

The Visitor - January 2021



A Publication of St. James Lutheran Church, 4425 South Jackson Rd. Jackson MI 49201 (517) 782-8297
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Blessing for a Home at Epiphany

Matthew writes that when the magi saw the shining star stop overhead, they were filled with joy. “On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother” (Matthew 2:10-11).

In our homes, we experience first-hand the gifts the manger has to offer us. Our home is where we first meet Christ in family and friends, in visitors and strangers. In our homes, faith is shared, nurtured, and put into action.

We’ve spent an extraordinary amount of time this year in our homes! We’ve painted, re-arranged furniture, re-decorated, cleaned and learned a new appreciation for our houses. We had no choice! For the safety and care and love of ourselves and others we have been asked to remain at home, work at home, and school at home. Since we have spent so much time in our homes, we have also felt the darkness of isolation, loneliness, and need of human interaction. Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun wrote, *Darkness deserves gratitude. It is the alleluia point at which we learn to understand that all growth does not place just in the sunlight.* We have, indeed, grown this past year despite the darkness we have experienced while staying isolated in our homes.

This is the perfect time to resurrect the act of “blessing” our dwellings as a way of remembering that “home” isn’t just where “the heart is,” but it is where many first know God’s love for us.

January 6, the 12th night of Christmas and the Epiphany of Our Lord offers an occasion for blessing our dwelling places. We mark our homes and pray a blessing upon our dwelling place with chalk or a pencil above the main door: 20+ CMB +21. The numbers stand for the year and change with each new year. The three letters stand for either the ancient Latin blessing *Christus mansionem benedicat*, which means, “**May Christ bless this house,**” or the legendary names of the magi (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar).

Greeting

May peace be to this house and to all who enter here.

By wisdom a house is built

and through understanding it is established;

through knowledge its rooms are filled

with rare and beautiful treasures.

(Proverbs 24:3-4)

Reading

As we prepare to ask God's blessing on this household, let us listen to the words of scripture:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory:

the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace."

(John 1:1-4, 14, 16)

Inscription

20 + CMB + 21

"The magi of old, known as

C Caspar

M Melchior

B Balthasar

(or ***Christus mansionem benedicat***, which means, "**May Christ bless this house,**")

followed the star of God's Son who came to dwell among us

20 two thousand

21 and twenty-one years ago

+ Christ, bless this house,

+ and remain with us throughout the year."

Prayer of Blessing

O God, you revealed your Son to all people

By the shining light of a star.

We pray that you bless this home and all who live here

With your gracious presence.

May your love be our inspiration,

Your wisdom our guide,

Your truth our light,

And your peace our benediction;

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Blessing Adapted from Come, Lord Jesus: Devotions for the Home (Augsburg Fortress, 1996.)

May 2021 be a year of blessings. When we struggle to feel blessed, may we be a blessing to others. And throughout all times, may we trust that we are blessed children of God.

Pastor Martha

EDUCATION

THURSDAY BOOK STUDY

With Susan Thornton

The Thursday Study Group is meeting via Zoom. We are reading Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Other by Barbara Brown Taylor. If you would like to join us, we are reading and discussing Chapters 7 and 8 when we meet on **January 7 at 1:30**. The first chapter is called The Shadow-Bearers and covers Islam and the struggles that members of Islam have with our perceptions of them after 9:11. If we have time we will take up the 8th chapter: Failing Christianity. In **February on the 4th at 1:30**, we will discuss chapters 9 and 10. These chapters cover the Evangelical Christian churches and the diversity of God the Creator.

If you are not on our class email, forward your email address to me at thorntonsl@aol.com. I will add you to the class list and you will receive an invitation to the zoom meeting the week before we meet. We will always meet on the first Thursday of the month at 1:30 pm.

Susan Thornton

ADULT BIBLE STUDY

Led by Laura Trombley

We will continue our Lectionary Bible Study of the readings for each Sunday. A Microsoft Teams meeting invitation (a link) is being sent out weekly for anyone interested in joining on Sunday mornings at 10:05am.

