

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"For from the rising of the
sun, even to its going down,
My name shall be great among the Gentiles;
In every place incense shall be offered
to My name, And a pure offering;
For My name shall be great
among the nations,"
Says the Lord of hosts
Malachi 1:11

Our King in Heaven

“According to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:19b-23).

These are triumphant words to all believers. We know that our King is in heaven, sitting at the right hand of God. He is “far above all principality and power and might and dominion.” What a great and powerful King we have!

But doesn't that sound far away and distant, to be seated “in heavenly places”?

There are times when Jesus does seem very distant. We can't see Him or touch Him. Heaven itself may seem very far off. It is something we have never experienced. We don't even know where it is.

Jesus may seem especially distant during times of trouble and sorrow.

Where is He when we really need Him? We pray and yet may feel very much alone.

At times, we even act as though He IS far away. We go against His will and act as though He can't see us. But we should take the news of Jesus' ascension to heart. He is not reigning on a distant throne. He is actually very near.

Our King With Us

At Christmas we rejoice to hear that Jesus has come to earth as our Immanuel—God with us. He is still our Immanuel now that He has ascended to reign in heaven. He is still God with us.

Postmaster: Periodicals postage paid at Roseville, MN 55113 and at additional offices. Send address corrections (Form 3579) to Lutheran Spokesman, 2750 Oxford Street North, Roseville, MN 55113.

The Lutheran Spokesman is published monthly by the Church of the Lutheran Confession, 2750 Oxford St. N., Roseville, MN 55113, and is an official organ of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC).

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Material submitted for publication should be sent to Editor Paul Fleischer one month before date of publication. Announcements and other short notices should also be sent to Editor Fleischer.

Business Manager: Benno Sydow, 2750 Oxford St. N., Roseville, MN 55113. E-Mail to BSydow01@roseville.k12.mn.us. Individual subscriptions {foreign—U.S. currency only}: \$10.00 {\$14.00} for one year; \$18.00 {\$26.00} for two years; \$26.00 {\$38.00} for three years. Subscriptions sent in bulk to congregations: \$8.00.

Spokesman Internet access: <http://www.primenet.com/~mpkelly/clc/spokesman.html>
Printed in U.S.A.

Look again at the last part of our passage from Ephesians. God describes the church as Christ's "body." Can Christ be any closer to us than to be our Head and we His body? We are inseparably connected to Him. We receive all our life and vitality and direction from Jesus, our Head.

Notice also that Jesus is described as the One "who fills all in all." Jesus is everywhere and in all things. Therefore He cannot be far from us.

We must not think of Jesus as being gone or far away from us. Just the opposite is the case. While He was on earth He was far away from us; now He is very near. If Jesus had remained on the earth in visible form, all believers on earth could not be with Him. Now that He has ascended, He is with each of us at all times wherever we are.

He is not only with us but dwells within our hearts together with the Holy Spirit. Seated at the right hand of

God, Jesus not only rules in our hearts and the hearts of all believers, but He rules all things in heaven and earth. "He put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to the church."

This is a great comfort to us in this day of war and turmoil in the world. Jesus rules all things. Nothing happens in this world without His knowledge and consent. And He rules all things for the benefit of His Church. He promises to make everything work for the good of His Church, His believers.

So we should rejoice in Christ's ascension. Not only is He very near to each of us, but He is nearer than before. We can also rest at ease, knowing that He rules all things for our benefit.

May we place all our trust and confidence in Him as we look forward to the day when we too will ascend to be with Him in heaven.

—Pastor David Reim

"Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call . . . Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:38,39,41).



The Wonder of Pentecost Power



The wonders that took place on that first Pentecost following Jesus' ascension are amazing signs of the Spirit's presence. While the signs were tremendous, an emphasis placed on the significance of certain signs can be over-

done.

A Glorious Beginning

The Lord Jesus promised that certain signs would accompany the preaching of the apostles so that we

might possess the assurance that their teachings were inspired and true. These signs were not a mark of true faith, but of true apostleship.

The signs of the tongues of fire and the speaking in tongues were not for emotional show, but for spiritual edification. These “tongues” were languages native to varying individuals in the crowd, spoken for their instruction.

These signs were used by the Spirit as He worked the greatest of His Pentecost miracles, the changing of unbelieving hearts of stone into believing hearts of flesh. Ezekiel’s prophecy was fulfilled: “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my judgment to do them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezek. 11:19-20).

Yes, that was the greatest of the wonders of that Pentecost day! By the Spirit’s power working through the Word, faith was created in the hearts of about 3,000 people who were baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins.

What an awesome power this is, this power of divine grace in the gospel!

The Miracle Continues!

The events of that Pentecost Day were a grand and glorious beginning of the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, as He establishes the Lord’s church on earth. But as grand as the conversion of the 3,000 was, it was only the beginning of the Spirit’s powerful working in the hearts of men during this last age of the earth. According to the working of God’s grace, this work has been passed down to our feeble hands to continue



spreading the good news of our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord.

Many who focus only on the “signs” associated with Pentecost miss this most marvelous truth, and its application to us, to our hearts, for our testimony.

