



/ DECEMBER 2025

MID-SOUTH LUTHERAN



Mary's Magnificat

And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me
blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their
hearts;
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever." LUKE 1:46-55

The apostle Luke is the only Gospel writer to record Mary's song, the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55). It is (pardon me) magnificent!

Mary's song reveals an expression of a deep and enduring faith. It is a wonder. Based on the potential social scorn accompanying her condition, Mary was able to trust fully in God in the face of the situation she was in. Yet digging through Scripture, we will soon discover her condition was truly a miracle: A (pregnant) virgin shall have a Son, and give birth to our Messiah!

But our Christian faith discards the impossibility of a virgin giving birth so that we might celebrate this miracle as a clear fulfillment of divine prophecy for us. Yet we're filled with questions. How can a virgin become pregnant and give birth to a child? Is it possible for God to become a Man? And how likely is it that the Child born to Mary, proclaimed by a throng of the angelic host and worshiped by the Magi, is truly the very God of very God?

Once we try to wrap our heads around the birth of Christ Jesus, we're then faced with another mystery: How likely is it that this one Man's death would completely pay for the sin of all mankind? How is it possible that this crucified One would also rise from the dead, proving we are totally redeemed in Him? And since He rose from the dead in glory and in human flesh, how likely is it that He is seated at the right hand of God, where He intercedes for us?

Is it another divine mystery that He will come in glory one day to judge the living and



Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola
District President

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MARY

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the dead? In the meantime, how do we grasp His continuous presence in the Word and in the bread and wine of His Supper, which is His body and His blood He offered for the forgiveness of our sin? How do we explain that these mere words of absolution, given and commanded by God's grace, can deliver perfect divine forgiveness to us in the stead and in the command of Christ through the lips of His men?

You see, once we start scrambling through Scripture searching for these kinds of answers, we will soon discover that the Bible is the interconnected, divinely inspired, revealed Word of God to make us "wise unto salvation." If we allow human logic or isolated, seemingly unimportant words and phrases to replace God's explanation in Scripture, we may place Christianity in our life in jeopardy.

Mind you, Christianity itself will never be jeopardized by what we do or say. Replacing what Scripture says with corrupted human reasoning doesn't jeopardize Christianity, but jeopardizes those who allow that danger to become real for them. Bible teachings hang together. Either God can do all of what He says or He is not God.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have the faith of that young virgin girl, Mary? Gabriel, an Archangel of the Lord, was sent to deliver God's promise for her to hear:

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." **LUKE 1:31-32**

She responded with a non-confrontational response:

"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." **LUKE 1:38**

Shouldn't that be the attitude of Christian believers when they hear God's Word?

Mary didn't question God. She didn't ask how long it would take, what her relatives would think or whom she could tell about this miracle. She didn't ask about any of the other details that would make a virginal conception possible and the birth of the Savior of the world a reality.

Of course, Mary knew how women would normally bear children. For that matter, her cousin, Elizabeth, was expecting a child as well. But Gabriel's angelic and divine promise of conception of the Holy Spirit was sufficient for her. After all, it was God's own explanation. It wasn't trumped by human reason.

Martin Luther wrote:

Isaiah announced: "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root, and the Holy Spirit shall rest upon Him" (Is. 11:1-2). This refers specifically to the generation of Jesse, David, and in particular this virgin, Mary. Jesus, the Christ, is the rod and flower. Mary the Virgin mother of God — the *Theotokos* — became His mother in a miraculous

manner. Not that a young woman would bear a Son, but that against all odds, probability, and possibilities, a virgin would have a Son, and His name would be Jesus, because He would save His people.

