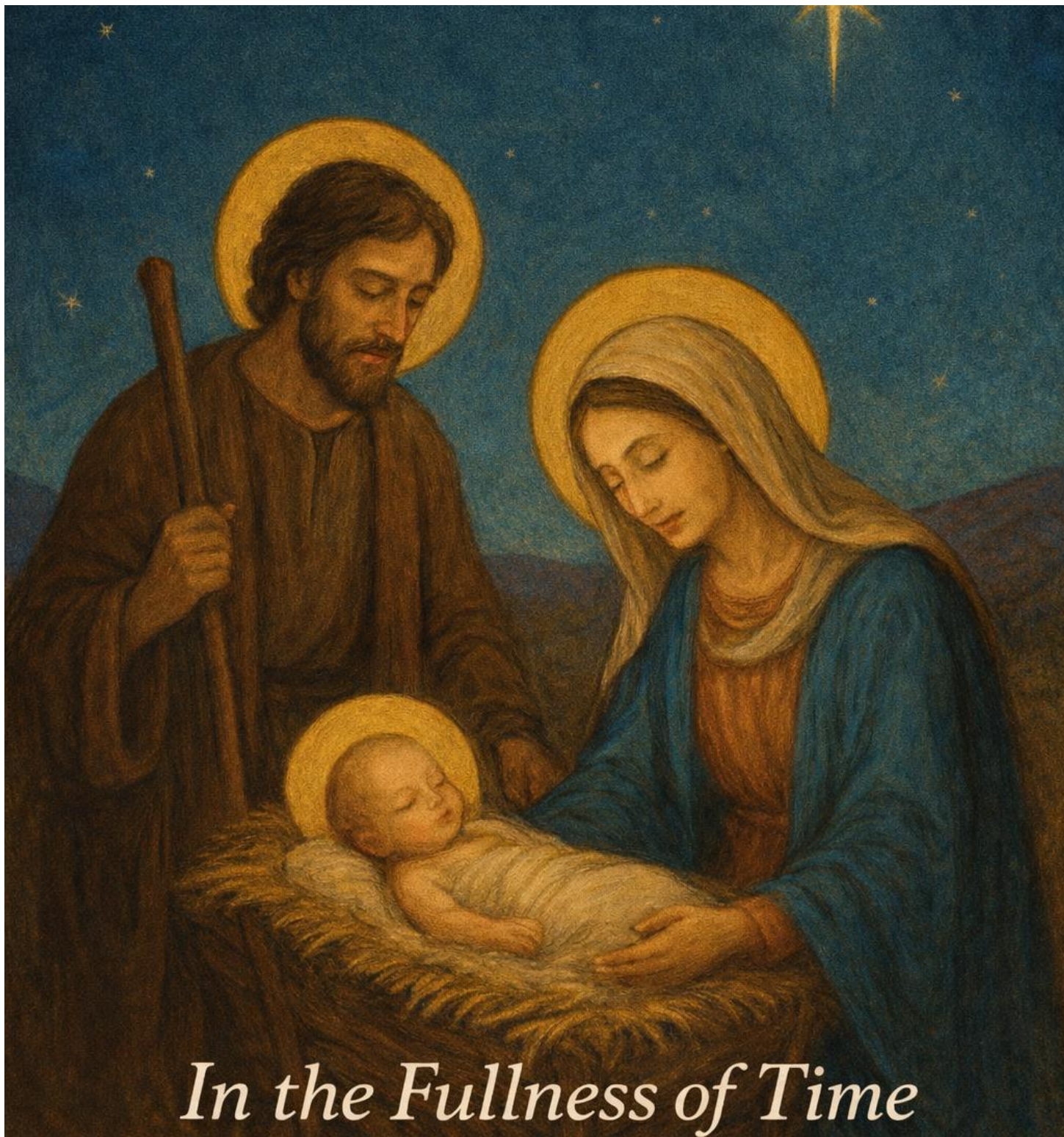




WITTENBERG WAY

Winter 2025



In the Fullness of Time

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Pastor's Message

Dear Grace Family,

As 2025 winds down, I've been reflecting on this wild, wonderful thing God does: He takes ordinary people like us, pours grace all over us, and—before we know it—our hearts start leaking generosity everywhere. And looking at you this past year, I've got to say... you've made quite the holy mess.