The power of the Holy Spirit IS present with you in your heart and life. He has come to you through the gospel. It took the almighty power of the Spirit for your cold, dead, stony heart to be made warm and alive in Christ.

This miracle of God’s grace continues in your life as the Spirit works in you the will to do His good pleasure, that God may be glorified before the world through you.

As we testify to the truth of salvation that is found in Christ Jesus, we extend the invitation of the gospel to the sinners of this world. The Spirit’s power continues to abide with that gospel message just as powerfully as it did on that Pentecost Sunday in Jerusalem.

We realize that we cannot change a single heart. Our most persuasive arguments will not have sufficient power to convert a single soul. We realize our feebleness. Our confidence is not in self, but in the Pentecost power of the Holy Spirit.

That power which called us to faith will accompany the gospel message we declare and it shall perform wonders of life and salvation in as many as the Lord our God will call.

—Pastor Theodore Barthels

A VIRTUOUS WIFE AND MOTHER

“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. . . . She opens her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all.’ Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates” (Proverbs 31:10, 26-31).

The first verse of Proverbs 31 tells us that these words were written by King Lemuel, of whom nothing is known outside these words of advice.

In these verses Lemuel is describing a very special wife and mother, namely, one who fears the LORD. He is describing a wife and mother who is a believer in the LORD, the covenant God of Israel, whom we know to have been revealed in Christ Jesus. So we could also say that Lemuel is describing a Christian mother.

What a blessing upon her family is the Christian mother! It is generally the mother who feeds and clothes the household. And while especially the husband is charged with the spiritual care of the family (cf. Ephesians 6:4), it is generally the mother who does much of the spiritual leg-work.

Generally the mother spends quality time with the children. It is the mother who often reads Bible stories to the children and listens to their memory work. She guides the children along the way, showing them what is right and correcting them when they do wrong. It is the mother who sings to the child such simple hymns as “Away in a Manger,” “I am Jesus’ Little

Lamb,” or “Jesus Loves Me.”

And what of those mothers whose children are grown? The grandmother continues to teach her children’s children the things she taught her own children. She teaches them of the loving God who gave His Son to die for all of us, yes, even for little children. She helps to teach them of their Savior Jesus Christ.

Another familiar verse from Proverbs comes to mind: “Train up a child in the way he should go . . . when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

What greater gift can a mother give to her children and grandchildren than to bring them up in the way of God’s Word? That way leads to eternal life in Christ Jesus.

On Mother’s Day children praise their mother for bringing them up and loving them; in short, they praise her for her virtues. On Mother’s Day the *believing* mother is to be praised for the highest of virtues. She is to be praised for the *eternal* blessings that belong to the child because that child’s mother taught God’s love, manifested in the Savior.

Our Lord will bless all such believing, virtuous mothers with the crown of

eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus. He will likewise bless the children who had (have) such a mother, so long as they continue to walk in the

ways of the Lord as they were taught.

May the Lord grant to our church many such virtuous wives and mothers!

—Pastor Joel Fleischer

From the editor: According to the Historic Church Calendar, the Third Sunday after Easter is known as JUBILATE Sunday (see p. 70 in the forepart of *The Lutheran Hymnal*). This writing gives a proper perspective on Christian joy.

JUBILATE

“Make a joyful noise!”

Joy is a very important subject in God’s Word. Words like *joy*, *joyful*, *rejoice* are found over 300 times in the Bible.

God makes it very clear, particularly in the Psalms, that He wants His people to be noisy when they are joyful. What the Lord desires is for us to make an outward, vocal expression of the joy with which He has filled our hearts!

Of course, this rejoicing is beyond the mere sound or rejoicing for rejoicing’s sake. It is as we read in Psalm 47:7: “Sing ye praises with understanding.” The rejoicing is the product of knowledge—knowing how we have been delivered from the bondage of sin and the fear of death through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let’s consider further what the Scriptures have to say on the subject of joy: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Not only is Jesus the object of our faith, He is the Cause of our faith and the Finisher of our faith. This is so because He unswervingly stayed with

the course which His Father set before Him. Jesus remained on course because of the joy that awaited Him at its completion.

The joy would be found in His exaltation and in the fact that the mission to save sinful mankind was accomplished. His great joy is to welcome each penitent believer into His Father’s home. The course that brought Him to such great joy passed through excruciating suffering and shame, but He despised it and would not let that deter Him from reaching His goal. His joy is our redeemed souls.

“And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 Jn. 1:4). All that John and the other inspired writers had written was for the purpose of giving joy to their readers. It is a deep and abiding joy which the children of God glean from these writings.

Worldly joys are here today and gone tomorrow, but the joy which the Holy Spirit instills through Word and Sacrament is a never-ending joy. The more we come to know our Savior and the thoroughness of His work of saving us, the more complete our joy is. It lacks nothing.

Through times of sorrow and of

tempest, this joy is a constant that no worldly disappointments can diminish. That is because it depends upon the objective truth of God's mercy. Even when we are persecuted and suffering for the sake of our faith, the joy vanishes not.