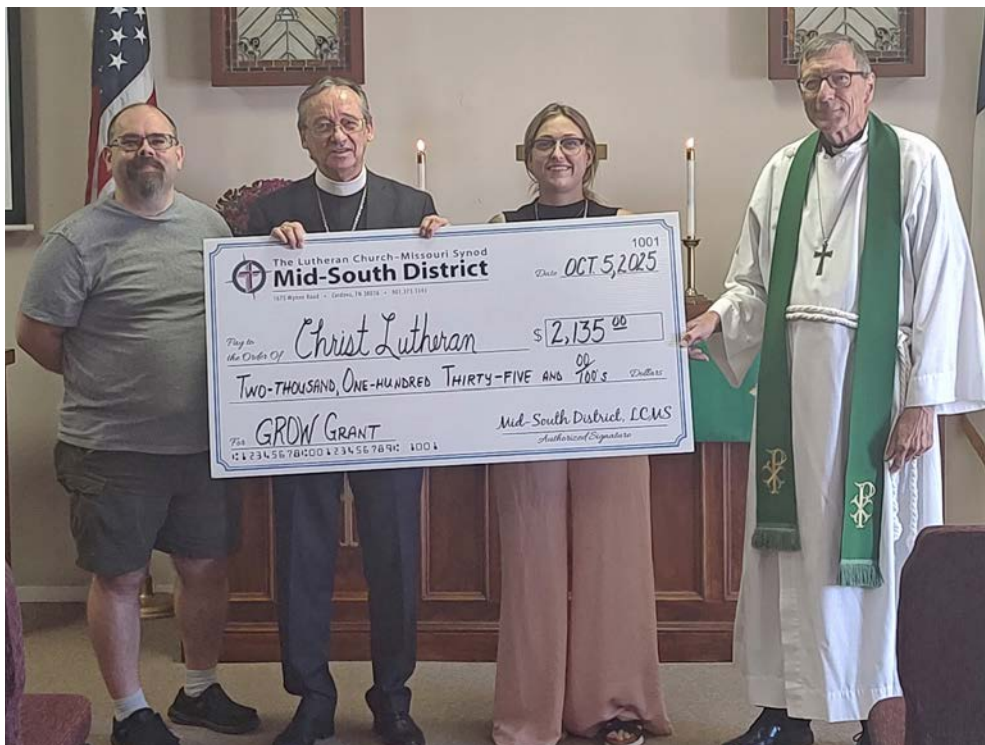
Of all the numerous prophecies given in God's Word, the mathematical probability of just one man fulfilling all of them is astronomical. But when we toss in the probability of a young virgin bearing a Son, the mathematical probability goes through the roof!

When we sing the *Magnificat*, we share in the same faith that embraced the mystery and promise of God as Mary. Mary's *Magnificat* shines brightly on God's extravagant, immense generosity, although the wisdom of mankind may consider it to be foolishness — foolishness that is wiser than the wisdom and reason of mankind.

God's foolishness chose impossible means to bring about our salvation in the mystery of this conception of the Holy Spirit, a virgin mother and the birth of His Son that fulfilled His ancient promise to redeem all mankind.

The Word became flesh to dwell among us. How that happened challenges us to search for the reason of what God accomplished by a virgin conceiving a Son and giving birth to a tiny Child. This is the incomprehensible mystery of God's grace toward us, for the sake of Jesus, the Christ, God's Son. In God's Word you will find that this is God's Son born for you and me. Have a blessed Advent and joyous Christmastide.





Christ Lutheran Church, Siloam Springs, Ark., received a GROW Grant from the Mid-South District. The funds will be used for Bread and Better, an outreach that is held every other week and offers brunch, Bible study and fellowship for students of John Brown University. Pictured are, from left, David Weilnau, congregation chairman; Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, district president; Keisha Hansen, Christ secretary; and Rev. Russell Shewmaker, Christ pastor.

District offering workshops for treasurers

Congregational treasurers are urged to attend one of the Mid-South District's free Treasurers' Workshops in January. Details and online registration are available at mid-southlcms.org/2026-treasurers-workshop.

Workshop dates and locations are:

- ▶ Jan. 3, Grace Lutheran Church (9076 Middlebrook Pike), Knoxville
- ▶ Jan. 10, Our Savior Lutheran Church (5110 Franklin Pike), Nashville
- ▶ Jan. 17, Hope Lutheran Church (1904 McArthur Blvd.), Jacksonville, Ark.
- ▶ Jan. 24, Salem Lutheran Ministries (1800 W. Emma Ave.), Springdale, Ark.
- ▶ Jan. 31, Mid-South District office (1675 Wynne Road), Cordova, Tenn.