I want to thank you—from the bottom of my heart—for the generosity you've shown. And I don't just mean the checks (though those help keep the lights on and the coffee flowing). I mean the whole package: the quiet kindnesses, the meals delivered without anybody asking, the prayers whispered when no one was listening, the way you show up for each other and for this place. That's not normal. That's Jesus.



One of the great secrets of the Christian life is that God delights in using ordinary, imperfect, sometimes-tired people to do His extraordinary work. And you've been letting Him do just that. Your giving has kept the Gospel front and center—being preached, taught, sung, splashed, and eaten. It's helped us walk with the lonely, comfort the grieving, and keep reminding each other that God really does love sinners like us.

I'm proud of you... and I'm grateful for you. Pastors don't say that enough. Maybe we're afraid it'll go to your heads. Don't worry—I know you well enough to know the Lord will keep you humble.

As we step into a new year, remember this: God isn't worried about 2026. Not even a little. And because of Jesus, you don't have to be either. He's got you. He's got this church. And He's not about to stop the good work He's started among us.

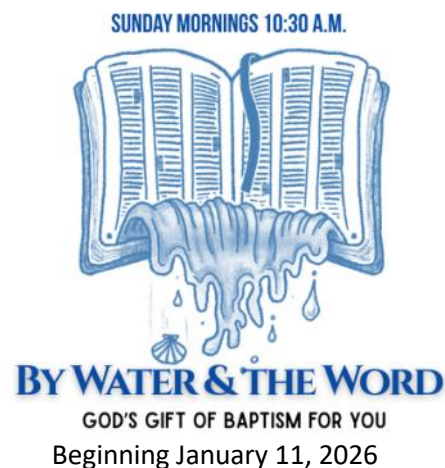
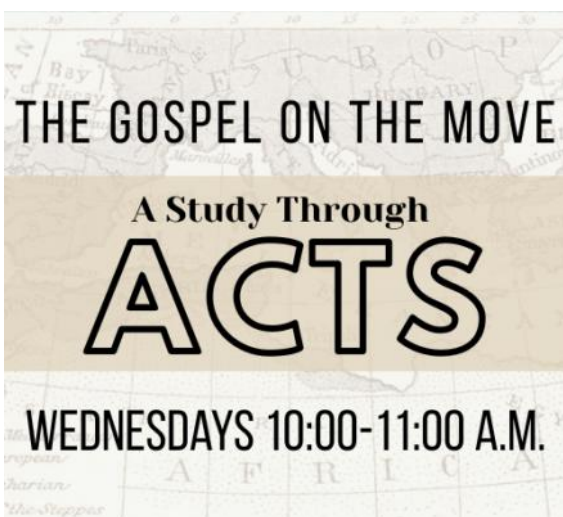
Thanks for letting me be your pastor. It's one of the greatest gifts I've been given.

You are loved—far more than you know.

In His grip,

Pastor Thomas

Upcoming Winter Studies



WHAT CHRISTIANS MEAN WHEN WE SAY JESUS WAS BORN IN HUMAN FLESH

BY REV. BRIAN W. THOMAS

When Christians confess that Jesus “was born into human flesh,” we are proclaiming one of the most staggering truths of the Christian faith: the eternal Son of God truly became human without ceasing to be God. This is the mystery and miracle of the Incarnation—God the Son taking on our nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world.

This confession rests on the testimony of Scripture itself: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The One who spoke galaxies into existence took on lungs, a heartbeat, and a human mind. He didn’t simply appear human or wear humanity like a costume. He became what we are so that He might redeem what we are.

