

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

Read

There shall come forth
a Rod from the stem
of Jesse, And a Branch
shall grow out of his roots.



The Spirit of the LORD
shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and
understanding, The Spirit
of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge
and of the fear of the LORD.

28 to 11 AM

THE RIGHTEOUS REIGN OF THE MESSIAH

Isaiah II: 1 & 2

“With the many dollars that are spent these days for presents, decorations, etc., would the modern-day family feel like it was celebrating Christmas if it had only the meager earthly supplies of the old-fashioned Christmas? . . . ”

AN OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS

Who among us has not enjoyed sitting down and listening to our parents, grandparents, or even great-grandparents describe what life was like when they were growing up?

The stories can be quite fascinating, especially when we consider the tremendous amount of change that has taken place over the past three generations or so—from traveling by horse-drawn carriages to soaring through the air in jet planes; from communicating via the telegraph to sending e-mail messages over the internet; and from living in homes without electricity to having every conceivable electrical convenience.

Around Christmas time we might

hear the older generation tell us what Christmas celebrations were like in the home many years ago. Those stories may not only be quite interesting, but also very informative as to the focus of past Christmas observances in the home.

Besides the mouth-watering descriptions of special ethnic baked goods of the old country, stories are often told of how very little our forebears had in the way of earthly goods when it came to celebrating Christmas. Both the house and the humble-looking Christmas tree were adorned with homemade decorations such as strings of cranberries and popcorn. As for presents, this writer remembers hearing of

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a young child in the previous generation receiving just an orange and a dime, or perhaps one inexpensive toy for Christmas.

While the old-fashioned Christmas was short on material possessions, yet in the Christian home it was very often long on a religious emphasis that focused on the birth of the Christchild.

On Christmas Eve or Christmas Day the family gathered together to hear the reading of or join in the singing of the Luke 2 account of Jesus' birth, or the singing of other treasured Christmas hymns and favorite carols. The young children's part in the family observance included the reciting of Christmas parts and the singing of hymns which they had learned for the festive church service. The old-fashioned Christmas in the home may also have involved the offering of a Christmas prayer, thanking the Lord for the rich and bountiful spiritual blessings poured out upon them through the young Child born of Mary.

What Is The Focus?

With the many dollars that are spent these days for presents, decorations, etc., would the modern-day family feel like it was celebrating Christmas if it had only the meager earthly supplies of the old-fashioned Christmas? How would the children react who are accustomed to receiving so many Christmas gifts?

What is the focus of the Christian celebration in our times? Are there not many cases where families are merely celebrating the giving and receiving of gifts instead of celebrating God's great gift of sending His only begotten Son into this world for our eternal salvation?



Many of you could very likely relate a family tradition of your forebears where the Christmas celebration in the home focused on the birth of the Christchild, and the emphasis was on praising God for His priceless gift to sinful man. Perhaps some of those special family traditions have been preserved and passed down to the present.

When we go back to that first Christmas night on which the Savior of the world was born, what were the sights and sounds? The temporary dwelling place where the celebrants gathered together was in a crude and lowly animal shelter. The focus of their attention and the joy of their hearts was that of a newborn baby who was to be given the name of "Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). The words of praise that were uttered that night were truly heavenly, for a host of angels praised God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!" (Lk. 2:14).

May our Christmas celebrations, whether old-fashioned or not, reflect the spirit of that first Christmas night.

—Pastor Mark Gullerud

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

“The King is coming!”

“The king is coming!”

This announcement was received with mixed feelings in olden times. If the king was coming to share his bounty, then the news of His coming was splendid. But all too often he was coming to levy heavy taxes or to draft the young men into his service. Then his subjects viewed his coming with dread. In any case, they could be fairly certain that he would be more interested about his own welfare than theirs.

It is not so different with today’s politicians. Typically, they manipulate people and spin the facts. The public good is not their priority. Their own interests take precedence.

The King presented in Zechariah chapter nine stands out in stark contrast to such leaders. He is not coming to discover how much He can get out of His subjects. He comes to give and be generous in ways they neither expect nor deserve. There is no intention to “lord it over them.” Instead, His desire is to serve. Rather than oppressing the people, He comes to set them free. He comes not to wage war but to speak peace. His people have great reasons to rejoice when He comes, because His coming means only blessings for them. He is the King of glory! His name is Jesus Christ.

A Man Of Action!

Many readily dismiss Him. “He doesn’t look like a king!” Where is the pomp and circumstance? Where the

jewels, the chariot, and the honor guard? His outward appearance is one of humility and lowliness. His birth-place was intended to be a shelter for farm animals, His cradle a manger.

Zechariah did foretell that this King would one day ride into Jerusalem as the King. Yet, even then His steed would be a young donkey, never broken, with its mother walking alongside. Later that week His appearance would become even less regal in His being numbered with the transgressors and crucified.

Everything about His coming is so modest, even despised. Who would welcome such a King?