This world's pains and troubles will pass, but the joy granted us in Christ

will never dim. Truly, it will one day be experienced in fullness without the hindrances of sin. As we read: "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:13).

—Pastor Delwyn Maas

A Chapel Talk given at ILC, Eau Claire—

"Do All To The Glory Of God"

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."—Matthew 6:23

This is the sort of word from God that we chapel speakers like to use at the beginning of the school year, for then it's easy to lead into questions such as: Why are you here at ILC? What do you expect to find here that you would not get at a public school? Since we are now closing in on the ending of the school year, I ask: "Have you been occupied with what our Lord Jesus speaks of: the *sine qua non*, the prime essential of all human needs, the greatness of God's Kingdom that has opened the gates of paradise for you and slammed shut the gates of hell?"

Together we have been seeking the heart of God this year. We have been seeking the face of God and the hand of God. And God has never closed His heart or turned His face or withdrawn His hand. So we have not let our chief preoccupation be the bell schedule and the social opportunities, for we have been seeking what God has for our souls, for our eternal welfare—and the earthly stuff will follow. Thus it has always been with God's children, be

they students or teachers, elderly or young.

You would not like to think so, but a good many Christians make it evident that they do not understand this main business of their life, even when they claim that their religion comes first. And many are serious and sincere about that. But what they are doing is viewing their life as divided into compartments. There is the secular part, and there is the sacred part. Certain minutes or hours are devoted to the sacred things such as worship, devotion, church activities, religion class. The rest come under the heading of eating, sleeping, working, relaxing. True disciples of Christ will say: "Of course, the sacred part is the most important." And if this is what they think Jesus was talking about at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, they are quite wrong, at least in their mode of expression.

First, let us get better acquainted with a certain word from the mouth of Jesus. When our version says "Seek ye first . . ." the Greek has the verb in the

durative form, and we should translate: "Be seeking . . ."—constantly, enduringly, seeking to spend our life on it, to endure in it.

Thus: "Be constantly seeking to live under the benign, gracious, protective rule of our Savior-God." This requires constant striving, simply because our old nature is dead set against it. Being constantly desirous of and in possession of that kingdom's righteousness, which is forgiveness and freedom from sin, requires effort because the old Adam of pride and self-righteousness is constantly against it.

But the emphasis here is also upon the word "first": "seek ye *first* the kingdom of God . . ." This does not mean "first in order" or "first thing in the morning, after which you can get on with your other business" Rather it means: in everything let your first and primary concern be that you are in the Kingdom and that you are living your life unto God.

This certainly calls upon us to let our personal lives be a unit, not a set of categories in which we now pray, then study, then play, then go out on a date, then attend church, then eat and then do homework. Our whole life has been transported into a new situation, namely, into the kingdom of God's dear Son. And here we have but one governing principle: to be in this kingdom, whatever we are doing at the moment.

Let me illustrate with an example that dates me. After World War II thousands of bombers were taken over for commercial service. They were "converted" from war machines to commercial airliners. Same wings, same fuselage, same motors. But the bomb racks were gone, the gun turrets removed. The plane got a new owner, carried new cargo, and had a new schedule.

ALL THE TIME. The converted plane does not spend one hour each day killing people.

We too are converted. And how could we find it possible to divorce any portion of our life's activity from our living in God's kingdom? This we are assured of from another word of God: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Easily we know all about a Christian's imperfections in practicing and using his newness of life; nonetheless, we will maintain and cherish our new life's status as members of God's kingdom—first, last, and always.

That has been our concern this year at ILC for one another. You the student, and you the professor, and you the staff worker who make that kingdom your first concern from morning until night and back again. We will then surely not pursue our affairs in harmful ways, in an evil spirit, with corrupt purpose. We will, on the contrary, make the most ordinary tasks glow with the glory of God.

And we cannot be the losers for this wonderful attitude of heart: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." All the other things that this world strives for and can be blessed with will be ours also—because Jesus loves us, and enjoys our company, and enjoys blessing us.

—Prof. Em. Paul Koch



Appreciating Our Lutheran Hymns



1 We now im - plore God the Ho - ly Ghost
2 Shine in our hearts, O most pre - cious Light,
3 Thou sa - cred Love, grace on us be - stow,
4 Thou high - est Com - fort in ev - 'ry need,

We Now Implore God the Holy Ghost

A Pentecost Hymn

#231 in The Lutheran Hymnal

Artists and writers often pride themselves on the originality of their works. They like to think that their paintings and novels originate in their minds alone and that they are indebted to no one else for their ideas.

In this they are often foolishly proud, not wanting to acknowledge that all of man's creative works are influenced by the work of others and that man's good ideas have their origin in things that God created. God is the only true creator, after all, the only true original artist and author.

Martin Luther understood this and for his work gave God the glory. And he was not above making use of the work of others, humbly acknowledging his debt to them and adding to their work his own God-given talent and labor.

The first stanza of the Pentecost hymn *We Now Implore God the Holy Ghost* was an old hymn stanza that Luther found quoted in a sermon by the famous preacher, Berthold of Regensburg who lived in the 13th century. This stanza, of unknown origin, was itself probably inspired by a prayer



MARTIN LUTHER

sung in Pentecost services, asking the Holy Spirit for His blessings and gifts.