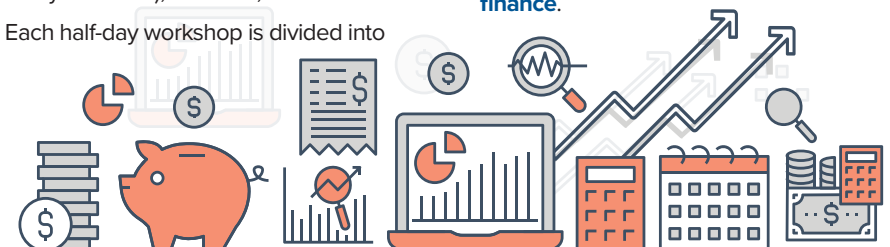
Each half-day workshop is divided into

two sessions. From 9 to 11 a.m., Charlie Rhodes will present on Volume 1 of the Synod Treasurer's Manual. Rhodes retired as director of Accounting for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Following lunch, Angela Fowler will present on church treasurer "best practices," Fowler serves as Mid-South District Business and Finance executive director.

The workshop concludes at 1 p.m.

Please note that attendees are encouraged to have either a printed or digital copy of the Treasurers' Manual—Volume 1 with them at the workshop. To access the online manual or request a copy, visit mid-southlcms.org/business-finance.



Congregation mission commitment receipts

as of Sept. 30, 2025 (9 months)

Anticipated amount (75% of budget)	\$1,221,522
Actual receipts	\$1,185,348
Over (under) anticipated amount	(\$36,174)
Use of mission commitment receipts	
Allocated to Synod for world missions	\$336,854
Allocated to Tanzania	\$18,750
Retained for district ministry/mission support (70% of receipts)	\$829,744
Total receipts	\$1,185,348

Mission commitment receipts comparison

Actual receipts as of Sept. 30, 2025	\$1,185,348
Actual receipts as of Sept. 30, 2024	\$1,221,153
Over (under) prior year receipts	(\$35,805)

DISTRICT NEWS



Wives of our Mid-South District pastors gathered for a retreat at St. Columba Camp and Retreat Center, outside Memphis, in September. Hosted by Pat Paavola — wife of Rev. Dr. Roger Paavola, district president — the wives' retreat included speakers, small group discussions, music and singing and, of course, fun activities like line dancing and relaxing around a firepit with s'mores.

Wendysue Fluegge, a musician, artist and speaker, guided much of the weekend's discussions and led the group

in engaging creative sessions. Talks on ministry and outreach topics were also given by attendees Jennifer Schmidt and Michelle Reuter. For the entrepreneurs and crafters in the group, there was even an opportunity to highlight their personal businesses.

Rev. Jim Belles, pastor of Grace Celebration Lutheran Church, Cordova, Tenn., helped close the special weekend by leading Bible study and worship on Sunday morning.

Attendees pictured are, from left (front row) Deaconess Christina Childers, Stacy Meyer, Sarah Anderson, Frances Bacic, Julie Harbin, Emily Gless, Jennifer Schmidt, Pat Paavola, Kristina Phillips, Barbara Hefta; (back row) Shirley Truog, Gloria Schultz, Michelle Reuter, Barbara Herring, Sheri Petering, Jean Belles, Dana McDonald, Janet Sellers, Heather Cox, Wendysue Fluegge and Elizabeth Holmes.

The Mid-South District continues its support of the **Lutheran Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship (LIME) in Madagascar**. Pictured is a LIME booth at an academic forum held by the Madagascar Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The forum, held Sept. 11–12, gave private and state universities an opportunity to inform students of what their schools offer.

