***Inspiring our community***

 ***to live out the hope found in Christ***

**Walking by Faith**

**Epiphany 2013**

*(January 6th – February 16th)*

St. Andrews Lutheran Church

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**Week One:** Matthew 2:1-12

1.  Do you believe that following God's Word will always be what's best for you?

2.  Is God's Word true for everyone?

3. There aren't many people employed as "wise men" today making it a bit difficult to directly translate their story of faith into our lives. Read **Matthew 2:1-12**.  How were the wise men an example of what it means to walk by faith?

4.  Read **verse** **10** again.  How did the wise men respond to finally seeing Jesus?  Beyond being happy to see the baby what other reason might there be for their reaction?

5.  Walking by faith (and not by sight) can be understood in a number of different ways.  For example:

   a. when we seek God's will in situations where we don't know what to do or say

   b.  when making major life decisions

   c. when we go into a new situation unsure of how it will turn out

   d. when we don't turn away from a situation where we know our own strength will not get us through

   e. when we depend upon God for strength to get through the day

   f. when we read and obey God's word

   g. when we go to God in prayer

In what way do you see yourself walking by faith?  What are some other ways you would give as examples for walking by faith?

**Weekly Reading:**

\_ 1/7 – Acts 1 \_ 1/8 – Acts 2 \_ 1/9 – Acts 3

 \_ 1/10 – Acts 4 \_ 1/11 – Acts 5 \_ 1/12 – Acts 6

**Week Two:** Acts 9:19-31

1. Do you ever feel pressured to “fit in” with the people around you in order to better relate to them as individuals before sharing your faith?

2. Read **Acts 9:1-19a**. Saul, a strong opponent of the early church, through the work of the Holy Spirit becomes a believer in Christ. Ananias had heard of Saul’s reputation and questions the Lord (vs. 13-14). How would you respond to God’s call if you were Ananias?

3. Read **Acts 9:19b-22.** Why would the people take notice of Saul’s proclamation of the gospel more than another disciple? How might the people’s response to his faith (**vs. 21**) have provided Saul with motivation to grow in his own faith?

4. Read **Acts 9:23-25**. Unable to prove Saul wrong, the Jews (those who opposed the Christians, not all Jews) sought to remove Saul by force. The Spirit leads Saul to safety with the help of his disciples. What does Saul’s example of faith show us today?

5. Read **Acts 9:26-31**. Why were the disciples afraid of Saul? What does this passage tell us about the importance of being surrounded by and ministering with others?

6. Read **Acts 9:31**. The early church was “walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.” Does this characterize the church in America today?

7. In the end we learn from Saul our role in the mission of God; to be witnesses to Jesus Christ. How is this demonstrated in Saul’s work with the early church?

**Weekly Reading:** \_ 1/14 – Acts 7 \_ 1/15 – Acts 8 \_ 1/16 – Acts 9

 \_ 1/17 – Acts 10 \_ 1/18 – Acts 11 \_ 1/19 – Acts 12

**Week Three:** Acts 15:1-22

1. What examples of division in the church can you think of both historically and presently?

2. Read **Acts 15:1**. A great deal of disagreement over what was required of the Gentile believes (were they required to follow the Laws of Moses as the Jewish people did) characterized the struggles of the early church. What requirements, other than faith in Christ, have you heard people claim to be necessary for salvation?

3. Read **Genesis 12:1-3**. Because of Christ, all people, Jews and Gentiles, are made a part of God’s promise to Abraham. We are called and blessed to be a blessing to all people. How do divisions in the church make out ability to be God’s witnesses difficult?

4. Read **Acts 15:6-11**. In **verse 7-9** Peter references an event in **Acts 10** when the gentile Cornelius and his household were baptized by Peter and received the Holy Spirit. How do Peter’s words in **verses 10-11** provide a foundation of unity in salvation through Christ? In the end what is the most important understanding for the church (**vs. 11**)?

5. Does it ever feel like the “church” communicates to believe that they must be perfect in order to worship and believe in God; that they need to “clean-up” their life before they can participate in the ministry and mission of the church? Have you ever felt that way?

Read **Acts 15:19-21**. The early church assumed they were to be united. How does this assumption effect how the church was shaped and the energy the church invested in addressing and reconciling tensions among believers?