He is welcomed by folk who cherish the gifts He brings. It is easier for leaders to make promises than it is for them to follow through. Indeed, some have made promises with no intention of following through. Not our King! What a thrill it is to have a King who does more than just talk! As a Man of action, He fulfills all that is promised.

As we prepare for Christmas, it is



natural for our thoughts to be on Bethlehem. Yet no reflection on the advent of Christ is complete without also contemplating Calvary. That is where our King's true glory shines through! He was obedient even to death on the cross, so that to His subjects an entrance will be supplied abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11).

The advent of our King is truly an

occasion for a celebration! The gift which He has personally prepared for us is nothing less than eternal salvation.

"The everlasting Son Incarnate deigns to be; Himself a servant's form puts on To set His servants free" (TLH 68:2). The result of His advent to earth will be our advent into heaven. For this reason we respond with exhilaration and praise every time we hear: "The King is coming!"

—Pastor Delwyn Maas



"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14).

Delivered From Darkness

On the first day of creation God made light and divided light from darkness. On the fourth day He created lights in the heavens to bear light to the world. He created a greater light to rule the day and a lesser light to rule the night. The result was a world in which there was no darkness, only greater light and lesser light. For this was God's creation, and "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5).

Light remains a feature of today's world—so persistent that even the heaviest clouds cannot completely shut it out, and even the darkest nights are not completely without it.

Darkness Invades

But another kind of darkness did invade God's creation—spiritual darkness, the kind of darkness that exists in the heart and soul where God does not dwell.

That darkness was brought into the world by Satan, whom God had expelled from His presence, reserving him for judgment in chains of darkness (2 Peter 2:4). Satan was successful in introducing darkness into God's world of light when he convinced Eve and then Adam to disobey God and turn away from His light. Since then this world has been a kingdom ruled by the prince of darkness.

We see that darkness, that absence of God, in the world today. It surrounds us.

We see it in the godless conduct and hear it in the godless speech of the world. We see it in the perversion and distortion of the truth spread by false teachers.

And—most appalling of all—we see the darkness in our own hearts, because we too have a sinful nature inherited from Adam. We see darkness in the evil thoughts and desires that

arise in our minds, thoughts just as dark as the words and deeds that offend us when we are confronted with them from outside us. We often desire what God has forbidden; we often envy our neighbor and covet what he has; we often are bitter and do not want to forgive those who sin against us.

Light Dispels

The darkness in our world and in ourselves threatens to swallow us.

But the celebration of the birth of Christ reminds us that we have also been delivered from the kingdom of darkness.

When Christ was born, light came again into this dark world. He destroyed the power of darkness by atoning for sin, which is the source of darkness in our world and in ourselves. When Jesus died on the cross, darkness covered the land for three hours. Our

Savior took our sins on Himself, and endured the horrible darkness of being forsaken by God His Father.

And God was satisfied with His sacrifice and declared our sins forgiven when He raised Jesus from the dead.

The darkness of the crucifixion gave way to the glorious light of the resurrection. The night of sin, death, and hell is over, and now we live in the eternal day of the Gospel of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

This is why we celebrate Christmas with such great joy. We know that the Child born of Mary is the Light of the world.

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13-14).

—Pastor John Klatt



A Christmas Message from our CLC President—

“There is no hidden meaning to Christmas; no deeper meaning than what the Father has Himself put in it. . . .”

An Unencumbered Christmas

What would Christmas be were it an unencumbered Christmas? We will never know. Think of it:

Christmas planning

Christmas cards

Christmas tree shopping or cutting

Christmas decorating

Christmas baking

Christmas sewing

Christmas shopping

Christmas wrapping

Christmas mailing

Christmas parties

Christmas travel

Christmas traffic

Christmas visitors

We could dispense with all of the above and still have Christmas! And then add in—for some an afterthought, but for us the essentials which contribute to our appreciation of Christmas—our church-related study

and worship activities.

How blessed were the shepherds. They were waiting. That was it. Otherwise they were at work “keeping watch over their flock by night.” They made no preparation. Suddenly came the announcement: “Fear not . . . For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:10-11).

With no prior preparation, not even an arrangement for a “sheep-sitter,” they made their way with haste to Bethlehem where they found everything just as they had been told. There was the Baby, their Savior, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Then they went back to work! Oh, yes, along the way they glorified and praised the Lord for all the things that they had heard and seen as it had been told unto them.

A simple Christmas! An unforgettable Christmas for the Shepherds. They had seen their Savior, their Life, their Hope, their Joy.

It is He whom we also see, but in the Word—the Word made flesh, our

Savior and our Guarantor of heaven. There is no hidden meaning to Christmas; no deeper meaning than what the Father has Himself put in it. No mystery beyond that inherent in the event itself. Jesus, the Son of God—true man, conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary—is my Lord and Savior.

Make haste to the Word at Christmas and throughout the new year. Contemplate and rejoice, as did the shepherds!