To the old hymn stanza that he had discovered, Luther added three stanzas of his own, each one a hymn of praise to the Spirit acknowledging His gifts of grace.

One stanza addresses the Holy Spirit as "*most precious Light*"—the One who reveals to us Christ our Savior, leading us to believe in Him. Another calls Him "*sacred Love*"—the source of true unity and peace among believers. A third calls Him our "*highest Comfort in every need*"—the One who sustains our faith in Christ through all the trials of life and finally in the

hour of our death.

Luther recognized that the highest and noblest of thoughts and words are not original with man but are those that

are inspired by the words of Holy Scripture authored by the Holy Spirit. It is to God alone that the glory belongs for all our works.

—Pastor John Klatt

Studies In Ephesians

Proclaiming the Unsearchable Riches of Christ (See 3:8)

Chapter 1:1-14

Salvation “Signed, Sealed, Delivered” in Christ

When Paul put pen to parchment in his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, he was writing to people who seemed to be in very uncertain circumstances. This city, famous for its majestic temple to the pagan goddess Diana, was a hostile environment for those who belonged to Christ. Strong opposition to the Gospel, as well as the fact that their founding pastor, Paul, was a prisoner in Rome, made life uncertain for them.

Uncertainty about the future is a plague on heart and soul which the Lord, through the apostle’s words, wanted to spare them. The Lord wants to give confidence and certainty to you, too.

So Paul opens his letter to the Ephesian church by giving you a peek into “the heavenly places,” by showing you how God planned your soul’s salvation from eternity. He wants you to know that, no matter what your earthly trials and troubles may be, the main thing—your salvation—is absolutely certain in Christ. It is, in fact, “signed,

sealed, and delivered” in Him.

SIGNED In Christ’s Own Blood

The first thing to know about being certain of going to heaven is that everything begins and ends “in Christ.” Paul says so more than ten times in these fourteen verses—in order to drive the point home. “*In Him* we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (v. 7).

If there were any question about who Jesus was or what He did for you on Calvary’s cross, then your arrival at your heavenly home would only amount to a wistful “maybe.” But there is no question about it. Redemption through Christ’s blood is an accomplished fact. God has established these things as undeniable truths in His Word, the Scriptures which cannot be broken.

Since the blood of God’s Son certainly was shed for you, then it certain-

SALVATION

SIGNED, SEALED, DELIVERED

IN CHRIST

ly was a complete payment for your sins, and it certainly does make you accepted with the Father. There is no reason to doubt it!

SEALED With The Holy Spirit Of Promise

Your wavering heart may tell you: "Yes, but salvation comes only to those who receive it by faith. I believe in Christ now, but how can I know whether I will continue in faith till the end?"

It is true that you can find no strength or certainty in yourself for these things. Paul's answer, again, is to look to Christ. For in Him, "... having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance . . ." (v. 13).

If going to heaven depended on keeping yourself strong in faith, you would certainly stray off the path of life and be condemned forever. But your faith does not depend on you, any more than the payment for your sins depends on you. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that drew you to Christ, and it is His work that will keep you in Christ.

The present proof of this is the Spirit's work in you right now, through the powerful Gospel in Word and Sacrament. In the Holy Spirit you have God's guarantee, His seal of assurance, to give you confidence!

DELIVERED By The Father From Eternity

Just how certain does God want you to be, in Christ, that heaven will

truly be your home?

So much so that He reveals that even before He made the world He decided you would have salvation! "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself . . ." (vv. 4-5).

This is a very humbling thing, because you can't take any credit at all for something that was given to you before you were even born. But more than that, it inspires rock-solid confidence to know that what the Son accomplished on Calvary, and the Spirit seals for eternity, the Father had already planned as your destiny.

It is true that the Scriptures warn believers to be on their guard against the real possibility of falling from faith and being condemned. And when we closely examine our own hearts, we will find sin, weakness of faith, and nagging doubts there. Hardly a reason for confidence!

There is a cure, thank God. The right way to be certain is to look outside of ourselves. Look up, up where Christ is, in heaven!

If doubts ever darken your doorstep, get out Ephesians chapter one and read it over . . . and over . . . and over. It will give you a look into eternity at God's will for you in Christ. It will help you see that your salvation is not only signed and sealed, but already delivered —IN HIM!

—Pastor Bruce Naumann

“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matt. 12:31-32).

THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST

From the Nicene Creed:

“ . . . And I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets . . . ”

In the Nicene Creed we confess our faith in the Holy Ghost as “The Lord and Giver of Life,” that is, of true spiritual life which leads to eternal Life. The Holy Spirit is the “Lord” of Life. The term “lord” means “master”; the Holy Spirit is the Lord or Master of spiritual and eternal Life because, as the One through whom alone sinners can be brought to faith, He Himself is the “Giver” of eternal Life.

It stands to reason that those who want to receive the Gift of Life must not spite or slight the Giver. According to Jesus’ words above, to do so means one will receive eternal death in place of Life.