Please have your bible handy, and we promise our time for study will remain under 45 minutes. The January study guides are included in this newsletter. If you have missed any of our previous bible studies feel free to go to our FaceBook page and watch them.

Dear St. James,

I thank you for your Christmas wishes and gifts. Your generosity toward me is a sign of God's abundant love for us all. I am so grateful for each one of you and for the privilege to pastor you. I look forward to a beautiful year of 2021 engaging in ministry with you. Thank you. Love Pastor Martha



	01/07	Lynn Eckerle
	01/09	Joan Wiegman
	01/13	Doug Brewer
	01/13	Pam Thomas
	01/14	Brett Trombley
	01/19	Joyce Anderson
	01/20	Emily Ernst
	01/23	Brian Niemi

	01/05	Jack and Sue Noren (58)
	01/27	Doug and Karen Ernst-Kendall (14)

BIBLE STUDY FOR 1-10-2021

Daily Discipleship

Baptism of Our Lord (B) – Mark 1:4-11

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Connected*

Focus Question: *How does baptism connect disciples with God and other disciples?*

word of life

“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Mark 1:11 (NRSV)

Read Mark 1:4-11

From birth, John the Baptist and Jesus were connected through the friendship of their mothers. Mary went to Elizabeth as soon as Mary found out she was pregnant. Pregnant Elizabeth proclaimed to pregnant Mary, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb . . . For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy” (Luke 1:41-44 NRSV). Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months of her pregnancy.

No doubt, John and Jesus knew each other well through their shared family connection, but they also knew a shared dedication to serving God. Despite the crowds from the Judean countryside and Jerusalem who clearly came to see John, he did not preach about himself. Instead, he pointed to Christ. Through baptism, God launched Jesus into public ministry and mission.

1. *Why is the connection between John and Jesus important?*
2. *What can we learn from that connection?*

John prepared the people for Jesus through a baptism of repentance. The baptism he taught and did was with water alone; it was a ritual cleansing. Jesus will do something new in baptism, connecting the baptized with the Holy Spirit.

3. *How are the baptisms proclaimed by Jesus and John different?*

When Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened, the Spirit descended, and a voice from heaven was heard. “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (vs. 11). In the baptism of Jesus, there is a unique connection between God and Jesus as a parent to a child. When we look at Jesus, we see God.

4. *Why did Jesus need to be baptized?*
5. *How do you explain the connection between God and Jesus?*

At Jesus’ baptism, there was also a public connection between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The form of a dove was a visible endorsement of the Holy Spirit’s presence. God’s voice added to the weight of the moment. Jesus was the “real deal” – God’s only beloved Son in whom God was well-pleased. In addition to being a public endorsement, this was a very intimate moment between parent and child. The key word is “Beloved.”

6. *How does it feel to be called “beloved,” especially by God?*

God as parent, child, and spirit were connected in a single unit in the baptism of Jesus, giving Jesus a clear mission. From this baptism, Jesus went into action, inviting others to connect with his mission and to follow him. In following Christ, people connect with God and the Holy Spirit in new ways, receiving God’s promise of salvation.

7. *What are your impressions of the baptism of Jesus?*
8. *Why is it helpful to clarify the connections between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?*

word among us

At the ELCA National Youth Gathering some years ago, a long-distance race was scheduled. The finish line was established inside the convention hall where at least 30,000 youth had gathered. Each synod designated one person to run the race.

The crowd of thousands applauded at the first sight of each runner entering the building. Eventually, the announcer proclaimed the final runner was within sight. The crowd geared up to see the last place runner. Poor runner. Would he or she be embarrassed to finish in last place?

But instead of a lone final runner, a small group of runners came into the convention center holding hands. When the crowd saw the final group of runners, everyone knew what had happened. The runners did not want one of their fellow competitors to face the crowd alone in last place; instead, a few of the participants had waited outside the convention door for the final runner. There was no last place finisher. The crowd erupted into thunderous approval. The crowd was connected as a single unit.