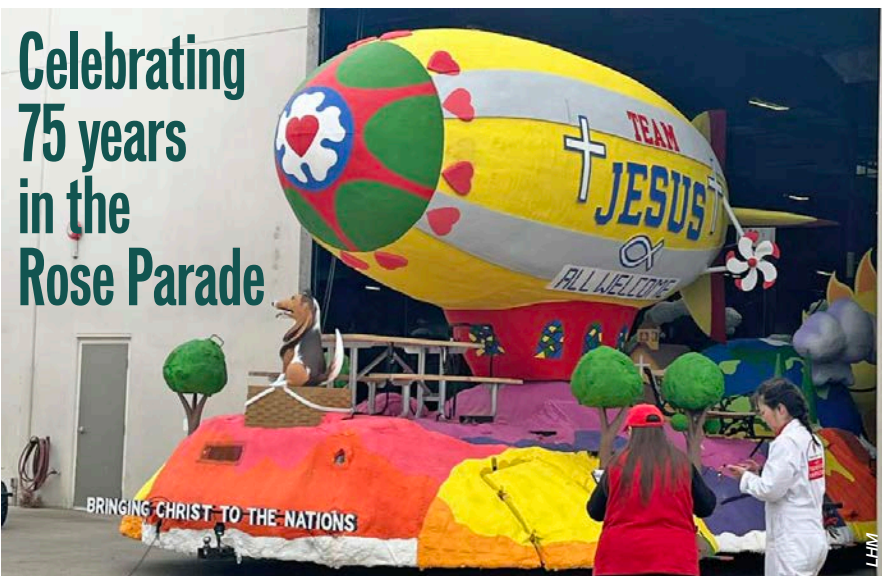
— Submitted by Rev. Dr. Joseph Randrianasolo, LIME president





Members of **Faith, Union City**, strengthened the congregation's community connection during a festival honoring Union City first responders on Oct. 11. Rev. Paul Leigeber, Faith pastor, and members shared information about the church with visitors to their booth. Calvin the Calm, Pastor Leigeber's popular canine pet, was also present and was popular with the children. Pictured are, from left, Blaze Bennett, Kara and Rev. Paul Leigeber (with Calvin) and Michael Elling.

— Photo submitted by Monica Elling



Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

Riding on the float this year is a small representation of the vocations Christ has called us to for the building of His church and furtherance of the Gospel message: a teacher, a missionary, a pastor. Additional symbolism includes a Luther Seal on the nose of the blimp crosses on the side; 75 crosses on the tail for the 75th year of having a Lutheran float in the parade, and the Petal Pushers banner to represent the volunteer efforts of our 3,500-plus individuals.

With this year's float, LHM invites you to meet or meet anew the source of hope and joy that cannot be taken away. Come, see, hear and experience the goodness of Jesus Christ.

Petal Pushers alert! Help decorate!

The Petal Pushers are volunteers who gather annually to decorate the LHM float and other floats. We welcome individuals, families, seniors, youth groups, fellowship groups, school classes and boy/girl scout troops to join us.

Everyone 13 and older is welcome. Youth group members must be accompanied by adults at a ratio of one adult per five youth.

For more information and to register, visit shop.petalpushers.org.

Bringing Christ to the Nations

Observing the 2026 Tournament of Roses Parade theme, "The Magic in Teamwork," the Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) Float Committee proudly presents its diamond anniversary float, "Bringing Christ to the Nations."

For 75 years LHM has started the new year with a Christian message of hope in Jesus Christ in the form of a floral Rose Parade float. This year's float features a "Team Jesus" blimp flying over the world and coming forth from

the church as Jesus celebrates with 12 modern-day disciples, as it features the message "All Welcome."

"Team Jesus" serves as a reminder that it takes all to fulfill the callings God has placed upon us to do the work of bringing Christ and His redeeming love to the world.

St. Paul reminds us in Romans 12:4-6:

For as in one body we have many members, and members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one in body in Christ, and individually members one of another.



Keeping **Christ** in **Christmas**

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

Luke 2:10-12

By Candy Habich

Chairman, LWML Mid-South District Media and Marketing Committee

Do you ever imagine what those shepherds thought when the angel appeared to them? Luke 2:9 says they were filled with great fear. But the first words the angel said assured them that they need not be afraid. Then the angel continued with instructions for finding the newborn king.

And then the multitude of the heavenly host showed up! Oh, how I look forward to heaven and hearing the angels sing!