The setting of the Lord’s remark was an encounter He had with the Pharisees. Jesus had cast out a demon from a possessed person. His enemies blasphemously accused Him of casting out devils by Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. Jesus did not permit Himself

to be personally offended at this blasphemous charge. Rather, He used the opportunity to warn them against the unforgiveable sin.

As terrible as is the sin of denying Jesus and blaspheming Him, there is forgiveness for such sins. There is forgiveness for all sins, even the coarsest and worst sins you might name—all but one. The blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to atone for and blot out all sins—all but one.

In the gospel of Mark Jesus put it this way: “. . . but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation” (Mk. 3:29). What does “blaspheme” mean? It means to speak against something sacred. To blaspheme the Holy Ghost means to speak evil against Him. God the Father planned our eternal salvation. God the Son earned forgiveness and eternal life through His innocent and substitutionary death for sinners on the cross. But the Holy Ghost is the Giver of eternal Life. Sins against the Father and the Son, if repented of, can be forgiven. But the one who sins against the Giver of eternal Life cuts himself off from the very Word which alone can lead to repentance and renewal. Such a sin, therefore, cannot be forgiven.

The sin against the Holy Ghost has not been committed by those who sim-

ply do not understand some parts of the Bible, or who sin ignorantly. St Paul writes of Himself: “. . . I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13). The sin against the Holy Ghost is not committed by those who are troubled, fearful, and distressed over some sin. In fact, that very attitude is evidence that the person has not hardened self against the Spirit’s continued working in the heart.

The sin against the Holy Ghost is an attitude of total disregard for, and defiance of, the activity of the Spirit who seeks to work on the hearts of sinners through the Means of Grace. The unforgivable sin can be committed only by those who have at one time been brought to faith or who have had opportunity for the Spirit’s influence upon their heart. It appears that Pharaoh committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, for we read that, when the Word of God came to him, he hardened his heart, blaspheming and mocking God (Ex. 5:2).

Since no man can read the heart of another, it can never be said definitely that some specific person has committed the unforgivable sin. However, every Christian needs to pay attention to the many warnings in Scripture—warnings from the Holy Ghost, Who is the Author of the Scriptures!—against despising His Means of Grace.

Writing about the unforgivable sin, a Lutheran forefather said: “. . . And why is this sin not forgiven? Because the sinner himself, fully conscious, decides: ‘I don’t want the forgiveness that I’ve experienced; I don’t want the faith that has moved my heart; I want no part of the Spirit that has

worked this faith within me.’ And he ends up cursing the Holy Ghost, the faith and the forgiveness and all the Holy Ghost effected in him! And thus that sinner has himself, fully conscious, voluntarily, willfully, and once for all rejected God’s forgiveness and driven off the Holy Spirit Who solely and alone by faith puts one into possession of forgiveness of one’s sins. As a consequence, such a one is without forgiveness forever and subject to eternal condemnation. The Holy Ghost abandons him, Christ does not intercede for him any longer, and the Father pronounces the sentence of everlasting rejection. And as St. John instructs us in his first epistle (5:16), Christians are not to pray for such a one any longer.” (Manna, 1906, by Carl Manthey-Zorn, p. 439)

Jesus said on another occasion: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (Jn. 6:63). It’s clear. The Holy Spirit gives life—true spiritual life which ends in eternal Life. As “The Lord and Giver of Life” the Spirit works through the Word of God to impart true spiritual life. “Oh, dear Christian, . . . willingly follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and tremble at the thought of the least resistance to him, lest such an evil beginning lead to such a frightful end!” (Same reference)

—Pastor Paul Fleischer



Psalm 124

“LORD, thank You for being my almighty Defender.”

A Prayer of Thanks

Psalm 124

“If it had not been the LORD who was on our side,” let Israel now say—“If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream would have gone over our soul; then the swollen waters would have gone over our soul.”

Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

This psalm is said to have been penned by David upon the occasion of some great deliverance which God wrought for him and his people (in a time of grave, threatening danger). It fits into the Songs of Ascents collection quite well.

As the people journeyed to Jerusalem it would have been natural for them to recall the many instances during their history when Jehovah showed them His faithfulness and love by coming to their rescue “just in the nick of time” (for example, their deliverance from Pharaoh’s armies at the Red Sea, their rescue from the Assyrian armies in the days of Hezekiah, their release from captivity in Babylon, to name a few).

How often Jehovah enabled His people to come out victorious in battle

when they were greatly outnumbered, against all odds, when it seemed like there was no way they could win. It was out of gratitude to the Lord for His undeserved mercies in defending them from their enemies that the Jewish pilgrims joined their voices together in singing His praise: “Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth.”

Like the Israelites of old, we have wonderful reason to bless the Lord. Many and strong are the enemies which we, the members of the Holy Christian Church, face in this world of sin as we go about our God-given task of heralding the Gospel.