After the race was over, a giant cross of white fabric was lifted high, flapping as it ascended. Each of us in the convention center was reminded of our baptism. We are not alone, but are connected with Christ and with one another

1. *When did you first realize you were connected with other Christians?*
2. *How does your connection with Christ help when you go through difficulties?*
3. *What experiences have helped you remember your baptism?*

We long for connections. We long to belong. In baptism, we are connected with God. We are named and claimed as God's beloved.

4. *What does it mean for you to be baptized?*
5. *What does it mean for you to be God's beloved?*

In baptism, we also become connected with others who are baptized, including the whole of the Church. Our baptized brothers and sisters come in all shapes and sizes, speaking many languages. We might not always agree with our brothers and sisters, but we are connected through Jesus Christ.

6. *Give any examples of when your connection with other baptized disciples has caused you discomfort.*
7. *How has knowing you are connected with other baptized disciples helped you in life?*

We know only too well our need to be connected to God and to one another. It is far too easy to go astray, connecting with the latest fads and discarding Christ. Daily we pray for the Spirit to keep us connected with Christ and to other disciples of Christ.

8. *What might you do this week to keep you connected with Christ?*

Prayer

Gracious God, send your Holy Spirit and connect me with Christ, so I might bring you joy.

Dig Deeper

Matthew 3: 13-17

last word

Each morning this week,
make the sign of the cross on your forehead
and remember your baptism.



Daily Discipleship

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Baptism of Our Lord (B) Page 2 of 2

BIBLE STUDY FOR 1-17-20201

Daily Discipleship

Second Sunday after Epiphany (B) – John 1:43-51

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Inviting*

Focus Question: *How do you personally invite and encourage others to follow Christ?*

word of life

“[Jesus] found Philip and said to him ‘Follow me.’” John 1:43 (NRSV)

Read John 1:43-51

It is clear from this passage Jesus is not going to wait for people to find him and discover his message. In this situation, Jesus decides to go to Galilee and find Philip. It is unknown if Jesus already knew Philip. Perhaps, Jesus went looking for him on the recommendation of Andrew and Peter. They were all from the same home town. It is possible there was no previous connection. The key aspect of the story is one of invitation.

When Jesus finds Philip, he simply invites him by saying, “Follow me.” (John 1:43 NRSV) There is no mandate. There is no theological discourse. It is a simple invitation: “Follow me.”

1. *What can you say about Jesus from this one verse, John 1:43?*

If Philip responded verbally to Jesus’ invitation to follow him, it is not recorded in the Gospel. Yet, it must have been a resounding “yes,” because Philip leaves Jesus to find another seeker, Nathanael. Jesus’ actions have sparked a chain reaction. Jesus invites Philip only to have Philip invite Nathanael. Today, this might be called *relational evangelism*. The good news of Jesus is shared from one person to another.

2. *What might have motivated Philip to leave Jesus to seek out Nathanael?*
3. *What does Philip tell Nathanael about Jesus?*

Philip and Nathanael are educated men who are well-versed in the law and prophets. Both know of the promise of the Messiah; both anticipate one sent by God. Yet, Nathanael is doubtful when Philip announces he has found the one whom they have been seeking. Nathanael points out the obvious. What good ever came from Nazareth, a town not known for much of anything?

Philip’s invitation to Nathanael is a simple one: “Come and see.” (John 1:46 NRSV) No need to debate it. Come and see. Yet before Nathanael can respond, Jesus finds him. Jesus knows him, but how? Nathanael is baffled. Jesus answers, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” (John 1:48 NRSV)

Jesus’ answer can easily baffle us. Was the fig tree isolated, making it impossible for anyone to know he was there? Some believe the fig tree is symbolic for studying the scriptures. Perhaps Nathanael had studied the scriptures in secret with Philip. (Some scholars surmise Nathanael is actually either Bartholomew or Matthew.) Nevertheless, something clicked for Nathanael. He was convinced and proclaimed Jesus as Rabbi, Son of God and King of Israel.

