

EPIPHANY

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN



"WHERE IS HE WHO HAS BEEN BORN KING OF THE JEWS?
FOR WE HAVE SEEN HIS STAR IN THE EAST
AND HAVE COME TO WORSHIP HIM."

MATTHEW 2:2

JANUARY 2005, VOL. 47 NO. 7

“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?”

(Matthew 2:2)

Who would have guessed such a simple question would cause so great a stir?

When Herod got wind of the question, he was filled with anxiety. The throne he had worked so hard to gain and keep was again threatened.

All Jerusalem was filled with anxiety. Why would the people of Jerusalem be in such a state of fear? They knew Herod and feared for what might come next. It seems curious, however, that there is no mention even of a few—of some in Jerusalem who rejoiced when they heard what these strangers from the East were seeking.

It might also seem curious that there is no mention of others going with the Magi to Bethlehem. Not the scribes, not the leaders, not the Pharisees, not the High Priest nor any inhabitants of Jerusalem are mentioned attaching themselves to the Magi and going to worship Jesus.

Perhaps they were all too busy, had other things to do and attend to.

As For Us?

“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” How does this question affect us?

Are we filled with anxiety when confronted by this question? When we realize that Jesus as King rules our every day, our every moment, and we are His subjects? That we are subject to His will and it is our privilege to carry it out in our lives?

Our lives are not about us, whether we are kings on a throne, pastors or teachers, elders or council members, influential lay members or children, it is all about our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not about us holding on to those positions or possessions as we wonder what will happen to them or us because Jesus is the King.

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It is about what Jesus our King has done for us, giving to us not the kingdoms of this world but that greater kingdom of heaven which has no end.

"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" He lies there in a stable in a little out-of-the-way town. He walks there in Galilee and Judea proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord. He is there in the upper room, in the Garden, before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate—leaving us an example to follow, giving us a feast of eternal life, praying, suffering in our place.

Furthermore, He hangs there on the cross bearing our sins. He lies there in the tomb. He stands there risen from the tomb, and He rules there at the right hand of the Father. He is there beside us every step of our life and He is there to lead us from life through death to life.



*W*here is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

M a t t h e w 2 : 2

For us who believe, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" does not cause anxiety, but removes anxiety and gives peace.

—Pastor Roland Gurgel



A New Year's Devotion—

"This is God's Favorable Year" [Read Luke 4:16-21]

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to...preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

A Teacher came home one day; a notable young Man returned to the town where He had grown up. Having been away for a time, and this being a very small town, we can assume that there were a lot of eyes watching Him. When a favorite son comes home, people watch closely to determine if he's changed or picked up 'new' ideas

while away.

He was in the habit of attending worship regularly, and He didn't miss that opportunity in His home congregation. The crowd was hushed as Jesus read the familiar scripture text. He closed the scroll and sat down to address them. Every eye was fixed upon Him, and the people who look for such things found precisely the ammunition that they were seeking. The small town boy came home and tried to tell these people something

they had never heard before in their lives. He tried to tell them that this was the "favorable year of the Lord."

How do you view the year gone by? Is it with a sense of gratitude—offering thanks to God for the blessings of a year gone by? Is it perhaps with regret, clouded by the burden of sins in things done or left undone? Do your thoughts tend more toward the year to come? Are you looking for help setting your perspective—searching for divine order for your life?

Whatever the case, my message to you as the New Year arrives is that now is the time to celebrate the *favorable year of the Lord*.

Jesus read a prophecy by Isaiah—one to which these people were very accustomed. They'd been hearing the same old words for 800 years, and always it was something that lay in the future, something they and their ancestors had patiently waited to see. But now Jesus laid on them the remarkable suggestion that this age-old promise of God's grace was fulfilled in their very hearing!

What was this 'favorable year' all about? The Old Testament gave us an illustration in the year of Jubilee. That may not be a familiar event to us, but it's the key to our hope for a truly happy New Year.

Imagine an economic system where your inherited land was a sacred possession—even if poverty struck and you had to sell even yourselves or your family into servitude, the system provided a means of economic recovery. God had commanded Israel to incorporate a system where, every fifty years, liberty was proclaimed, bondservants

were released, title to land went back to the family, and a year of rest was proclaimed. This was the Jubilee year, and it served as a pattern for the greater Rest that was to come. Jesus came to His people, proclaiming a wonderful new year—a 'jubilee' year—by the authority of the Lord God.

A Year of Grace!

He brings that message to us as well. Are you ready to listen? Are you willing to weave yourself into the fabric of this message?

This is God's favorable year: He preaches the gospel to the poor. Are you poor? Materially, probably not. But that's really beside the point, when we consider Jesus' definition of 'poverty': "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The gospel of the kingdom of God is good news to those who are aware of the thorns and thistles in their earthly labors and who understand that sin underlies the presence of all such troubles. This year is a year for proclaiming liberty to the captives. We are, by nature, captives of God's enemy, Satan. He rules our lives—sometimes openly; more often, subtly through selfishness, thoughtlessness, or faithlessness.

But Jesus, the promised Seed of the Woman, filled with the Spirit, sent by God, crushed the head of our captor. Jesus tells us: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:31f).

Now is the year of grace, where Christ offers new, clearer vision to all of us who are so easily dazzled by the goals other people pursue. With the eyes of faith we enter a kingdom under Christ—a kingdom that doesn't come to

you labeled "made in Taiwan"; in fact, a kingdom not even "of this world."

Dear friends, let 2005 be the year of the gospel in your life—in your home, in your relationships, in the priorities you set about worship and family devotions.