Jesus’ promise, however, is that the gates of hell won’t prevail against it. “The Church shall never perish! Her dear Lord, to defend, to guide, sustain, and cherish, Is with her to the end.” There have been times in the history of the Church when it seemed like the Lord was no longer with His people and the Gospel light would be completely extinguished (as in the days of Luther). But the almighty Lord kept this from happening. He used Luther as His instrument to uncover the Gospel light so it could shine forth brilliantly again. This is but one example.

The same is true in the lives of individual Christians. Our faith is continuously under attack. It would seem that

continued on page 20

Christian Marriage Faces Sin-Pitfalls

It is no surprise that Satan's strategy for winning souls would focus on those institutions God has established for the propagation and preservation of the Christian faith—the church, the family, and Christian marriage.

In recent generations all of those sacred institutions have come under relentless siege and, to no one's surprise, have suffered serious damage in our society. The disintegration of many marriage and family relationships (as God designed and desired them) has not only caused major social problems in our country, but also has left in its wake a path of spiritual destruction that will impact future generations as well.

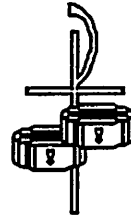
Two of Satan's key agents in his mission are the world and our own sinful flesh.

The World

At Satan's disposal is a world which is diametrically opposed to the will of God.

By the *world* we simply mean all those things surrounding us that tempt, allure, or pressure us into sin. Hymns 430 and 446 in *The Lutheran Hymnal* clearly present the world's true colors and a Christian's attitude toward it. Scripture says clearly: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:15).

Thus the world's view of marriage is radically different from God's. The world would disagree with our previous description of marriage as a divine



institution, a heaven-sent blessing, and a sacred spiritual commitment. It would rather view marriage as a cultural or religious preference, or as one of several relationship alternatives. In our "anything goes," "tolerant," and "politically correct" society, such issues as pre-marital sex, adultery, divorce, and homosexuality become matters of individual choice, subject to the judgment of no one.

From the perspective of those who remember back a few generations this represents a significant change. To be sure, sin was no less present or powerful in the "good old days." Yet back then society and the evolving media of TV, movies, and music did not undermine Christian marriage and moral values to the degree this is being done today. We may have come a long way, but in what direction?

To illustrate, let's ask ourselves a few questions:

- * How easy is it to find "wholesome" (Philippians 4:8) family entertainment today?
- * How often do we find Christian marriage and moral values strongly endorsed in any public medium or forum?
- * In the past would those who speak

out against immorality or homosexuality on the basis of Scripture have been labeled as intolerant, narrow-minded, and bigoted, sowers of seeds of hatred and paranoia?

*Would the majority of our society fifty years ago have shrugged their shoulders and expressed continuing support for a nation's leader guilty of adultery, cover-up, and perjury?

* How difficult is it today to find logical reasons for divorce or to legally secure one?

The answers to these questions reflect the changing mores and values of our spiritually decaying world.

Our Sinful Flesh

The other serious sin-pitfall in Christian marriage is our own sinful flesh.

Enthusiastically our flesh rises up to embrace the selfish philosophy and attitudes espoused and practiced by many: ME first, ME only, MY needs, MY rights! The focus is on self and what I want. Witness the Dear Abby criteria for determining whether to continue in a less than ideal marriage: "Ask yourself—am I better off with or without my spouse?" Yes, the overwhelming majority of marital problems stem from simple selfishness.

All of this flies in the face of God's

design for selfless Christian marriage.

Just as Jesus Christ loved His Church and selflessly and sacrificially gave Himself for her, so Christian husbands and wives are to love and honor each other selflessly. Love's focus is always on the needs and wishes of the other—that is, my God, and my God-given spouse and family.

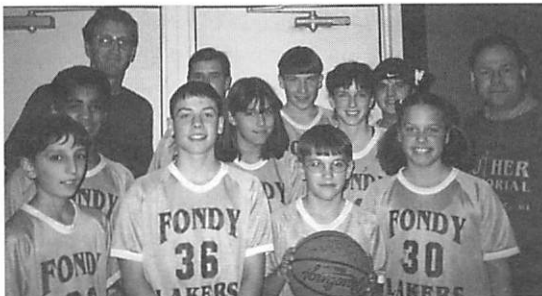
Because of sin no marriage is perfect, nor is any marriage partner. The many flaws which I possess (which begs the question: "How would I like to be married to me?") should drive me to my knees in humility and repentance. The flaws which my spouse possesses (the "speck of dust" in Mt. 7:3) should in love evoke a kind and forgiving spirit in me (Eph. 4:32).

Repentance and forgiveness at the foot of Christ's cross lie at the heart of all our relationships—with God and with each other. Thank God for Christ—in my life and in my marriage.

Pitfalls there may be in marriage. Yet with God's forgiving love, His help and strength, these can be overcome. "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 Jn. 4:4).

In Christ husband and wife find a love, a unity, a commitment and a strength that will "overcome" and will be a joy to their God and a blessing to each of them.

—Pastor David Schierenbeck



The Fondy Lakers, representing Luther Memorial School of Fond du Lac, Wis., was one of the teams competing in the CLC Grade School Basketball Tourney (see p. 19). The team of four girls and six boys was coached by Tim Williams and Dave Mueller.