The church has historically summarized this truth by saying that Christ is one person with two natures, fully God and fully man. In the womb of Mary, the divine Son united Himself to a real human body and a real human soul. In other words:

He grew, learned, hungered, wept, and suffered.

He experienced human limitations, emotions, weakness, and vulnerability.

He lived a true human life—yet without sin.

Why does this matter? Because salvation requires more than a divine decree; it requires a redeemer who truly stands in our place. What is not assumed cannot be healed. The Son of God entered into our humanity so that He could bear our curse, fulfill the law for us, die as our substitute, and rise as the firstborn of a new creation. The Incarnation is not a sweet Christmas sentiment—it is the foundation of the Gospel itself.

What Christians Do Not Mean

Confessing Jesus’ birth in human flesh requires just as much clarity about what we do not mean.

1. We do not mean that Jesus became “part God, part man.”

He is not a blended being or a hybrid. The church has always rejected the idea that His divinity diminished or mixed with His humanity. He is 100% God and 100% man—without confusion or change.

2. We do not mean that Jesus stopped being God when He became man.

The Incarnation is addition, not subtraction. The Son did not set aside His divine nature; He “emptied Himself” (Phil. 2:7) not by losing deity but by taking the form of a servant, choosing humility, suffering, and obedience for our sake.

3. We do not mean that His humanity was an illusion.

From the early church to today, Christians have rejected every claim that Jesus only seemed human. He was not a divine spirit pretending to eat, sleep, bleed, or die. His body was real. His suffering was real. His death was real.

4. We do not mean that Jesus became a fallen sinner.

Though He took on human nature, He did not inherit sin or participate in Adam’s rebellion. He took our mortality, not our corruption. He is the Second Adam—the true, obedient human we failed to be.

5. We do not mean that His humanity was temporary.

After the resurrection and ascension, the Son of God did not shed His humanity. He is still, and forever will be, the God-Man—our brother, our mediator, our High Priest.

Why It Matters

The Incarnation is not an optional doctrine. It is the beating heart of the Christian faith. If Jesus is not fully God, He cannot save. If He is not fully man, He cannot represent us or redeem us. Our hope depends entirely on the One who bridges the infinite gap between Creator and creature by becoming both.

The baby in the manger is no mere symbol of peace or divine sentimentality. He is God in the flesh—our Redeemer come to pull humanity from the grave by entering into it Himself.

This is the marvel Christians celebrate each year:
God became one of us so that He might save all of us.

IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME: WHY JESUS WAS BORN WHEN HE WAS

BY REV. BRIAN W. THOMAS

Christians confess not merely that Jesus was born, but that He was born “in the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4). The incarnation was not an improvisation in response to human failure, nor the appearance of a spiritual teacher who happened to emerge at a moment of cultural ferment. Rather, the eternal Son entered history at a precise intersection of divine promise and human need. When Paul says “fullness,” he means that the stage of world history, Israel’s story, and God’s redemptive plan had finally converged. The first-century Roman world was not ideal in a romantic sense; it was ideal in the sovereign, covenantally directed sense that God Himself had prepared.

A Political World Prepared for the Gospel

Rome may have been many things, but it excelled at building roads and enforcing order—two features of empire that God would bend toward His redemptive purposes. The Pax Romana, Rome’s much-vaunted “peace,” was the result of a sword, not a sermon. Yet that relative stability and its network of roads created a surprising environment for the swift spread of the gospel. Apostles could travel from Jerusalem to Antioch to Ephesus to Rome with unprecedented ease. The empire’s hunger for unity, security, and meaning—achieved by coercion and idolatry—formed a sharp backdrop against which the true Prince of Peace would be revealed.