EPIPHANY 2004—



By the Spirit-filled message of the gospel, may God grant to all of you treasures in heaven, freedom in the truth, the clear-eyed vision of faith, and the courage of children of God.

—Pastor Peter Reim

THE BLESSINGS OF (THE) LIGHT

How important is light? The very first chapter of Genesis gives us a clue. At creation "darkness was on the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2). "Then God said, let there be light, and there was light" (v. 3).

Light is important because it is an essential necessity of life and experience. Light has an undeniable impact on the quality of life. There is a reason why at the end of the night we look forward to the rising sun at dawn. Many, if not all, of us have experienced the depression of day after day after day of over-cast sky. Darkness can break the spirit and affect one's attitude. Just ask the prisoner who has been incarcerated in a dim cell—and worse, sent to "the hole."

However, there is darkness deeper and more deadly than the lack of physical light. It is the darkness of spiritual death in which all people were enveloped by reason of sin. It is the darkness of eternity that envelops the damned in hell.

As surely as the Creator God created light for the benefit of the world and its inhabitants, so He sent the Light for the enlightenment of sinners who lived on the Earth.

For the Christ-believer Epiphany—part of the Christmas season—is about

the Light. Our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world for all people, Jew and Gentile. By His grace our Lord enlightened (see Luke 2:32) the Gentiles who in their darkness were not the people of God. He made them the people of God and partakers of the covenant He had made with the Jews, but which that nation had rejected.

Epiphany is about promise. The prophet Isaiah records the word of the Father to His Son. "I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles" (Isa. 49: 6). Epiphany is about the fulfillment of that promise. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world" (Jn. 8:12).

And for what purpose was He the Light? According to Isaiah 49, the



Father said to His Son that He would "... be My salvation to the ends of the earth." The inclusiveness of the Father's reaching out was manifest by the star that led the Magi to worship the newborn Savior.

Rejoice ... with Great Joy!

There are contradictions in life. In this world in which darkness reigns, Christ the Light still shines. In the evil of this present world, Christ the Light still shines. In the dimness of an afflicted world, Christ the Light never ceases. When the love of many toward one another grows cold, the love of Christ for the world does not wane. While men try to create their own light, Christ the Light is still the only Light that leads home to heaven and God. We thank the Lord that in Him there are no contradictions!

The blessings of the Light means that we need fear no darkness. In Jesus we have the answer to spiritual depression. Oh, how blessed are we who believe the promise and the fulfillment!

Scripture says, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great

light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined..." (Isa. 9:2) "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace..." (Isa. 9:6). Thus our Savior says to us, "I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12).

When Herod inquired of the wise men where Jesus was born, they quoted the Bible to him. When Herod rejected the Light, the star resumed its path "until it came and stood over where the young Child was" (Mt. 2:9). "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy" (2:10).

The blessings of the Light are many. The ultimate blessing is that the shining brilliance of heaven overcomes the shadow of death for those upon whom the Light has shined.

The Light has come. Rejoice, fellow Christ-believer, with great joy.

—*Pastor Daniel Fleischer*



An Epiphany Devotion—

"Ut perducamur"

The Latin phrase above is to get your attention and "lead you on." It refers to God's effect on Gentiles like us, as in the original "Epiphany of our Lord" Collect, composed over fifteen hundred years ago. An English translation (somewhat weaker than the Latin) is on page 58 in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (*see box).

The Collect refers to the journey of the Wise Men, following the star. They watched the eastern sky for its daily rising. They were "led on" by it, tracking it west for about a thousand miles.

Our Gentile journey matches theirs, in a way, starting when we first came to faith in Jesus, Bright and Morning Star of Revelation 22. It proceeds to that

**O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know Thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead: through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost. Ever one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

grand occasion when we shall see Him in the splendor of His eternal *Metamorphosis* (Transfiguration—Matthew 17:2) and our own *Metaschemasis* (Transformation—Philippians 3:21), together with Moses, Elijah, and all believers. The English Collect suggests this with the word "fruition."

The Latin title phrase above means "that we may be led on"—"we" who know Jesus by faith, as the Collect says. We know Him from God's initiative, not ours. By the Scriptures the Holy Spirit has "led us on," giving us perception through revelation, to see and confess that this Man-Child of the manger is the Word made flesh. To see that we need Him—and to confess that God became Man and that this Man-Child truly is God!—"God in Man made manifest," as the hymn has it. "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God"—an old way of saying there is no other—no other God; no other Maker; no other Redeemer; no other Savior.

The Holy Spirit has "led us on" to Him, to His life and work, His crucifixion, His rising, His ascension and final coming. He thus establishes among us sure knowledge of sin and grace, forgiveness and justification. And the Holy Spirit has "led us on" to believe that when we die, we go to be with Jesus, to await the final day, to face no other Judge but Christ.

This Man-Child-God Who rules and



runs the entire universe will call all people to account when He comes. He will be tender towards us then, as He is now.

The God-ness of Our Messiah

Epiphany emphasizes this God-ness of our Messiah and King, and "leads us on" from His childhood to His ministry and beyond. We follow and sing: "Jesus, lead Thou on till our rest is won...guide us by Thy hand...to our home we go..." (TLH #410).

Epiphany, the Twelfth Day of Christmas—"Day of Lights" in some parts of the world—always falls on January 6th. It is almost a lost Festival for many. It ushers in a season of three M-words—mystery, mission, and miracle. Jesus' mysterious incarnation is celebrated nine months and twelve days before Epiphany (March 25th—go figure!), but is now revealed in Mary's lap in a certain house in Bethlehem. He is on the threshold of His mission to save Jew and Gentile from sin and eternal death. And oh,

how we have needed His saving words and deeds—His saving Mission—every day of our lives!