It is probably too late for 1999. But think about it. Wouldn't an unencumbered Christmas be a blessing? So simple, so quiet—a little “peace” of heaven before we get there. Nothing can destroy the fullness of forgiveness in the Christchild or the promise of life eternal to all who believe in Him.

In spite of the activity and din of Christmas season, may you know the fullness of peace in Jesus. Only, please take time with your family and fellow Christians to enjoy the message the shepherds heard. You will know the shepherd's joy.

—*Pastor Daniel Fleischer*



Pastors of the South-East Conference met in Live Oak, Florida in September 1999. Here they are taking a recreation outing “Way Down upon the Suwannee River”: (l-r) J. Johannes, V. Fossum, J. Schierenbeck, J. Klatt, D. Fleischer, T. Schuetze, P. Larsen, S. Sydow

Appreciating Our Lutheran Hymns



1 Now are the days ful-filled, God's Son is man-i - fest - ed,
2 Now are the days ful-filled, Lo, Ja-cob's Star is shin - ing;
3 Now are the days ful-filled, The child of God re - joic - es;

Now Are the Days Fulfilled

A Christmas Hymn

#99 in The Lutheran Hymnal

The author of this month's hymn is unknown, but the words of Scripture his hymn call to mind are familiar: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His son . . ." (Gal. 4:4).

That first Christmas was a special one for God the Father. He was looking forward to the birth of His one and only Son as a human being.

The magnitude of the effort and planning and *love* that went into carrying out His plan dare not escape us. The guiding and directing of thousands of years was all done for that one moment—all so that God could give the first and best Christmas Gift to the world.

In that Gift "dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), given so that "your joy may be full" (1 Jn. 1:4). Yes, *your* joy—you who were born full of sin; *you* God wanted to fill with the joy of forgiveness.

What we could not do, "God did by sending His own Son . . . that the . . . law might be fulfilled in us . . ." (Rom. 8:3-4).

It is God's earnest desire that you

"know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19).

And in us God's desire has been realized, for by Spirit-worked faith "of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace" (Jn. 1:16).

It could well be said of our days before Christmas: "Now are the days full-filled" — full of shopping, full of holiday activities, full of anticipation over how full the space below our Christmas tree will be.

But let's not fill our days so full that no room is left for that for which God completely emptied Himself.

Make time for God in His Word to fill you with His Christmas present—His "indefinable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

—Pastor Paul Krause



Daily Bible Readings

The Year of our Lord 2000

From the Editor:

Thanks once again to Pastor Roland H. Gurgel (Faith, Nicollet and Faith, New Ulm, Minn.) for these daily Bible readings.

For the year drawing to a close Pastor Gurgel matched daily Scripture readings with hymn stanzas. He then used these devotional suggestions as "text" to write daily meditations, which in turn were offered at a minimal fee to members of his own congregation, and to others as well. An ambitious undertaking--writing a 40-page bulletin-size booklet every month!

He has offered to do it again, explaining: "In keeping with the word of our Lord to 'encourage one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' (Ephesians 5:19), this year's devotions are taken from the Psalms. I tried to include many of the favorite and familiar psalms, along with a few one may not normally read." -- And yes, the pastor's intent is again to write a daily meditation on the reading for the day.

With regard to the brevity of these daily readings, a suggestion is given: "While many of the readings are only one verse, and in some cases two or three, the thought behind such short readings is for us to ponder during the day, or as we fall asleep, the words of our Lord -- focusing upon one thought and applying the thought to our daily lives."

For those who would like ideas for longer Scripture readings, this suggestion is made: "From New Year's Day to Ash Wednesday, read Genesis; During Lent, one of the Gospels; During the Easter Season, a second Gospel; For Trinity Season, the Minor Prophets (Hosea-Malachi); or Isaiah; or any number of the New Testament Epistles; During Advent and Christmas, Luke or John (or one of the Gospels not previously read)."

Devotional booklets based on these daily readings may be ordered from Pastor Roland H. Gurgel, 22 North State Street, New Ulm, MN 56073 (Phone 507-354-4534). Cost is \$2.00 per month or \$15.00 per year; master copy with rights to print copies: \$25.00. Make checks payable to Pastor Gurgel.

Dear reader, our Savior is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So too is His Word which, He says, will never pass away. Take Jesus and His Word with you into the new millennium.