4. *How would you describe Nathanael?*

Jesus promises Nathanael will see far greater things. Again, it is not clear what all Jesus is describing. Perhaps, this is a reference to the resurrection or the end of time. As the rabbi, Jesus reminds Nathanael his learning is not over, but extends an invitation to continue to learn and grow.

5. *What do you think is the main point of the Philip and Nathanael story?*

word among us

Aaron came running into the kitchen, “Mom, come and see!” Aaron’s mother immediately dropped what she was doing to witness Joey’s latest discovery in his backyard safari.

Monique rushed back on the trail to her waiting father, “Dad, the waterfall is amazing. Come and see!” Her dad breathed deeply and chuckled, “Give me a minute. Let me catch my breath. I’m not as young as I used to be.” Monique sat beside her father and waited patiently. Finally, he took her by the hand and nodded. She danced with joy and shouted, “Yes! Come and see!”

From childhood days, we have invited others to celebrate the discoveries of life. Come and see! Come and enjoy!

1. Describe a time when you invited someone to “Come and see!”
2. What kind of response did you get?

It’s just that simple. In our story, Jesus invites Philip. Then, Philip invites Nathanael. Each invites because there is a deep desire to share good news with others. In this case, the good news is Jesus Christ himself. This is the one whom Philip and Nathanael have been waiting for since they began studying and understanding the scriptures.

3. Take a moment and reflect on your own life. Who invited you to come and see this one named Jesus?
4. What role has the church had in that invitation to grow in the love of Christ?
5. How is that invitation still changing your life?

In this passage there are several invitations. Jesus invites Philip to follow him. Philip responds favorably and extends an invitation to Nathanael. But Philip’s invitation is met with doubt and suspicion. Nathanael is hesitant to respond to the invitation to come and see Jesus, so Jesus goes to Nathanael.

6. In your opinion, what makes someone hesitant to respond to an invitation to come, see, or follow Jesus?
7. If someone would come and see your congregation, what would they find?

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to have an attitude of inviting others to “come and see” just as we have received the invitation.

8. What makes us hesitant to invite others?
9. What if we meet rejection, then what?
10. Take a moment to prayerfully consider those in your life who need an invitation to come and see Jesus. Plan how you will personally extend an invitation to each of them.

Prayer

Christ, thank you for inviting me to know, love, and follow you. Send me to invite others to come and see you. Amen.

Dig Deeper

John 4

last word

This week,
invite someone to
attend a church activity with you.



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2 Epiphany (B) Page 2 of 2

BIBLE STUDY FOR 1-24-2021

Daily Discipleship

Third Sunday after Epiphany (B) – Mark 1:14-20

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Responsive*

Focus Question: *How do you respond to Jesus on a daily basis?*

word of life

“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Mark 1:17 (NRSV)

Read Mark 1:14-20

The Gospel of Mark was written several decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus. For those early Christians, it was not an easy thing to be associated with the teachings or life of Jesus. Christians were persecuted and sometimes killed. To choose to follow Jesus was a critical decision – one that could mean imprisonment or sacrificing your very life.

Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels, noted by a sense of immediacy and urgency. This author seems to have no time for adjectives, adverbs, and extra words. Instead, Mark urges the listener to hear the core message of the gospel of Jesus captured in verse 15, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15 NRSV)

1. *What do you think Jesus meant by the phrase “good news”?*
2. *Rephrase Mark 1:15 and put in your own words.*

In the first chapter of the Gospel, Mark quickly jumps into a description of Jesus calling his first disciples. There is no time for details about Jesus being born in the manger — on to the ministry and mission. Jesus begins by calling people to serve as partners in mission.

First, Jesus passes through the Sea of Galilee and sees fishermen at work. This scene is not of a summer vacation with two men holding a fishing pole for recreation. Instead, brothers Simon and Andrew are casting nets into the sea to catch a quantity of food. It is their livelihood. Jesus interrupts their work with a two-part invitation. These fishermen are invited to follow Jesus *and* to invite others to follow Jesus. Note how quickly Simon and Andrew respond. It is immediate!