Miracles of all kinds will surround and comprise His mission. The biggest and best were during His last three days on Earth, followed by Pentecost. "Great indeed," we confess, "is the mystery of our religion" (1 Tim. 3:16, RSV); "He (God) was manifested in the flesh...believed on in the world." That He is "believed on" by any sinners, and by us sinners, is sheer miracle!

"Deep in the prophets' sacred page" we find broad hints concerning His saving mission. The Spirit leads Paul on, to pick up these hints and put them into Romans 15, quoting 2 Samuel 22, Psalm 18, Deuteronomy 32, Psalm

117, and Isaiah 11—because they give hope to "Gentiles" like us.

The three M-words still apply. Some congregations hold their mission festivals in the Epiphany Season—very good practical theology. Miracles occur still today whenever the mysteries of Jesus' law and gospel are revealed. People come out of darkness into light, walk in the light, perform the works of light, and move on to the light of eternity, guided all the way by Him who is the Light of the world.

The Holy Spirit continues to lead us on. Our Epiphany Prayer is "ut perducamur" all our lives—"That we may be led on." Happy following!

—Pastor Em. Warren Fanning



Studies In Colossians

"In (Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3)

Chapter 3:12-17

"What a Character!"

We have all heard the above expression used to describe someone who is not taken seriously, unlike the description which notes an individual as a "solid character," which elicits quite a different image in one's mind—that of someone who is serious, capable, and dependable.

We think of people possessing certain qualities and ascribe to them a certain type of character.

In the passage before us from

Colossians, the Holy Spirit encourages us to develop the qualities of a Christian character. It is hardly so simple a matter as telling someone how to behave and then they will possess Christian character. Genuine Christian character cannot be called forth from within ourselves. It can come only from God.

We possess a sanctified character because God called us forth from the world to be His holy people. He did not

call us because we already possessed superior character, but rather in spite of our sinful nature He called us in His grace. Called by God to be holy, we are cleansed by the blood of Christ so that we are holy and blameless in His sight. Through faith we have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ, Who lived the perfect life, with the perfect love exemplified in His every action, in His every Word.

Our Christian character has been designed by Christ and instilled by the power of the Holy Spirit. Working through the Word of the gospel, the Spirit made us new creations from the inside out—from the spirit within us, to the attitude and behavior that is seen by the world.

Spirit-given Traits!

What Paul here presents by inspiration is a sampling of the characteristics which the Holy Spirit has instilled in us: tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, forgiving one another. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live with such character in our daily walk. If these qualities sound foreign to us, it is only because of the presence of the sinful flesh and its egocentric nature.

The Holy Spirit has given us a Christ-center, that we might show Christ to the world. Think of how Christ had compassion upon us in our sorry state, how kind He has been toward us as He humbled Himself, putting our need before His own. Then let us demonstrate the same compassion toward those who surround us in life, recognizing their needs—not just as the world sees them, but as Christ sees them.

Let us humble ourselves, not doing

good so we feel good, or so that we feel appreciated (as the world does), but that others might be blessed through us. When others sin against us, let us be gentle and patient, bearing one another's weaknesses, being forgiving as Christ has forgiven us.

Jesus did not question first whether we were deserving of His forgiving grace. He did not qualify His forgiveness by the number of opportunities we had previously received; nor did He question first whether we would truly appreciate the sacrifice He had to make to secure forgiveness for us. No, He died for us, and freely forgives us our trespasses. It is this spirit of forgiveness that will be manifest in the Christian character.

This then becomes the manifestation of Christ's love and peace. With this as the Christian's pervasive attitude toward life, Christians reveal thankful appreciation for all the blessings God has showered on them. As new creations we have a purpose in life that transcends us, even our own salvation. Christ has charged us with a mission of salvation that we may care for one another and encourage one another on our way to heaven.

Christian character reveals this loving attitude as we instruct and, yes, admonish and encourage one another as we encounter the bumps along life's path, whether these be temptations or tribulations.

The world also likes to encourage people, but to what end? And we have been equipped by the Spirit with wisdom that is infinitely superior to the world's trite clichés or empty philosophies. We have the truth of God to bring to one another in "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," as well as

the undeniable and eternal truths of all Scripture.

We do it all in Jesus' name, giving thanks for the Christian character God has instilled in us by His grace. When we so live, the world in mocking derision well might say of us, "What a character!"

What a character indeed, for we are blessed to possess that character which can come only from Christ Himself! May we faithfully reflect the qualities of Christ's character before the world to His glory and our neighbor's blessing.

—*Pastor Theodore Barthels*



SIGNS OF OUR TIMES

Eighth in a series

**"God without man is God.
Man without God is nothing."**

This church sign takes us back to the absolute basics in mankind's relationship with God. By nature, man resists any intrusion into his life by any philosophy that makes him dependent upon or subject to anyone or anything outside of himself. By nature, man considers himself the master of his own fate, the captain of his own destiny. Unless, of course, he runs into problems and troubles. If he cannot manage to earn enough money to support the lifestyle of his choice, if he is struck down by some disaster, if he experiences any difficulty or sorrow, then someone or something else is to blame.