Here on this side of heaven, I love to see nativity scenes, angels and stars decorating homes and businesses. However, I am pretty

sure that, these days, the nativity scenes, angels and stars are outnumbered 10 to 1 by Santa, Rudolph and the Grinch. In a Google search I found one survey that indicated nativity scenes came in at No. 10 after snowflakes, snowmen, stockings and candy canes, among the others.

Fortunately, Lutheran Women in Mission has a vast number of resources to help us keep our focus on the Christ child. You can find a list at lwml.org/posts/category/christmas. Many of these resources would be great to share with your friends and neighbors.

May God bless your Advent and Christmas seasons with peace, joy and confidence in the saving grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Last chance for grant applications

Mission grant applications are due to Laurie Sanders, LWML district third vice-president, by Dec. 31. All the information you need is available at midsouthlwml.org/mission-grant-request-forms. Questions? Contact Laurie at missiongrants@midsouthlwml.org.



Endowment fund

This is a great time to think about year-end charitable contributions. Perhaps you can honor the friend or relative who doesn't want "things" by contributing in their name. This fund enables women in our district to attend events and training that they otherwise might not be able to afford.

Learn more at midsouthlwml.org/endowment-fund.

LWML Mid-South District Convention

June 12-14, 2026 • Springdale, Ark.



Lodging and business sessions will be at the Holiday Inn Springdale/Fayetteville. Opening worship on Friday will be at Salem Lutheran Church, Springdale.

The keynote speaker will be Deaconess Dr. Tiffany Manor, LCMS Managing Director, Human Care and Ministerial Support.

Please add the dates to your calendar!

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. **Ps. 121:1-2**

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WANTED:

Missionaries to serve in Africa

There are currently only seven LCMS missionary families serving in Africa. In the November edition of *The Lutheran Witness*, Rev. Shauen Trump, LCMS Africa regional director, issued an urgent appeal for more missionaries, both lay and ordained. It is excerpted below.



Rev. Shauen Trump

languages, for short-term volunteers, for support in pursuing advanced degrees for their own seminary faculty and church leaders, for visitation, and for advisors on seminary development and curriculum. We have a great need for missionaries to facilitate all these programs and projects!

Today in Africa, we have a problem — a good problem! Almost every Lutheran church body we work with is growing, some as much as 15% a year. ...

Pastors in Africa are stretched thin. Almost every pastor you meet is overseeing between five and 15 congregations. The leaders of the Lutheran partner churches we work with in 25 countries across Africa are urgently renewing their requests for LCMS missionaries to serve with them as elementary, middle school and high school teachers; English-as-a-Second-Language instructors; computer and technology specialists; nurses; pharmacists; instructors in deaconess and social work programs; church planters; church administrators; and theological educators in seminaries.

Beyond these requests for embedded, grassroots missionaries, these rapidly growing church bodies are asking for the programs and projects we offer — for new member and lay leader materials, for continuing education for church workers, for translation of Lutheran resources into their vernacular

Further, our own dear missionaries in Africa are so passionate and committed that they constantly over-stretch themselves to take advantage of the myriad opportunities to spread the Gospel, plant Lutheran churches and show mercy. These missionaries need partners to share the work and support them: field chaplains, member care coordinators, business managers, accountants, writers and photographers. Our Africa team needs missionaries to multiply the impact of the whole team. ...

The church needs missionaries — from all walks and stages of life — for every region of the world. If you are wondering whether you are called to this kind of service, please reach out. If someone in your congregation comes to mind, please send us a referral so we can reach out to them even as you suggest the possibility to them directly. You can start now by contacting our director of missionary recruitment, Rev. Dr. Mark Rabe, at mark.rabe@lcms.org.

Read more at witness.lcms.org/2025/call-for-missionaries.

Congregational tool assists Synod's connection with youth



Each year, on behalf of the Concordia University System (CUS) and the Synod's seminaries, LCMS Rosters, Statistics and Research Services (RSRS) gathers contact information for 7th–12th grade students from each LCMS congregation. This information is used strictly to reach these youth with information about LCMS schools and opportunities for professional church work.