**All references are to
the psalms; Sunday
readings in boldface**

JANUARY

- 1 95:1
- 2 **95:2**
- 3 95:3
- 4 95:4
- 5 95:5
- 6 *Epiphany*
95:6
- 7 95:8
- 8 95:9
- 9 **95:10**
- 10 95:10
- 11 95:11
- 12 105:1
- 13 105:2
- 14 105:3-4
- 15 105:5
- 16 **105:6**
- 17 105:7
- 18 105:8&11
- 19 105:12&15
- 20 105:16&19
- 21 105:20&22
- 22 105:23&25
- 23 **105:26&36**
- 24 105:37
- 25 105:38
- 26 105:39
- 27 105:40
- 28 105:41
- 29 105:42
- 30 **105:43**
- 31 105:44&45

FEBRUARY

- 1 2:1
- 2 2:2&3
- 3 2:4&5
- 4 2:6
- 5 2:7
- 6 **2:8**
- 7 2:9
- 8 2:10&11
- 9 2:12
- 10 8:1
- 11 8:2
- 12 8:3
- 13 **8:4**
- 14 8:5
- 15 8:6&8
- 16 8:9
- 17 57:1
- 18 57:2
- 19 57:3
- 20 **57:4**
- 21 57:5
- 22 57:6
- 23 57:7
- 24 57:8
- 25 57:9
- 26 57:10
- 27 **57:11**
- 28 16:1
- 29 16:2&3

MARCH

- 1 16:4
- 2 16:5&6
- 3 16:7
- 4 16:8
- 5 **16:9**
- 6 16:10
- 7 16:11
- 8 *Ash Wednesday*

- 139:1
- 9 139:2
- 10 139:3
- 11 139:4
- 12 **24:1&2**
- 13 139:5
- 14 139:6
- 15 139:7
- 16 139:8&10
- 17 139:11&12
- 18 139:13
- 19 **24:3&4**
- 20 139:14&16
- 21 139:17&18
- 22 139:19&20
- 23 139:21&22
- 24 139:23
- 25 139:24
- 26 **24:5&6**
- 27 51:1&2
- 28 51:3&4
- 29 51:5&6
- 30 51:7
- 31 51:8

APRIL

- 1 51:9
- 2 **24:7&8**
- 3 51:10&11
- 4 51:12
- 5 51:13
- 6 51:14
- 7 51:15
- 8 51:16
- 9 **24:9&10**
- 10 51:17
- 11 51:18
- 12 51:19
- 13 124:1&2

- 14 124:3&4
- 15 124:5&6
- 16 *Palm Sunday*
124:7&8
- 17 121:1
- 18 121:2
- 19 121:3
- 20 121:4
- 21 121:5
- 22 121:6
- 23 *Easter Sunday*
113
- 24 119:1
- 25 119:2
- 26 119:3
- 27 119:4
- 28 119:5&6
- 29 119:7&8
- 30 **119:9&10**

MAY

- 1 119:10
- 2 119:11
- 3 119:12
- 4 119:13&14
- 5 119:15&16
- 6 119:17&18
- 7 **119:19&20**
- 8 119:21&22
- 9 119:23&24
- 10 119:25
- 11 119:26&27
- 12 119:28
- 13 119:29&32
- 14 **119:33**
- 15 119:34&35
- 16 119:36&37
- 17 119:38&40
- 18 119:41&43

19 119:44&47
20 119:48
21 119:49
22 119:50
23 119:51&52
24 119:53&54
25 119:55&56
26 119:57
27 119:58
28 119:59&61
29 119:62&64
30 119:65
31 119:66&67

JUNE

1 *Ascension*
119:68&70
2 119:71&72
3 119:73
4 119:74
5 119:75&77
6 119:78&80
7 119:81
8 119:82&84
9 119:85&86
10 119:87&88
11 *Pentecost*
119:89
12 119:90&91
13 119:92&93
14 119:94&96
15 119:97
16 119:98&100
17 119:101&102
18 119:103&104
19 119:105
20 119:106&108
21 119:109&112
22 119:113

23 119:114&115
24 119:116&117
25 119:118&120
26 119:121
27 119:122&124
28 119:125
29 119:126&128
30 119:129

JULY

1 119:130
2 119:131
3 119:132
4 119:133
5 119:134
6 119:135
7 119:136
8 119:137&138
9 119:139
10 119:140
11 119:141
12 119:142&143
13 119:144
14 119:145&146
15 119:147&148
16 119:149
17 119:150
18 119:151
19 119:152
20 119:153&154
21 119:155
22 119:156
23 119:157&158
24 119:159&160
25 119:161&162
26 119:163
27 119:164
28 119:165
29 119:166&168
30 119:169&170

31 119:171&172

AUGUST

1 119:173&174

2 119:175

3 119:176

4 1:1

5 1:2

6 **1:3**

7 1:4

8 1:5

9 1:6

10 23:1

11 23:2

12 23:3

13 **23:4**

14 23:5

15 23:6

16 33:1

17 33:2&3

18 33:4&5

19 33:6&7

20 **33:8&9**

21 33:10&11

22 33:12

23 33:13&15

24 33:16&17

25 33:18&19

26 33:20&21

27 **33:22**

28 45:1

29 45:2

30 45:3

31 45:4

SEPTEMBER

1 45:6

2 45:7

3 **45:8**

4 45:9

5 45:10

6 45:11

7 45:12

8 45:13

9 45:14

10 **45:15**

11 45:16

12 45:17

13 66:1

14 66:2

15 66:3

16 66:4

17 **66:5**

18 66:6

19 66:7

20 66:8

21 66:9

22 66:10

23 66:11

24 **66:12**

25 66:13

26 66:14

27 66:15

28 66:16

29 66:17

30 66:18

OCTOBER

1 **66:19**

2 66:20

3 145:1

4 145:2

5 145:3

6 145:4

7 145:5

8 **145:6**

9 145:7

10 145:8

11 145:9

12 145:10
 13 145:11
 14 145:12
15 145:13
 16 145:14
 17 145:15
 18 145:16
 19 145:17
 20 145:18
 21 145:19
22 145:20
 23 145:21
 24 131
 25 46:1
 26 46:2&3
 27 46:4&6
 28 46:7
29 46:8&9
 30 46:10
 31 46:11