SMORGASBORD

• THE GIDEONS

A *Spokesman* reader recently favored us with an informative writing on the Bible distribution group popularly known as “the Gideons.”

It was while he was still a member of another Lutheran synod that this reader, who recently became a member of the CLC, was led to investigate the Gideons first-hand. (In his former church “they were permitting . . . the Gideons to speak and collect voluntary funds after the worship service.”) Subsequently, this concerned Lutheran Christian did some “digging” into the association’s history and program.

The five-page report is too long to print in its entirety. We give only excerpts here. The background history is interesting: “. . . On May 31, 1899, they (two men, John H. Nicholson of Janesville, Wis. and Samuel E. Hill of Beloit, Wis.) met at Beaver Dam, Wisconsin and concluded to band the Christian commercial travelers together for mutual recognition, personal evangelism, and united service for the Lord In view of the fact that almost all of the Gideons in the early years of the Gideon Association were traveling men, the question quite naturally arose regarding how they might be more effective witnesses in the hotels where they were forced to spend so much of their time. One suggestion was that a Bible might be placed at the reception desk in each hotel so that the patrons would have the privilege of

borrowing it if they wished. It also occurred to these men that this would be a silent witness remaining in these hotels when they were elsewhere. . . .

“This question of advanced activities, as they called them, was carefully considered in the Cabinet meeting held in Chicago, October 19, 1907. One trustee went so far as to suggest that The Gideons furnish a Bible for each bedroom of the hotels in the United States. . . . This plan was adopted by the convention at Louisville, Kentucky, in 1908. . . .”

The Constitution of “The Gideons International” is quoted as to the Association’s name, object, and membership.

The section which follows further answers the question “Who Are The Gideons?” In part, this is said:

“The Gideons are laymen from various evangelical denominations, Christian business and professional men with a vital testimony for the Lord. Each Gideon is an active member of some local church and the Gideons as an Association work in cooperation with the evangelical churches and denominations. The primary object of the Gideons is to win others for the Lord Jesus Christ, and an effective means to this end has been the wide distribution of the Word of God.”

We are told that The Gideons Association now exists in more than 172 countries, and “thousands of evangelical churches support the work by their prayers and contributions.”

It becomes clear that—in his search for information on the Gideons—this Lutheran Christian became convinced



that to remain in an affiliation which endorsed the activity of the Gideons would compromise biblical "church fellowship" principles. On concluding pages of his writing, these principles are reviewed, and their application to the Gideons is shown.

The concluding paragraphs lend sound advice: *"Before a Christian joins any organization or participates in fellowship with another church or organization, a person should first find out their oath, creed, and confession and then with the pastor examine these alongside Scripture.*

"We do have the opportunity through our CLC to do mission work at home and abroad. If a person wants to be active in sharing the Gospel, one does not need to join the Gideons to do evangelism. Consult with your evangelism board, pastor, and synod and I'm sure that you can be very active in evangelism work.

"Each Christian should study the Scripture to know what he believes and confesses, so that he may grow in grace, recognize false teaching and error, and spread the Gospel to others. May the study of His Word be our guiding light to draw us ever closer to the Savior."

The complete writing can be procured by contacting Lee Gorne, 5362 Sayre Ave., Fremont, CA 94536. E-mail CalChief53@aol.com.

• SUBSCRIPTION TIME

It's during the month of May that the annual call goes out for subscriptions to the *Spokesman*. Besides letting the magazine advertise itself, our chief "salesmen" remain the pastors in our CLC congregations.

And they come up with some fine sales pitches.

One pastor e-mailed the rest of us

the following *Spokesman* promo piece he put together for his church bulletin.

Dear Members of _____,

It is once again the time of year to begin or renew your subscription to the CLC's monthly devotional magazine, the Lutheran Spokesman. I would like to urge each of our member households to subscribe. This magazine offers many benefits:

** Each month you receive well-written devotional articles on our Christian faith and life.*

** Many use the Spokesman for their family devotion time.*

** The Spokesman keeps you up to date on what's happening in the CLC.*

** It is the duty of each of our members to be a "watchdog" for our church body, making sure that it presents God's Word in truth, without human opinion added. Keeping track of what is printed in our official magazine is one of the best ways to do this.*

The Spokesman is YOUR magazine — so subscribe today! The cost is \$8.00 for 12 monthly issues (bulk subscriptions—ed.). . . . Deadline for subscribing is May 31st.

(signed: Pastor _____)

After seeing the above, another pastor added the following comment and ideas.

The congregation here buys a subscription to the Spokesman for every family in the congregation. Some members feel they want to pay for it anyway. That's up to them. A copy is there for them each month, "take it or leave it," literally. We then try to get all to not only read their copy after they get it, but to put it somewhere for the public when they are done with it. We are trying to get everyone to adopt a pet location—like a doctor's

office, hospital waiting room, laundromat, library, etc. A mailing address with pertinent local church info turns it into a congregation's outreach tool as well as a gospel outreach tool.

Great sales pitches! About all we would add is that subscriptions might

be given as gifts—to a college student away from home, to a service person, to a friend or relative in another synod, etc.