This church sign reminds us that just the opposite is true, and it applies to all people, whether they are believers or unbelievers. But in order to fully understand mankind's relationship to God, we must first understand God Himself, insofar as our puny, finite human minds are able to do that. The

sign reminds us, "God without man is God." We sometimes get the idea, and children have been known to ask about this, that before creation God must have been lonely or bored. God from eternity? Our minds cannot even begin to grasp the concept. But even if we cannot fully understand the nature and attributes (characteristics) of God, we can still learn and believe what God has revealed to us about Himself.

God is a spirit, which means that He does not have a physical body as we have. But this is not a lack or a shortcoming for God. God is almighty, all-powerful; there is nothing that we can imagine that is beyond God's power to do. The familiar question of the unbeliever, "Can God create a boulder so heavy that even He cannot lift it?" is merely an attempt to confine God within the limitations of the human mind. We might answer, "Yes, but He could still lift it," but even that does not begin

to explain the extent of God's power.

A study of the universe is a good place to begin to get a glimpse of what God is able to do. The more you learn about creation, from the smallest particles of matter to the greatest expanses of the universe, the greater respect you have for God's power. That is, unless you have already ruled out the very idea of God. In that case you have to invent some other explanation for the order and complexity of the universe, something like evolution.

In addition to God's omnipotence (His almighty power), the Bible reveals God's omniscience (all-knowledge) and omnipresence (presence everywhere). These attributes are just as far beyond our understanding as is God's power. That God knows everything that happens everywhere, every word that is spoken by every mouth and every thought that goes through every mind, is beyond our ability to grasp. But we can still believe it. And that God is present everywhere at all times—even though we cannot see, hear, or feel Him, or measure His presence with an electronic instrument—is beyond our ability to grasp. But we can still believe it, by God's grace.

Now, everything God reveals to us about Himself in the Bible has some

relation to us. What the church sign says is that even if man didn't exist, even if the world and the universe didn't exist, God would still be the same.

But "man without God is nothing." As we said, this applies in one sense to all people, believers and unbelievers alike. But it also applies in a special sense only to believers. In the first sense, it means that no person could even exist without God. As the psalmist says, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14). And as Paul said to the Athenians, "He (God) gives to all life, breath, and all things...for in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:25,28). Luther understood this well, as evidenced by his explanation to the First Article of the Creed, "I believe that God has made me with all creatures, giving me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my faculties."

But also in another sense, a spiritual sense, "man without God is nothing." A person can be alive and well physically, but if he is without God in his life, he is nothing. For God also tells us in His Word that He is merciful and gracious, that He has planned in eternity and carried out in time the redemption of sinful mankind by send-



Ladies Aid, St. John's Lutheran Church, Clarkston, Washington

ing His Son to bear all sins in His own body on the cross. If we fail to accept that good news by faith (which is also God's gift to us), then we will be worse than nothing. We will be without God in death and in eternity, which is a description of hell.

One of our tasks as believers, and the primary task of our congregations and our church body, is to proclaim

this good news, to reveal God's grace in Christ to those who are without God, and to reinforce the truths of God's Word in those who are His children by faith in Jesus Christ. May God give us the knowledge, the desire, and the courage to carry out this task to the best of our ability.

—Gene Rutz



INTRODUCING the Books of the Prophets

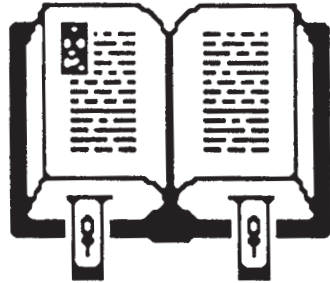
Jeremiah

... We are also told that a remnant of Judah would return: "I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them" (Jer. 30:3). They would rebuild the city and the temple and the people would once again sing praises to God.

If you ever feel that you have things rough, as all of us are tempted to feel at times, take a look at the life of the prophet Jeremiah. Over a period of four decades—during the reigns of five Judean kings (Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah)—Jeremiah faithfully prophesied to a people who despised his message and hated him, the messenger.

What was this despised message? Jeremiah was called to inform the people of Judah of their impending destruction at the hands of foreign powers. The poignancy of the book is due in large part to the compassion Jeremiah had for his people, as he pleads with them to turn from their evil ways.

Known as the "weeping prophet," Jeremiah struggled with a yoke he often



felt was too much for him to bear. But through it all, the Lord sustained him as he carried out His work under most adverse conditions.

Jeremiah's Call

Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, a priest, in Anathoth, lived in a town just north of Jerusalem. In the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (626 B.C.), God called

Outline of JEREMIAH:

- I. Jeremiah is called; he calls Judah to repentance, predicts their captivity and the restoration of the faithful remnant (Jeremiah 1-35)
- II. The Prophet's personal history during and after the siege of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 36-45)
- III. Prophecies concerning foreign nations, particularly the Babylonians (Jeremiah 36-45)
- IV. Detailed account of the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the exile of its inhabitants (Jeremiah 52)

Jeremiah to be His prophet with these words: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; and I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5-6).

Because of his youth, Jeremiah felt ill-equipped to function as God's prophet. God promised him that He would provide the words to speak and deliverance from his enemies. God warned Jeremiah that persecution would come because of the message he spoke. The majority of the book contains prophecies against Judah (Jer. 2-45).

Prophecies Against Judah

Josiah, the first king under whom Jeremiah prophesied, was the last of the God-fearing kings of Judah. One would think that the people would have rallied around their leader as he tried to restore true worship in the land and repair the temple. Improvements were made, but the condition of the people's hearts was not changed. "Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but only in pretense" (Jer. 3:10).