3. *How do you picture this scene?*
4. *How might friends have reacted to the response of these fishermen?*
5. *Imagine how Simon and Andrew’s lives might have changed.*

Next, Jesus walks further. He sees more fishermen, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. These brothers are mending their nets, probably doing needed work for the family business. Jesus calls them *immediately*. Their response appears to be *immediate* as well as they leave their father and the hired workers.

6. *What surprises you about this whole passage?*

Mark’s description is sparse without digression. The disciples take no time to ponder or procrastinate. Jesus calls and they respond. Even if these fishermen knew Jesus from earlier experiences and anticipated his calling of them to serve, it is still very impressive. It is a call to follow and also a call to invite others to learn about Jesus.

7. *Which is harder: to follow or to invite others to follow? Explain your answer.*

word among us

When we were children many of us played the game “Simon says.” The leader would give a command, and if it began with the word “Simon,” then all were to promptly follow the directions. Otherwise, each person was to remain frozen. The leader would try to trick others into moving without the key word “Simon” being uttered. It was a fun game and taught listening skills.

As we got older and entered school, listening to directions became an important tool in getting through school. Teachers expected attentiveness and follow-through.

As a student, how were you at listening and following directions?

What helped you to listen and to follow directions?

Following directions may or may not be your forte. Perhaps you like to give the directions with others following you. Or, maybe you have an ornery, independent streak. Or, maybe you thrive in creative settings where you do not fit in any box. That’s reality for many people.

Today, how are you at following others?

What criteria do you use when you decide to follow someone?

How easy is it for you to follow Jesus? Explain.

Each of us is created with a big “ME” burning deep in our spirit. Some call it sin, spelled with a capital “I”. Unfortunately, that “I” can take over our lives, leaving no room to follow Christ. Thus, we daily are called to confess and ask for guidance.

Imagine Jesus finding you on this Tuesday at 10:35 a.m. Imagine Jesus saying to you the same words as he said to the fishermen, “Follow me.”

Where will you probably be on Tuesday at 10:30 a.m.?

What would it mean to leave what you are doing to follow Christ?

How is that similar or different than the response of the first disciples?

Jesus adds another level. Not only are we to follow Jesus, but we are to invite others to follow him. Sometimes we invite by allowing people to see how we live, observe our choices, and note our values. Hopefully, our lives become a witness to the incredible love of Christ. Other times, we overtly ask people to learn about Christ and to follow him. We turn from an inward posture to looking at the needs beyond ourselves . . . the need for Christ.

Jesus talked in terms of “fishing for people.” How might you invite others to follow Christ?

Prayer

O Christ, give me a heart and spirit to follow you and courage to invite others to do the same.

Dig Deeper

Mark 8: 34 - 9:1

last word

Invite someone this week
to come to your church
or to talk with you about Jesus.



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3 Epiphany (B) Page 2 of 2

BIBLE STUDY FOR 1-31-2021

Daily Discipleship

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – Mark 1:21-28

An Attitude of Discipleship: *Openness*

Focus Question: *How might disruptions help you to know Jesus?*

word of life

“I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” Mark 1:24 (NRSV)

Read Mark 1: 21-28.

Jesus begins his ministry by calling disciples to follow him. (Mark 1:16-21) Next, he honors the Sabbath by going to the synagogue to worship and teach. He teaches with authority as one who knows God. One can almost picture listeners scratching their heads and wondering, “Who is this man? How did he get such insights to the scriptures?” There is a slight dig at the scribes because they apparently have taught without authority.

1. *What does it mean to teach with authority? Describe such a teacher.*
2. *How does one get “authority”?*

Suddenly, the scene is interrupted. Out of the crowd comes a voice. It is someone who clearly understands the identity of Jesus. The only problem — this man has unclean spirits and speaks in plural. He cries out to Jesus, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” (Mark 1:24 NRSV)

3. *How can such a confused person be so clear about Jesus?*
4. *How can people without unclean spirits be so confused about the identity of Jesus?*

Here on his first days of his mission Jesus finds his teaching disrupted and himself in conflict. Jesus is at the synagogue to teach, but instead he is being challenged. What more could go wrong? Or is this an opportunity to put things right, at least with one person?