NOVEMBER

1 133
 2 91:1
 3 91:2
 4 91:4
5 91:5
 6 91:6
 7 91:7
 8 91:8
 9 91:9
 10 91:10
 11 91:11
12 91:12
 13 91:13
 14 91:14
 15 91:15
 16 91:16
 17 149:1

18 149:2&3
19 149:4
 20 149:5&6
 21 149:7&8
 22 149:9
 23 *Thanksgiving*
 117
 24 127:1&2
 25 127:3&5
26 115:1
 27 115:2
 28 115:3
 29 115:4&5
 30 115:6&8

DECEMBER

1 115:9&11
 2 115:12&13
3 115:14&15
 4 115:16&18
 5 19:1
 6 19:2
 7 19:3
 8 19:4
 9 19:5
10 19:6
 11 19:7
 12 19:8
 13 19:9
 14 19:10
 15 19:11
 16 19:12
17 19:13
 18 19:14
 19 20:1&3
 20 20:4&5
 21 20:6
 22 20:7&8
 23 20:9

24 *Christmas Eve*

45:1&2

25 *Christmas Day*

45:3

26 45:4&5

27 45:6

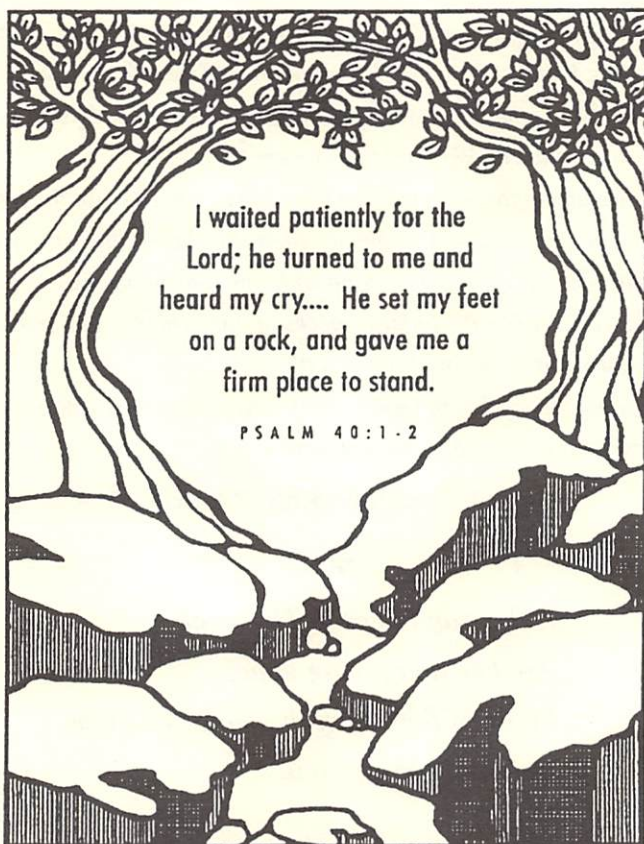
28 45:7&9

29 45:10&12

30 45:13&15

31 *New Year's Eve*

45:16&17



For the new millennium -- thoughts from Luther:

"Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Psalm 90:2).

. . . Moses wants us to learn how easy it was for God to make all things out of nothingness, since all things were, so to speak, born as a result of His Word. Being born is obviously a very easy thing. The birth of a tree does not involve labor.

The God who does such marvelous things is our God. This God we worship. To this God we pray. He is that God at whose command the whole universe was born. Why, then, do we tremble if this God is kindly disposed toward us? Why should we be afraid even though the whole world were angry at us? If this God is our Dwelling Place, will we not be secure even if heaven itself were to cave in? We have a Lord who is greater than the whole world. We have a Lord who is so powerful that at His Word all things were born.

And yet we are so fainthearted that if we happen to provoke the wrath of a single prince or king, yes, of a single neighbor, we chase hither and yon and despair of life; in reality, in comparison with our heavenly King everything else in the entire world is like the lightest specks of dust which a soft breeze removes from their place and does not allow to settle.

Thus Moses' description of God is most consoling. May trembling hearts take recourse to it in all trials and dangers.