In fact, some in Judah believed that God would surely not punish them, for the temple was located there. The temple, however, had become a center of idolatry. The Lord said, "Why have they provoked Me to anger with their carved images, and with foreign idols?" (Jer.

8:19). The temple would not save them; like the ten northern tribes of Israel, they too would fall.

The Holy Spirit used many illustrations in describing the unfaithfulness of Judah to her God. She is pictured as an adulteress and prostitute, whose many lovers are the idols of Judah's neighbors (Jer. 3). She is shown as a clay jar that is smashed to pieces by its creator (Jer. 19). Judah is also like a linen belt that is exposed to water and dirt over a long period of time and is now completely useless (Jer. 13), and as bad figs, worthless for eating (Jer. 24).

Jeremiah's Suffering

Although Jeremiah was the contemporary of several other prophets, including Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel, and Ezekiel, his was a lonely, isolated life. Jeremiah was, in fact, the only Biblical figure who was forbidden by God to marry, nor was he to attend weddings or funerals (Jer. 16). His life was to be a picture of the desolation his people would suffer. Like Job, Jeremiah reached a point of utter despair, cursing the day in which he was born (Jer. 20:14).

Jeremiah's life was repeatedly threatened, even by those from his hometown, whom the Lord had to prevent from killing him. After Jeremiah advised the

people to surrender to the Babylonians to save their lives, King Zedekiah allowed his nobles to put Jeremiah in a muddy cistern to die. Once again he was rescued, this time by a kind official, Ebed-Melech, a Cushite (Jer. 38).

Glimmers of Hope

Although much of Jeremiah is a message of doom and gloom for a rebellious people, there are glimmering diamonds of hope amidst the black coal.

For example, in chapter 25 Jeremiah prophesied that the Babylonian Captivity would come to an end after seventy years, and the Babylonians would then face the anger of God. This is not the only enemy of Judah that would face judgment, for in the final chapters of Jeremiah (46-51) numerous judgments are pronounced against Gentile nations (including Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, and Edom).

Jeremiah had once asked, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do the faithless live at ease?" (Jer. 12:1) Here we see that God's patience towards these wicked nations had come to an end, and they too would be destroyed.

We are also told that a remnant of Judah would return: "I will bring my

people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them" (Jer. 30:3). They would rebuild the city and the temple and the people would once again sing praises to God. Because Judah had broken the old covenant, the Lord would provide them a "new covenant." "I will be their God and they will be my people." "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Jer. 31:33-34).

We conclude with the most sparkling diamond of all, for in both Jeremiah 23 and 33 we are told how Judah's and our sins will be forgiven. "I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line...This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness" (Jer. 33:15-16). God had not forgotten His promise to send a Savior from the line of David, whose sacrificial death would be our righteousness.

So, if you ever do think that following your Savior in this sin-darkened world is rough, remember Jeremiah whom the Lord preserved through most difficult times.

But also remember the Righteousness promised to Jeremiah—and to you.

—Prof. Joseph Lau



Trinity Lutheran Church, Spokane, Washington celebrated its 60th anniversary on June 27, 2004. (l-r) Pastor John Hein (son of the congregation), current Pastor Terrel Kesterson, Pastor David Schaller (son of the congregation), former Pastor, Prof. Paul Schaller.

*The first of fourteen Bible-centered devotions for the person who wants to know more about God and life with God.**

#1: Who are you?

The answer seems obvious—you are yourself, of course, and you know yourself quite well—but God knows you better than anyone else does.

Your mother knew you before you were born, and she could feel you growing for nine months; then she nursed and nurtured you for a dozen years, but then you grew away from her. Perhaps your father knew you pretty well as a teenager, with all your thrills and fears. Or your spouse knew you better than anyone else on Earth has ever known you.

Yet God has known you better than all of these, for He has known you even before you were born, as He tells you, "Thus says the Lord who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you..." (Isaiah 44:2).

Maybe your mother didn't realize God was on duty, but He was! Maybe nobody but God was concerned about your soul, but He has been through all the years of your life, and He still is concerned for you, and right now you have His full and devoted attention. In His own wonderful way, He has always been working to bless and keep you.

You realize that every day you are coming closer to the end of your time on this Earth, and then you will meet God; it is a meeting you cannot avoid. What will you say to God when you see Him face to face? It won't be enough to say, "Here I am, God; You know me." You must depend on more than God just knowing you.

It is more important to know that He loves you—and because He knows and loves you, He has done something "out of this world" for you. He has loved you so much that He has given you a Savior from hell! He has given you His Son to see you safely through the terrors of death and of Judgment Day and to take you with Him into heaven!

Trust Jesus Christ, God's own Son, for your salvation! Trust the Father, who has provided Jesus as your Savior! Trust God, who knows you and loves you! Come to God with your heart open to His love!

"Just as I am; Thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down.
Now to be Thine, Yea, Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come."

—Paul R. Koch

** The author explains that these devotions were composed in answer to a request from the Outreach Committee at Messiah Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, Wis. that he go to local nursing homes in order to locate lost souls. "So I wrote the series of short ('three-minute') devotions for such persons who may have fallen away from any childhood Christian faith, lack pastoral soul-care, and/or do not have the comfort of God's love via God's Word." The devotions are handed out freely and, says the author, "sometimes a discussion leads to reading a devotion to someone without a shepherd."*





The Free Imperial City of Augsburg at the beginning of the 16th century.

475th Anniversary of THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION (1530-2005)

In our postmodern there-is-no-such-thing-as-truth day, we believe it is important and edifying for our readers to be made aware of significant anniversaries bearing on our conservative/confessional/orthodox Lutheran heritage.