A Cultural World Hungry for a Word from Beyond

The Greco-Roman intellectual world had grown disillusioned with its own philosophies. Stoicism offered virtue without grace; Epicureanism offered pleasure without purpose. Mystery religions promised transcendence but delivered only emotional catharsis. Into this intellectual exhaustion stepped the gospel—a Word not from human speculation but from divine self-disclosure. In Jesus, the Logos became flesh, not to deliver a new technique for enlightenment, but to reveal the God whom philosophers groped for in the dark.

A Religious World Longing for Fulfillment

Israel’s story was also ripe for its climax. The people had returned from exile geographically, but spiritually they remained in a kind of Babylonian twilight. Herod sat on a pseudo-Davidic throne. The temple stood, but God’s glory had not returned to it as promised. The prophets had been silent for centuries. The Law had done its

work: Israel—and humanity—knew its need for true atonement and a true king. The very fragmentation of Judaism in the first century—Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots—witnessed to a deeper yearning: Who will finally deliver us?

In this environment, Jesus did not appear as one more reformer or revolutionary. He came as the final prophet, the faithful priest, and the true king—fulfilling the covenant from Abraham to David to the prophets and bringing Israel’s story to its God-appointed fulfillment.

A World Chosen, Not by Accident, but by Providence

When theologians speak of the incarnation, we emphasize not only that God became man, but the deliberate divine choreography behind the when and where. God does not scatter His promises to the winds; He anchors them in history, genealogy, geography, and empire. By the time Christ was born, the ancient world had exhausted its own resources. Pagan religion could not give peace. Philosophy could not give certainty. Politics could not give salvation. Even Israel’s own best efforts could not fulfill the covenant.

Into this vacuum, at precisely the right moment, God sent His Son—born of a woman, born under the Law—so that slaves could become sons and daughters.

In other words, the first-century Roman world was perfect not because it was morally admirable but because it was perfectly desperate. And that is precisely where God loves to work. The incarnation is not merely a story of God entering the world; it is the story of God entering the world at the moment humanity was most ready to see that it needed Him.



President's Message

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On August 25, 2020, Elsy and I welcomed our son, August. His birth, while joyous, came at a complicated time in our lives. I had just accepted a new job that required us to move back to San Diego, and the week before his arrival was spent packing, relocating, and preparing for this transition. I began the new role two weeks after his birth, and life felt hectic as we adjusted to parenthood.

Elsy and I both grew up in the Church, though during our university years we attended seldomly. When August was born, however, we reflexively thought we should have him baptized. This was during the height of pandemic lockdowns, so we began searching online for Lutheran churches in San Diego, sampling via livestream, and trying to decide where to attend when things opened up. In that search, we discovered Grace Lutheran Church, which happened to be the closest to our home. Unusually, Grace had no livestream on its website. When Elsy called to ask about one, the office manager (Gretchen Jordan) explained that they didn't have a livestream but worshiped in-person. We decided to attend that next Sunday but assumed we would continue to "church shop" for a few weeks before finding the right fit.

Within minutes of sitting down in the pews that Sunday, we were greeted by Rev. Thomas. By the end of the conversation, we were already planning August's baptism for a few weeks' time. The reverence of the worship, the beauty of the liturgy, and the Biblical preaching made it clear that our search for a church was over. Five years and a couple children later, Grace has become the bedrock of our family life—a place where we grow in faith in fellowship with a community of faithful, like-minded believers.

Grace Lutheran Church is able to provide this because it has a strong identity, given by the grace of God. We are a confessional, liturgical, and sacramental Lutheran church, grounded in the Scriptures. This identity is supported by strong pastoral leadership, a dedicated group of elders, and a faithful deaconess. With this foundation, the role of the Church Council is straightforward (though not always easy): to tend to the worldly business of the church. As one past president of Grace put it, our job is to "keep the plant running."

Looking ahead to 2026, we will continue to fulfill that responsibility by performing routine maintenance, monitoring expenditures against giving, and addressing unforeseen issues as they arise. We will also explore ways to make long-term investments in Grace's facilities and improve our stewardship of financial resources, with the goal that Grace will remain a spiritual haven for future generations of Christians.