— LUTHER'S WORKS, Vol. 13, p. 92 (American Edition)



*A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.*

*Our God, our Help in ages past,
Our Hope for years to come,
Be Thou our Guard while troubles last
And our eternal Home!*

Parables Of The Master

Luke 14:25-35

Cost-Counting

The scenario is all too familiar. A young person with no significant or permanent income source is bombarded with almost irresistible offers from the credit card companies. “Buy now, pay later” is simply too tempting to resist, and the spending spree begins. The joyride is wonderful, until the harsh reality of burdensome repayments takes its toll in the months and years to come.

Until maturity brings a sense of fiscal responsibility and self-discipline, few people count the cost of instant money in their pockets—or of much else. In this age of instant gratification and indulgence, many want much now, with little thought given to the future consequences of their immediate actions.

Such was the caution of our Savior in His construction and war “cost counting” examples. Neither a major construction project nor a decision to wage a war is ever undertaken without careful planning and consideration (vv. 28-31). Will it begin and then collapse, or do I have what it takes to successfully complete it?

Spiritual Cost-Counting: God’s

What is true about building a tower or waging a war is surely also true of building a spiritual life that will endure through eternity. Careful planning and cost-counting are absolutely vital—lest

the burdens along the way disillusion us and derail the effort, and all is lost.

It has been said that everything in life comes at a cost. Since the Fall into sin, our spiritual life, our salvation, comes at a humanly unattainable price.

Our accumulated sin-debt is beyond measuring. No one can redeem himself or his brother from sin (Psalm 49:7). Only our loving and merciful God possessed the wherewithal to redeem sinners and restore and rebuild their spiritual lives. Only the Son of God could have “purchased and won me . . . not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.”

Yes, our God and Savior carefully counted the cost and in love willingly “endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God’s throne” (Heb. 12:2). Jesus’ loving commitment and life-sacrifice saw His salvation mission through to completion.

And through Spirit-worked faith in our hearts, all Christ has built and won for us has now become ours!

Spiritual Cost-Counting: Ours

While our sin-debt has been paid in full by Jesus, there remains a cost-counting and price-paying involved in being a disciple of Jesus.

Because of sin still in and around us, there are ongoing and major obsta-

cles to real and lasting discipleship—things that interfere with building lives for Christ and for eternity, things against which the Christian must daily wage all-out war. To truly follow Jesus means bearing our cross, letting no one or nothing come before or interfere with our relationship and responsibilities to our Savior.

Such words humble all of us who have in various times and ways wavered, even failed to count or pay these costs of discipleship. Too often we instead travel the path of least spiritual resistance.

In a society of instant food, information, entertainment, and gratification, things that require commitment and sacrifice are often avoided—including religion.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. The Christian who imagines true discipleship to be a spiritual cake-

walk will be setting himself up for disillusionment, discouragement, doubt, and defeat.

Yet the Lord Who calls us to build our spiritual towers and wage our war also supplies us with the “tools and weapons” to do so. In His Word and in our Savior’s love He equips us with the commitment and strength, the motivation and zeal to build our lives on the rock (Matthew 7:24-25), and to fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12). Look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, for the “endurance” to build and fight . . . and finish!

Yes, it’s serious not to “count the cost” before embarking on a major financial commitment. It can be far more tragic not to spiritually “count the cost” of discipleship. Count the cost and whatever it is, remember—it’s worth it.

—Pastor David Schierenbeck



LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

“That We Might Have Hope” (Rom. 15:4)

First Samuel Chapters Seventeen To Twenty

David and Jonathan: A Formula for Friendship

This past summer I had the privilege of speaking at my parents’ 50th wedding anniversary. The number of relatives present may have been impressive, but what struck me was the number of friends. One can accumulate quite a number of them over the years.

When we turn to the Scriptures for examples of true friendship, the stories about David and Jonathan surely rank among the best. I believe David and Jonathan had a great formula for friendship. Now, I don’t think they actually sat down to figure out just how

they were going to pursue friendship with each other, for I believe that their love for each other was a natural outgrowth of their love for God.

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above. (TLH 464:1)

The basis for any deep, true, lasting, friendship/relationship will be a mutual love for the Savior. We may have acquaintances in all sorts of walks in life. But the friendship of a fellow Christian can be a lasting, even permanent thing!

As we join with those of kindred heart and mind to rejoice in the Lord's blessings or commiserate in the sorrows and troubles that come our way, we know the same loving Savior holds these individuals in His heart even as He holds us.

What a privilege to have Christian friends—not always seeing eye to eye on every issue that comes along, but always putting the Lord and His Word above every opinion, and even above each other!

“A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24).

“And it was so that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Then David and Jonathan made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:1,3).

David, the “man after God's own heart,” and Jonathan, faithful follower of his father, the Lord's anointed, joined in a covenant that would not only last throughout their lifetimes, but into the next generation as well. “Most

men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?” (Prov. 20:6).

Defending One Another

How did this great Christian friendship cause David and Jonathan to act toward each other? It led them to defend each other against terrific odds. When we read of King Saul's fierce anger against David, and that he issued an edict calling for David's life, Jonathan stood up to his father and defended the reputation of his friend.