To that end, in the year past the *Lutheran Spokesman* noted the 475th anniversary of Luther's Small and Large Catechisms with articles on the Small Catechism.

The year after Luther wrote his Catechisms, another event took place which deserves to be noted throughout Lutheranism. In the year 1530 another of our church's confessional documents, THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION, was written.

Beginning this month, we have chosen staff writers to present popular treatments of selected articles (there is a grand total of twenty-eight articles in the Confession) from THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION. It is then left to the writers to select appropriate Scripture texts upon which to base their comments, tying those comments in with the featured AC Article.

As we begin the series this month, to help all of us understand the historical setting for THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION, Pastor Wayne Eichstadt has nicely provided "A Working Introduction" together with his treatment of Article I. We thank him.

May the Spirit of our thrice-holy God bless the writers and readers of this series which, Lord-willing, will appear monthly throughout 2005.

—The Editor

Introduction:

Charles V, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, wanted to bring an end to the "Lutheran Problem." The problem was that the princes of Germany were divided between Lutheran and Roman Catholic. Emperor Charles desired unity among the princes so that they could fight together against the invading Muslim Turks. In an effort to effect such unity, the emperor invited the princes and representatives from free cities to Augsburg in 1530.

The document we know as THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION was originally intended as a confession of the faith for the churches of Saxony,

Germany. However, when other princes heard the confession, they found that it declared their faith as well. In the end, THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION was signed by seven princes and representatives from two free cities.

The Wittenberg theologians who wrote the Augsburg Confession (Martin Luther, Justus Jonas, Johannes Bugenhagen, and Philip Melancthon) began by identifying the one true God. Their confession of the true God's identity was accepted by the Roman Church without disagreement.

Any true confession of faith must begin with an identification of the God

who is being worshipped. May that God—the true God of heaven and earth—bless this devotional journey

through the declarations of faith found in the articles of THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION.

The One True God Says: “Bless You!”

If you were to write a concise declaration of your faith, where would you begin? The writers of THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION began by identifying the God whom they worshipped. The confessors at Augsburg identified the true God as "one divine essence...three persons, with the same wisdom and goodness...the word 'person' is to be understood...not as a part or property of another, but as that which exists of itself."

There is joy in the heart of a Christian to know that it is the Triune God who blesses him. Nowhere is the blessing of the Trinity spoken more



WE BELIEVE & CONFESS THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION ARTICLES OF FAITH AND DOCTRINE

I. God

We unanimously hold and teach, in accordance with the decree of the Council of Nicaea (see the Nicene Creed), that there is one divine essence, which is called and which is truly God, and that there are three persons in this one divine essence, equal in power and alike eternal: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. All three are one divine essence, eternal, without division, without end, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, one creator and preserver of all things visible and invisible. The word "person" is to be understood as the Fathers employed the term in this connection, not as a part or a property of another but as that which exists of itself.

Therefore, all the heresies which are contrary to this article are rejected...

(Article abbreviated)

simply or with greater meaning than in the words which God Himself gave to the children of Israel: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Numbers 6:22-26).

Within the words of the Lord's blessing we find instruction, hope, and encouragement. Think of it!—the almighty, holy God Himself speaks to you through these words and imparts His blessing upon you! This is not some meaningless promise of a false god nor the empty solution of a passing spiritual fad. This is the one true God—Maker of Heaven and Earth—who pronounces His blessing upon you.

Spiritual confidence, peace, and blessing are tied to the truth that there is only one God. Imagine if there was any uncertainty about the true God or if multiple gods existed. You would always be left wondering if you had put your trust in the correct god and the one most able to help you. It is a glorious blessing to know that there is one Creator God who has also redeemed you, who promises to be your constant help, and who has given you His sure Word and abiding promise (cf. Isaiah 43:1-3).

The LORD bless you and keep you

Within the words of the Lord's blessing upon Old Testament Israel, you are able to rejoice and find His promise and blessing for you. The almighty God of heaven and Earth desires to bless you and accomplish in your life whatever is needful for your soul's salvation. The Lord blesses you by having the wisdom to know what is



in your best interest and by having the power to act upon that knowledge. He blesses you to keep you as the apple of His eye (cf. Psalm 17:8) and guard you without fail. "He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold! He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper...He shall preserve your soul" (Psalm 121:3ff).

The LORD make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you

The Lord's blessing upon you includes a shining face. The Lord's eyes light up to see you and He beams at you as a loving and proud father beams at His children. This would not be the case without the work of Jesus. Our sinfulness directs God's face of anger and judgment against us, but clothed in Christ's righteousness we are declared pure and forgiven. We are forgiven through the work of Christ and live in God's grace. God's face warmly shines upon us and upon our lives.

The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace

All of God's grace would mean nothing to us if we were to reject it in

unbelief. The Holy Spirit has brought God's grace to each of us and secured us in it. The Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts to believe, showers us with spiritual blessings, and works to keep us in true faith. The Holy Spirit's work in our hearts brings peace to a sinner's soul. Within the Lord's blessing is His promise that He "will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on [the Lord]...." (Isaiah 26:3).

The words of the Lord's blessing are not merely a wish nor are they a prayer directed heavenward to God from His people. Rather, they are the Triune God's blessing upon His people. God's words of blessing are spoken to you as

an individual sinner. These are words of God's active blessing, which will be accomplished (cf. Numbers 6:27). God's words of blessing are intended to reach *your* heart. The blessings He promises are for *you*, and He will accomplish them for *you*.