6. Significant cultural differences exist between the Jews and Gentiles. How do **verse 19-21** communicate the importance of understanding the cultural differences between groups? How can our own culture blind us to the working of the Holy Spirit in others?

**Weekly Reading:** \_ 1/21 – Acts 13 \_ 1/22 – Acts 14 \_ 1/23 – Acts 15

 \_ 1/24 – Acts 16 \_ 1/25 – Acts 17 \_ 1/26 – Acts 18

**Week Four:** Acts 18:1-11

1. “I might not know how God will work but I know He will work.” How does this statement speaking to our calling to walk by faith?

2. Read **Acts 4:12**. This verse provides the foundation for the Christian life. Why must we understand that salvation is through no one and nothing other than Christ? How is believing in Christ as our only means of salvation an exercise in walking by faith?

3. Read **Acts 18:1-11**. Paul traveled extensively, following the Holy Spirit, preaching the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. It would have been all too easy to give up hope in the church as he constantly faced opposition from Jewish leaders and other believers. How was he supported by fellow Christians while traveling?

4. “To believe in God’s Word of promise despite our feelings, is faith. This is why all trials, both major and small, are occasions for the exercise of faith.” How is your faith being “exercised” currently?

5. Reading through the book of Acts the early church doesn’t look much like what we see of the church in America today (especially when we equate church strictly with Sunday worship). How does Acts inform our understanding of the ministry and mission of the church (the body of Christ)?

6. What does **Acts 18:10-11** tell us about what the church and its people are called to do? From where does our confidence in speaking of faith come?

**Weekly Reading:** \_ 1/28 – Acts 19 \_ 1/29 – Acts 20 \_ 1/30 – Acts 21

 \_ 1/31 – Acts 22 \_ 2/1 – Acts 23 \_ 2/2 – Acts 24

**Week Five:** Acts 4:29-31

1. What is prayer? In what situations do you find yourself praying? How has your understanding of prayer changed throughout your life?

2. Read **Acts 4:13-22**. In **Acts 3** we read that Peter and John healed a crippled man. In **Acts 4** they are brought before local leaders who warn and threaten them to speak no more of Jesus. How do Peter and John respond (**vs. 19-20**)? From where does their boldness in faith come?

3. Were you constantly faced with the opposition of others when sharing your faith how would you respond? How did the believers in **Acts 4:23-30** respond?

4. How do **verse 29-30** inform your understanding of the purpose of prayer?

5. The believers prayed for boldness and received a respond to their prayer immediately. Have you experienced an immediate response to prayer? Have you ever prayed for boldness in sharing your faith?

**Weekly Reading:** \_ 2/4 – Acts 25 \_ 2/5 – Acts 26 \_ 2/6 – Acts 27

 \_ 2/7 – Acts 28 \_ 2/8 – 1 Corinthians 1, 2 \_ 2/9 – 1 Cor. 3, 4

**Week Six:** Acts 5:1-11

1. Have you ever felt pressure from the church to present yourself as a perfect person?

2. Read **Acts 5:1-11**. This passage from Acts provides us with an interesting look at the early church. Why do you feel the writer of Acts felt it important to include this narrative? What doe it say about the church, the body of Christ, and the importance of honesty amongst believers?

3. Read **Acts 4:32-37**. How does this passage recorded right before **Acts 5:1-11** provide new insight into the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira?

4. We have discussed the importance of unity for the believers in the early church. How could such a display of dishonesty cause division in the church?

5. We walk by faith, not in order to prove our faithfulness to others, but because we are called by God to trust in Him and Him alone. How is being honest with others a way of showing trust in God? How is being honest an exercise in walking by faith?

6. What might it look like to present yourself honestly, faults and all, to the church while saying a prayer that your fellow believers would see you and your life not through their own eyes but through the eyes of God?

**Weekly Reading:** \_ 2/11 – 1 Cor. 5, 6 \_ 2/12 – 1 Cor. 7, 8 \_ 2/13 – 1 Cor. 9, 10

 \_ 2/14 – 1 Cor. 11, 12 \_ 2/15 – 1 Cor. 13, 14 \_ 2/16 – 1 Cor. 15, 16