On one occasion Saul's anger burned so hot, and Jonathan's defense of David was so intense, that Saul actually attempted to slay his own son. True Christian friends are willing to sacrifice—sometimes everything—for each other.

When Jonathan and David first pledged their loyalty to each other, Jonathan had given David gifts. Jonathan's royal robe “with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt” were given as a token of their friendship. Yet these were not ordinary gifts. These were the trappings of a prince—one in line to the throne!

Even Saul himself recognized this as he ranted to Jonathan during one of his tirades: “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom.” Did this sway Jonathan from his loyalty to his friend? No, Jonathan stuck with his soul-mate even though it could cost him earthly gain and power.

How do your relationships stack up to that of David and Jonathan? Are your friendships based on a love for



Christ first? Are you willing to “go to the mat” for your friends and defend the defenseless? Are you willing to take a stand with your friends even if it costs you other “friends,” personal gain, or social standing?

I think once again of the friends my parents have accumulated through the years. Will I have as many when I reach my later years? One thing I do know. No matter how friendless we may become, there is one Friend who will always be faithful to us.

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Ev'rything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Ev'rything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a Friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our ev'ry weakness—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our Refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there. (TLH 457)

—Teacher David Bernthal



SMORGASBORD

• A TRADITION TO RE-ESTABLISH?

Last Christmas one of our pastors put out, via an e-mail message, the following word of encouragement to his brothers in the CLC ministry. The good words speak to us all—

As we approach the Christmas holydays, I would like to encourage preaching on the Incarnation and its meaning. It's Christmas Day I'm thinking of especially. . . . If on Christmas Eve the children of the congregation describe the sending of the greatest gift of God, it is our wonderful privilege to unwrap it on the Festival Day itself. And if Christmas Day is falling into disuse in our churches, isn't it our work

to help our people see that the Christmas Day service should be a highlight of our church family's Christmas celebration—and of each family too?

How sad to spend four weeks preparing and then to skip the service that focuses on the main event. We deplore the practice of coming to church services only on Christmas and Easter, but the reverse is surely also an aberration and something to be avoided as well.

So . . . let us speak up . . . and encourage our people to center on the Christ of Christmas by worshiping together on Christmas Day. Here's a tradition to re-establish, one that will

In a Stable

P. Schaller, 1998

1. In a sta - ble, Ba - by Je - sus, Rest - ing now on straw and hay,
 2. In the dark - ness, Ba - by Je - sus, Comes to give us heav - en's light,

Help - less in - fant in a man - ger, comes to take our sins a - way!
 Comes to help us on our jour - ney. Soothe our sor - rows, calm our fright:

For to - day our Sav - ior's born, Christ the LORD this hap - py morn!

We thank Prof. Paul Schaller for sharing with us again this year a Christmas hymn first composed for his family.

benefit our people from one generation to the next.

It seems the preparing of the Christmas Day sermon was a highlight of Luther's personal Christmas devotions. At least his Christmas sermons read that way. I have personally found this can be true. And when this is the case, we will surely speak to our people from the heart—as joyful shepherds—on Christmas Day in the morning.

Dear reader—see you 'in church'

on Christmas morning!

• **A CHRISTMAS LETTER** (In the recent past we, with others, were recipients of this Christmas letter from 'the Koenig's'—our Missionary David and his wife Mary)

Dear fellow redeemed,

We have once more entered upon that season of mystery and wonder. It is a mystery certainly to the wicked, careless world that He came. Even we wonder how He could come to this sin-

darkened world for the likes of us. The true mystery though is that God became man. And the abiding wonder is not of doubt, but of amazing joy at beholding Him in the manger Who would then be on the cross.

The skeptics and detractors have assailed the Scriptures—ever since they were given—as being of doubtful veracity. Yet it was in the exact city prophesied, Bethlehem Ephratah, that He was born. It was by the exact miraculous means, through a virgin's womb as prophesied, that He came. The star that was supposed to appear at His coming came as it was foretold. And on and on it goes, as we read the Old Testament writing about Him and His work—foretold . . . fulfilled, foretold . . . fulfilled, foretold . . . fulfilled.

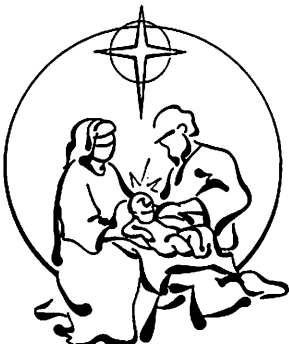
It could hardly be otherwise than that when we read of a heavenly host announcing His birth to the shepherds, we believe it. Although we have not seen, yet we believe. The Shepherd's joyful message—we are united in exuberant hearing and telling! It is in the Word of God that we find our anchor and compass. This is so because in the Word of God (the Bible) we have the Word made flesh, our Jesus, revealed to us. As He is the center, heart, and core of the Bible, so He is the anchor of

our lives. In Him we live and move and have our being. He is the compass giving us the true direction to life. Relying upon His Word as He dwells within our heart, we move forward to our ultimate destination.