Each time you hear the Lord's blessing, remember it is the one true God who says, "Bless you!" Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God speaking to you personally through His Word as He did for the confessors at Augsburg. His words are living and active to accomplish every needful blessing in your life.

—Pastor Wayne Eichstadt

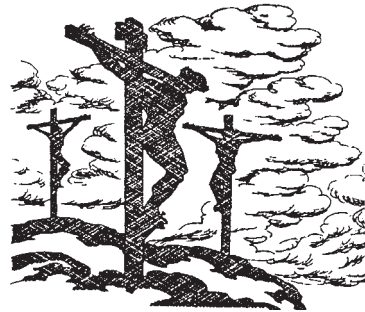


THE FIRST WORD FROM THE CROSS—

*"Father, forgive them, for they
know not what they do."
(Luke 23:34)*

Throughout His trial Jesus did not complain. He did not strike back with His tongue at the evil that was hurled at Him. He was silent, except when it was necessary to witness to the truth or proclaim the honor of God.

Yet upon the cross, when the die was cast, He spoke treasured words. The first words were words of intercession. But for whom were they spoken? They were spoken for the betrayer and the denier. They were spoken for the soldiers who had taken Him in the Garden as well as for those who had borne false witness against Him. They were spoken for the High Priest and the crowd that called for His crucifixion. Included were Pilate and Herod, and



finally those who crucified Him and mocked Him at the cross.

Even as He prayed, He witnessed to His relationship to God. He called Him, "Father." He did not say to the people at the cross, "I forgive you." The offenses against Him were directed at the Father who had sent Him. He

implored the Father to forgive them, and thus showed that He had not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

The cross of torment and death was the cross of love. We sing in a hymn, "The King of Love my Shepherd is." Never was such love shown by one person for so many as when the Savior-God, having taken the sins of mankind on Himself, died to validate the very prayer that He spoke—"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

But this all sounds so abstract to many. Furthermore, of what importance are the words spoken by Jesus Christ two millennia ago? Today the issues are race relations, the economy, the war, taxes, social welfare and equality, and a myriad of other things. Who cares about what Christ said so long ago?

In response let us recognize that those words were spoken for us and for all people. When the crowd cried, "Crucify Him," Jesus' response was, "Forgive them, Father."

In the face of the world's blasphemy, Jesus says, "Forgive them." When our conscience cries out against us because we have transgressed, Jesus' words still echo across the centuries, "Father, forgive them."

The message of the gospel is that where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation. All who recognize the terrible burden of sin and its eternal consequence are thankful for the price Jesus paid, for which reason the Father graciously forgives our sin.

(This series by Pastor Daniel Fleischer on the words of Christ from the cross will follow at two per month until completed.—Ed.)



THE SECOND WORD FROM THE CROSS—

"Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise"
(Luke 23:43)

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left" (Lk. 23:33).

Around the cross were representatives of all kinds of people. There were the proud, the self-righteous, the scoffers and mockers. There were people sympathetic to Jesus. They were all there by choice.

And then there were some who

were there not by choice. They were two others suffering the same punishment as Jesus, though for different reason. They were malefactors who were there not by choice, but whose life choices put them in this circumstance. The one criminal mocked Jesus from the cross. He died with cursing on his lips. What a horrible way to die! But there was the other who was won by the power of the cross. He had heard the first word of Jesus in which Jesus

implored the Father to forgive His crucifiers. "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Lk. 23: 42).

We often speak cynically about condemned criminals who repent on death row. No doubt there are some who do confess the Lord without meaning it when they are confronted with death; in other words, they do it for effect.

But we should be careful about such judgment. The criminal who was facing death hanging alongside Jesus spoke from the heart. He confessed his sin and unworthiness. Luther said, "In the Garden He (Jesus) was comforted by an angel, on the cross by a murderer hanging beside Him. How strange that God should let His Son be comforted by a murderer."* There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents.

Jesus' response is a comfort to us. This man did not plead his works or any righteousness of his own. How could he? He had wasted away his life in crime and was now receiving the just reward of his deeds. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6: 23). If ever there was a strong commentary on the fact that salvation is by grace through faith without the deeds of the Law, here is one.

The gift of salvation is not earned. It is given. Jesus said to the penitent

thief, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." The Lord had said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (Jn. 12:32). Through Jesus' word to this man, He declared the penitent thief to be one of those who was drawn to Him.

What a way to die! "Today you will be with me in paradise." Analyze those words. Today, with Jesus—in paradise! How blessed is the death of the saints; how great the breadth and depth of the grace of God!

Let us not wonder how this evil man could be shown such grace. But let us thank God that grace is so rich to include even him, for then it will include us whose sins against the Lord are every bit as dark, even if not as spectacular.