In September, a new online form was released that makes the annual reporting process simpler, more efficient and more secure. The new method vastly reduces processing times, while also eliminating the risk of emailed files being intercepted. Congregations may access the form by logging into lc.lcms.org, the same site they use to update their information for the LCMS Locator and *The Lutheran Annual*. Additional information and instructions were emailed to each congregation at the beginning of October. Questions may be sent to rosters.stats@lcms.org.

Dr. Bernard Bull, president of Concordia University, Nebraska, highlighted the value of this information for LCMS educational institutions.

“The more detailed and accurate data that we receive about young people in our churches, the better chance we have of building a relationship with prospective students early and increasing the chance of them prayerfully considering a Concordia, as well as one or more church work vocations,” Bull said. “At a time when between 60% and 70% of young people are leaving the church ... it has never been more important to urge our young people to consider higher education options ... where God’s Word is present and prevalent, and where these young people will find professors and coaches who mentor and guide them.

Scott Kostencki, RSRS director, said that the long-standing process suffered from waning participation and lost CUS support during COVID; with the urging and support of the Synod’s universities and seminaries, it has now been resumed and revitalized.

Rev. Dr. James Baneck, executive director of the LCMS Office of Pastoral Education, said, “As a part of *Set Apart to Serve*’s work to uphold a culture of church work formation and recruitment throughout the LCMS, we encourage LCMS youth to consider attending an LCMS Concordia university and/or seminary to receive a Christ-centered education in preparation for their vocations — whether it be in the church, in the world or at home.”

For more information, contact rosters.stats@lcms.org.

DISTRICT NEWS

Camp Trinity

A busy fall has included 20 sessions of the Outdoor Classroom for homeschool families; six family reunions; the Hendrix choir retreat; Music on the Mountain; Narcotics Anonymous fall retreat; Hamfest (fall gathering of ham radio operators); Christ, Little Rock, eighth-grade outdoor education retreat; the Linkt retreat for junior high youth from Mid-South congregations; PALS pastors and families retreat; Nature Club (of Minden, La.) fall retreat; and Crop and Craft women's retreat.

Music on the Mountain

The Eighth Annual Music on the Mountain on Sept. 27 was the most successful to date, with about 200 people gathered throughout the day to listen to live music, play lawn games, bid on items in the silent auction, and enjoy barbecue dinners prepared by the camp staff and board. Among those attending were nine LCMS pastors.

More musicians than ever before performed on the stage in front of the historic Trinity Chapel. Musicians and bands included Paul Morphus, EasterDay, Logan & Fam Band, Patty and the Cakes, the Lindsley Brothers, Smoothly Reflections, Brown Family Bluegrass, Buttercup and the Davis Family. Bands performed music in many genres: old-time Gospel, folk, bluegrass, country, contemporary Christian, pop oldies and alternative rock.

Although the event officially ended at 4 p.m., musicians from four bands continued to perform another two hours to entertain those who remained on site to hear more.

Plans are already underway to expand the festival in 2026. Music on the Mountain is held each year on the last Saturday in September.

Advent Service

Camp Trinity will hold one Advent service on Dec. 20. The service will include many traditional Christmas hymns and carols and a message about God humbling Himself and taking human form two millennia ago to become the Savior of mankind. Fun holiday activities for mountain residents and guests will precede the service, which will be followed by a soup and sandwich supper.

Times will be posted on social media closer to the event.

Summer Camp 2026

Camp Trinity is now taking applications for staff at summer



The Brown family, members of Christ, Little Rock, performed during the Eighth Annual Music on the Mountain at Camp Trinity.

camp 2026. Christian young adults (ages 18-25) who want to serve God by serving others are encouraged to apply.

To learn more and receive an application, email the camp office at trinitypetitjean@gmail.com.

Registration for summer camp opens Jan. 1. For more information, visit lutherancamp.org.



**SHARE
YOUR NEWS
WITH US!**

Digital files, sent via e-mail, are preferred. Send email submissions to LW@mid-southlcms.com or send by postal mail to:

Judy Otto; 150 N. Maury St.; Holly Springs, MS 38635
Send us your stories and photos for our
February 2026 issue by Dec. 15.