"Thro' the night of doubt and sorrow Onward goes the pilgrim band, Singing songs of expectation, marching to the Promised Land." He is at our head to lead us. He is behind us as rearguard to protect and assist the straggling. He is among us, walking at our side; upon His arms we lean when weary. He is there in the campfire's glow, in the morning sun's dewy dispersal, in the heat of the noonday trek, always and everywhere.

Who is this child, whose birth we celebrate? We know full well. We've read in the Word and seen in our lives. Foretold . . . fulfilled, foretold . . . fulfilled.

*In the same confident faith,
we extend to all our Spokesman
readers a blessed Christmas, and a
truly happy, blessed year 2000
and beyond!*



*“And she shall bring forth a son,
and thou shalt call his name Jesus;
for he shall save his people from their sins.”*

MATTHEW 1:21

• **HOW SAD . . .** (*From the Newsletter of Messiah Lutheran, Eau Claire, Wis. Prof. Em. Paul Koch, the writer.*)

During this joyous season when the voices of evangelists and apostles should sound with clarity from Christian pulpits, we hear the smooth and subtle voice of a local Protestant cleric with a Christmas message that has something in it as unsettling as fingernails down a chalkboard.

This pastor deserves one of the year's Glittering Blotch Awards for his article in the local newspaper entitled "Christians, Jews share many values, hope of redemption." In this article the clergyman denounces the anti-Judaism he alleges is spouted from Christian pulpits this Advent season. He feels it a "strange contradiction" that people who "voice the themes of Christian hope during Advent" at the same time contaminate their message by "anti-Judaism . . . a sinful way of thinking." So far, that sounds like he's on to something. We agree that our calling as God's children and spokespersons is to reach out to others with the Christmas Gift from on high. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life for Jews, too.

But this clergyman deserves the G.B.A. for non-meritorious disservice to the Lord Jesus in his condescending disapproval of a friend who said: "How sad; Jesus came, and they missed it. They are still waiting." At this point we must ask: Who is out of step here? Is it the sorrowing Christian—or is it the clergyman who displays his glittering ignorance of one cardinal problem: He evidently considers Christianity and Judaism as co-equal! He should be competent to recognize that they simply are not, ever since "He came unto His own, and His

own received Him not" (John 1:11). How sad that a Protestant clergyman (serving in the denomination "Church of Christ") apparently no longer believes that Judaism has chosen to follow a religion that in rejecting Jesus as Messiah/Savior is simply not God's religion at all.

The prime issue here is not that a professing Christian may on occasion hit the sour note of anti-Jewishness, but that Judaism has soured itself in the most self-destructive way against God Himself in the person of His own Son. That remains the issue which separates Judaism from God. Anyone who glosses over that elementary distinction deserves no golden stamp on his theological diploma, for his witness is but a glittering blotch that disfigures his credentials as a spokesman for the Lord Jesus.

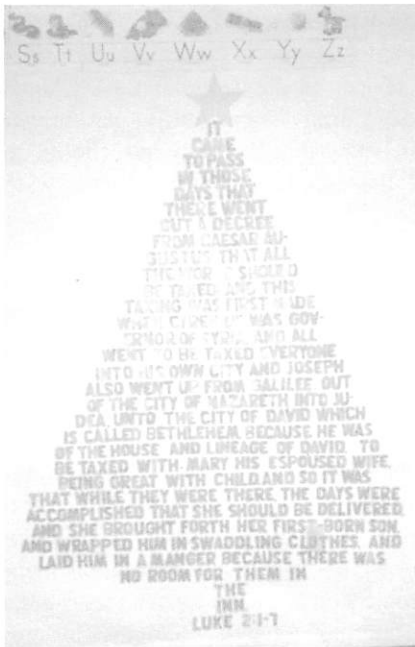
Who is out of step with God's truth? If we are quick to say that we are not—for we live in a fellowship that is ultra-conservative about Biblical doctrine—let us recognize that there is another issue standing full-faced before us: our performance. Are we doing our Christian ministry in a way that has overcome all our own sour notes as we rehearse and practice our speaking parts under the direction of the Concert-Master Himself in preparation for the hour of our personal testimony? Lord, have mercy!



Correction:

Dr. Martin Luther was summoned to a Diet in *Worms* (not Augsburg), Germany in the year 1521. Please make the correction on page 3, first column, in our October issue.

—The Editor



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

Christmas 1998 at Holy Cross Ev. Lutheran School in Phoenix, Arizona. The Luke 2:1-7 Christmas "tree" was done for the education of the children, and for the enjoyment of all, by Mrs. Lana Strike.

Installations

In accord with our usage and order, Ruth Eigenberg, who was called as part-time teacher for the upper grades at St. John's Lutheran School, Okabena, Minnesota, was installed on August 22, 1999.

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