One church father wrote, "I do not ask for the measure of Paul's grace. I ask not for Peter's portion; but I fervently beg to receive what Thou on the cross didst bestow on the malefactor."*

On our last day how blessed we will be as we cling to the cross of Jesus from which will come to us these gracious words, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

*Quoted in *The Passion Story* by Wilhelm Besser



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—The Bread of Life—

Daily Bible readings for home devotions; February, 2005

<u>Day</u>	<u>Genesis</u>	<u>A leading thought on the reading</u>	<u>Hymn</u>
1	16:1-6	A mistaken effort to help Jehovah	429
2	16:7-16	brings sorrow, with limited earthly blessing.	427
3	17:1-14	Jehovah confirms Abram in His love.	412
4	17:15-27	God blesses Abraham, Sarah. . .and us, too.	129
5	18:1-15	“Is anything too hard for the Lord?”	13
6	18:16-33	Prayer holds Jehovah to His gracious Word.	458
7	19:1-11	Having eyes, they do not see.	430,4-6
8	19:12-23	“Flee (the world) for your life!”	430,1-3
9	19:24-29	Ash Wednesday: “Not a brief glance”	430,7-8
<i>In His own time Jehovah keeps His promise, and in faith not limited by human love, Abraham commits to the Lord (Heb.11:17-19).</i>			
10	21:1-14	“And the Lord did as He had spoken.”	384
11	21:15-21	“What ails you? Fear not, for God has heard.”	518
12	22:1-14	The obedience of faith is everything.	521,1-3
13	22:15-19	God’s gracious love goes rolling on.	521,4-6
<i>Through trials and temptations, pilgrim Abraham sets his house in order, confident that the Lord will provide for his child, and that the Lord’s Promise will provide for all of us, souls at risk.</i>			
14	23:1-20	“I am a foreigner and a sojourner among you.”	586,1-4
15	24:1-9	Such a good father, and such a good friend!	625
16	24:10-21	The right place, the right time, the right girl!	621
17	24:22-33	“Come in, O blessed of the Lord!”	624,1-2
18	24:34-49	A family history (of God’s work) unfolds—	624,3-4
19	24:50-61	“This comes from the Lord...I will go.”	626,1-2
20	24:62-67	“So Isaac was comforted” in God’s care.	626,3-4
21	25:1-11	From Abraham to Isaac — to us.	172,9-10

The time of the patriarchs:

While world powers were achieving their own goals, God made His choice of a nation to bear His Promise of the Savior. To this end He carefully trained His people in the faith they should hand down to their children, and He preserved them from the virus of idolatry.

Jehovah first sanctified Isaac’s meekness to advance His plans.

22	25:19-28	Jehovah changes the order of inheritance	514,1-2
23	25:29-34	“a profane person like Esau...” (Heb.12:12-17)	400
24	26:12-33	We learn to get along with our neighbors.	413,1-2
25	27:1-17	When deceivers deserve a curse—	378
26	27:18-29	Shameful! It’s better to wait on the Lord!	514,5-6
27	27:30-40	Esau comes in second-best, and due to sin!	369:1-3
28	27:41-28:5	(Blessed in spite of yourself—)	374



“Arise and Shine” A Retreat to Strengthen and Encourage

August 12-15, 2004



The Lord truly blessed the first annual 20's and 30's retreat sponsored by Faith Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Missouri! Fifty attendees from all over the nation joined together at Cuivre River State Park to spend a weekend immersed in the Word of God.

Our theme was "Arise and Shine." Our purpose was to strengthen and encourage the future leaders and support system of the CLC. The retreat was designed to increase the activity of this age group throughout the synod. Focus was not only put on growing stronger in faith and encouraging each other through the Scriptures, but also on implementing what we learned in our daily lives and working together as a team. Sessions and speakers were as follows:

1. Out of Darkness into Christ's Marvelous

Light—Pastor Todd Ohlmann

2. The Light of Christ Shines as we Search for a Godly Spouse/As we Love and Serve our Spouse—Pastor and Mrs. Wayne Eichstadt, and Leonard and Carol Benter

3. The Light of Christ Shines in our Vocation—Dr. David Menton

4. The Light of Christ Shines in our Friendships—Pastor Luke Bernthal and ILC Seminary student Eric Libby

5. The Light of Christ Shines as we Seek Opportunity to Serve our Church—Peter Evensen, Nick Stelter, and Alana Ahrens

As we gathered together to study His Word, the Lord's presence was visible in everything. Everyone had safe travel, the weather was perfect, the facilities were adequate, the speakers were well prepared and armed with the one thing needful, the food was excellent—all who attended grew in faith and friendship; all who did not attend will benefit from those who did.

Here are some of the comments the



ILC Seminary Student Eric Libby addresses the group

attendees made:

"This was the best weekend of my life!"

"Despite the fact that I'm not Lutheran...I appreciated everyone's open and willing spirit to accept me and make me feel comfortable, as we all take this journey of faith and growth!"

"What a wonderful way to enjoy Christian fellowship!"

"I was kinda skeptical about coming, but once I got here, it was probably one of the best times I ever had!"

"This weekend helped me to be more excited about teaching and really encouraged me!"

"I was contemplating on coming here or not, because I never went to ILC for high school...I have learned so much from this experience and am excited that I was a part of the first one!"

Faith Lutheran Church would like to thank all those who attended and all of our wonderful speakers. A special thanks goes to everyone who remembered us in your prayers and encouraged fellow members to attend. The Lord truly blessed your efforts! We are looking forward to next year. Our goal is 100 attendees. Please continue to pray for the Lord's blessings on our efforts and encourage those in your

congregation to be part of the 100!

— Alana Ahrens, reporter for the Arise and Shine Committee from Faith Lutheran Church



Announcements

Installation

In accord with our usage and order, Mrs. Lila Brown, who was called by Faith Lutheran congregation of Markesan, Wisconsin, to serve as upper grade teacher, was installed on August 8, 2004.

—Pastor Michael Schierenbeck

TWO SERVICES AT BERE A

Beginning on January 16, 2005, Berea Lutheran Church of Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota, will have a new Sunday schedule. Two worship services will be held—at 8:15 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., with Sunday School and Bible Class at 9:30 a.m. (September through May). In the summer months (June-Labor Day weekend), only one 9:30 a.m. service will be held.

—Pastor David Schierenbeck