5. *How might this disruption be an opportunity for ministry?*

Yet, this man realizes the authority of Jesus far exceeds that of teaching. Jesus’ authority extends to healing and transforming lives. This man realizes Jesus has the ability to change his very life and release him from his disease, but he appears hesitant to be transformed to health.

6. *Why might this man be resistant of the healing power of Jesus?*
7. *Even when change is for the better, what makes change so difficult?*

Despite the questions, Jesus heals the man. Mark is quite descriptive of the convulsing and crying out as he is healed. This entire scene, from the teaching of Jesus to his healing, leaves people asking about the identity of Jesus. *Who is this man? What is he doing?* It appears beyond their grasp.

8. *Why do these witnesses have such difficulty believing in Jesus?*
9. *Who, if anyone, has an open attitude in this passage?*

Mark describes how the word spreads about Jesus. People tell others about his teaching and healing. Thus Jesus begins to become famous, but not all who hear about Jesus choose to become disciples and follow him.

10. *What is the central point of this passage?*

word among us

By the time Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast and moved north, all agreed. Never had the United States seen such a storm. Yet, the full impact from Katrina was yet to come. The breach of the New Orleans levees turned the city into a lake, sending unsuspecting people into a panic as the waters rose in their homes. Some went to their roof to wait for days for rescue. Others left by boat or anything that might float.

In the midst of the chaos, many tried to bring order. Some tried to speak with authority, but their words revealed that they hadn't a clue how to bring order. Now and then, someone in the crowd would step forward and say something that made sense. Sometimes, it was not a word people wanted to hear,

“Be patient.”

“Night is coming. Everyone get as comfortable as possible. Make the best of it.”

The hurricane was a disruption to the maximum degree. Lives, homes, businesses, and dreams were wiped away. People were ripped raw with anguish. Yet, slowly, healing is coming. The journey to rebuild lives and communities is a long one. Some people have turned to God in new ways. Others continue to seek order in the midst of the chaos. Some may not have the emotional stamina to start again.

1. *How might a crisis, small or large, open us to God?*
2. *Besides living through a disaster or crisis, how else might we develop an attitude of openness?*
3. *Why is it important for disciples of Christ to have an attitude of openness?*

The man in Mark 1 was at a crisis point. If Jesus healed him, his life would change. Sometimes change is difficult even if it is for the better. After the hurricane, hundreds of thousands moved into shelters such as schools, churches, motels, and civic centers. When people got the word that they could leave the temporary shelter, some found it difficult to leave the security of their new home. It is known as “evacuee syndrome.” It might not have been the best of homes, but at least the shelter was a known place of comfort.

The love of Christ brought healing and wholeness to the man with an unclean spirit in Mark 1:23; but radical change is not always readily accepted. The man was unsure about receiving such a gift, and the crowd seemed unsure about the authority of Jesus to do such things. Change can be difficult. Sometimes we can resist the good gifts of God because we are not open.

4. *How might we, as disciples of Christ, adopt a more open attitude?*
5. *How might God be stirring your congregation to adopt more open ways?*
6. *What might we learn from this story?*

Prayer

Creator of the universe, create in me an open heart and spirit.

Dig Deeper

Psalm 51

last word

Make a list of ways
to be more open to others.



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4 Epiphany (B) Page 2 of 2



Jan Lehman and Robin Vogel	Rev. Martha Porter-Reid
Jim Skrocki	Anna Pedrotte
Tim Ernst	Parish Administrator
Organist	Tech Director
Custodians	Pastor

Staff Listing:

Sundays at 9:30 a.m. – Worship Service with Holy Communion

Worship with us:

“We are a grace-centered family of faith that seeks to know Christ and make Him known.”

St. James Lutheran Church
4425 South Jackson Rd.
Jackson, MI 49201



We're on the Web!

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