Throughout the year, we will provide regular updates on giving, financial health, and ongoing projects. My one request of the congregation is to read these updates and give thought and prayer to the business of the church. Many of you bring a wealth of knowledge and experience in business or church leadership, and I am extremely grateful for any advice or questions that the Council receives.

Yours in Christ,

Carl J. Lehman



FACES OF GRACE



Left: Pastor Brian performing the Rite of Godspeed for Micah before his relocation to Rhode Island.

Above: The Houts receiving the Rite of Godspeed as they retire to Tucson, AZ



Baptism of Charlotte Smith

Smiles all around as many children came forward to take part in the Children's Sermon.

FACES OF GRACE



A very successful Veterans Day dinner hosted by John Downey. Clockwise from left: Paul wearing his Marine uniform; John slicing into the cake; the group enjoying trivia.

Left: Baptism of Audrey Aarstol. Welcome to the Grace Family, Audrey!



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The Reverend
Brian W. Thomas
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DIRECTOR OF CHURCH MUSIC
Dale Sorenson
dalesorenson2@gmail.com

OFFICE MANGER
Elsy Lehman
elsyglc@gmail.com
SUNDAY DIVINE SERVICE
9:00 am
SUNDAY SCHOOL
10:15 - 11:00 am
Nursery available

CARL LEHMAN
Council President
DANIEL PAYLOR
Treasurer
JUDY GEORGE
Secretary
HEATH RUSSERT
Trustee
RACHEL THOMAS
Fellowship/Activities
JOSH MELLOR
Member-at-Large
MARK JORDAN
Member-at-Large
JEREMY FULLAM
Head Elder
STEVE HOLLMAN
JASON HUNTLEY
DARYL NEWTON
TED NILSEN
Elders

PRAYERS

FOR STRENGTH AND HEALING

Dave, Arleen, Eddie, Michelle, Kristi, Mark, Jacque, Dave, Phyllis, and Floyd

FOR OUR MISSIONARIES & SEMINARIANS

Rev. Dr. Tardelli Voss, Vicar Rowan Turner, and Vicar William Baker

FOR OUR MILITARY MEMBERS

Micah Burge, Nathan Farish, Matthew Morgan, Jeff & Jordan Gruetzmacher,
and Joshua Simmons

*(If you are new to Grace and in the military, please email your info to the church at:
elsyglc@gmail.com, so we can add you to our prayer list.)*

FOR THOSE UNABLE TO ATTEND

Joyce Rochester, Herb & Marge Foelber, Janice Keitel

BIRTHDAYS

DECEMBER

10 – Vanessa Yates
14 - Johnathan Belgau
14– Amelie Lehman
26– Mario Ancira

JANUARY

4- Matthew Morgan
7- Eleanor Hansen
10- Kate Latham
10– Rob Santiago
11- Ingrid Hoffmann
19- Jennifer Gertz
21- Katharina Hass
24- Jennifer Hass

FEBRUARY

12- Nathan Russert
15- Gloria Berge
17- Gretchen Jordan
26- Carl Lehman
27- Laura Latham
27- Randy Houts
27- Georgia Thompson

*Did we miss your birthday?
If so, please email the church
office to be included on the
birthday list:
elsyglc@gmail.com*



CHOIR NOTE: Our Grace Lutheran Choir is looking for new members. We practice of 20-30 minutes after the Sunday service. If you are interested in joining, please see Dale Sorenson.

AUG, SEPT, OCT, NOV GIVING

Offerings	\$ 95,486
Budget	<u>\$ 88,452</u>
Overage	\$ 7,034

HOW TO GIVE

- By using your offering envelopes or those in the pews
- Online from your bank website
- On the Giving Page at gracesandiego.com
- Scan the QR code below
- Register your Ralph's grocery card to Grace