Pricing for individual subscriptions (U.S. or foreign) is itemized in the masthead.

Spread the good Word!

CLC Grade School Basketball Tournament—March 12-14, 1999



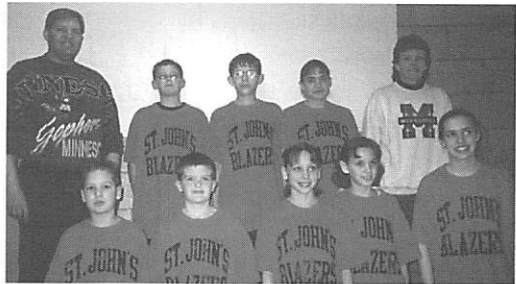
The Thunderbirds, representing Holy Cross Lutheran School of Phoenix, Ariz. drove 1,800 miles in two days to participate! Team coaches were Teacher Philip Strike and Pastor Delwyn Maas.

The tournament is held annually at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire. A flyer describing this year's tournament adds the following information: "Welcome . . . This year's tournament has been renamed as the Don Brandt Memorial Basketball Tournament. It was named after its founder who passed away last year. In 1986, he organized a tournament of CLC grade schools with teams, to play basketball with other churches in our synod. There were only five teams in the first tournament. There are fourteen teams this year, including St. John's Blazers and the Phoenix Thunderbirds,

the two new teams. This year's basketball games were organized by Mr. Ted Quade and Mr. Mark Kranz."

Besides the two new teams, other teams were: Austin Pioneers, Austin, Minn.; Berea Bobcats, Inver Grove Heights, Minn.; Faith Falcons, Coloma, Mich.; Fondy Lakers, Fond du Lac, Wis.; Fridley Falcons, Fridley, Minn.; Gethsemane Grizzlies, Saginaw, Mich.; Grace Spartans, Valentine, Nebr.; Mankato Trojans, Mankato, Minn.; Markesan Mustangs, Markesan, Wis.; Messiah Rams, Hales Corners, Wis.; Messiah Squires, Eau Claire, Wis. and Trinity Eagles, Watertown, S.Dak.

The St. John's Blazers from Okabena, Minn. were the other new team in this year's tournament. Coaches shown are Steve Sumey and Doreen Iverson.



Psalm 124

continued from p.14

the unholy three of devil, world, and flesh—powerful enemies indeed!—would be too formidable for us to overcome.

This would be true, of course, if we were to rely on our own strength—“if it had not been the LORD who was on our side.” The assurance of this psalm is that He in whom we trust will keep us safe by His power. He will come to our rescue “just in the nick of time” in every trial, in every trouble, so that though we be assailed by them, we will win in the end and keep the victory.

Announcements

West Central Delegate Conference

Dates: June 4-6, beginning at 10:00 a.m. (CDT) on Friday through 3:00 p.m. on Sunday.

Place: Redeemer Ev. Lutheran Church, Bowdle, S.Dak.

Agenda:

- 1) Devotional Study of Psalm 51—Rev. George Dummann
- 2) Devotional Study of Psalm 121—Mr. Caleb Wiechmann
- 3) Explanation of the Liturgy—Rev. Peter Reim
- 4) “Do All to the Glory of God”—Rev. Michael Roehl
- 5) “Train up a Child” (Proverbs 22:6)—Mr. Curt Wiest
- 6) May a Christian Regard Temporal Events as Specific Judgments of God on Specific Wickedness of Men?—Rev. Timothy Wheaton
- 7) Sign of the Times: Is the End Near?—Rev. Steven Sippert

Conference Chaplain: Rev. James Naumann

Communion Service Speaker: Rev. John Hein

—Rev. Michael Schierenbeck, *Secretary*

Youth Camp

Immanuel Lutheran College will host a Youth Camp June 20-26, 1999. The camp is intended for those who have completed grade 4 to completed grade 8. There are dormitory accommodations for 100 youth campers. Cost will be \$80/camper/wk. or \$70/camper/wk for multiples in the same family.

More information and registration forms are

M/M Albert Gebhardt
811 S. Union Road
Spokane, WA 99206

available from your pastor or by writing to:

Ethel Dorow
ILC Youth Camp
501 Grover Road
Eau Claire, WI 54701
Phone: (715) 836-6626
Fax: 715-836-6634
E-mail: etheldorow@aol.com

Only registrations received through the mail can be accepted. Registrations are limited to 100 youth campers and must be received by June 4, 1999.

Basketball Camp

Immanuel Lutheran High School is hosting a Basketball Skills Camp for girls on June 18-20 on the campus of Immanuel. This camp is for girls entering 5th through 12th grades in the fall of 1999. The cost is \$20.00 for the Friday evening, Saturday, and Sunday morning sessions. Campers will be attending Saturday evening services at Messiah here in Eau Claire. If interested, please contact Ross Roehl for information and/or a registration form. Registration deadline is May 15. Anyone interested in assisting in the camp should also contact Ross.

Ross Roehl
501 Grover Road
Eau Claire, WI 54701
Phone (715) 831-8306