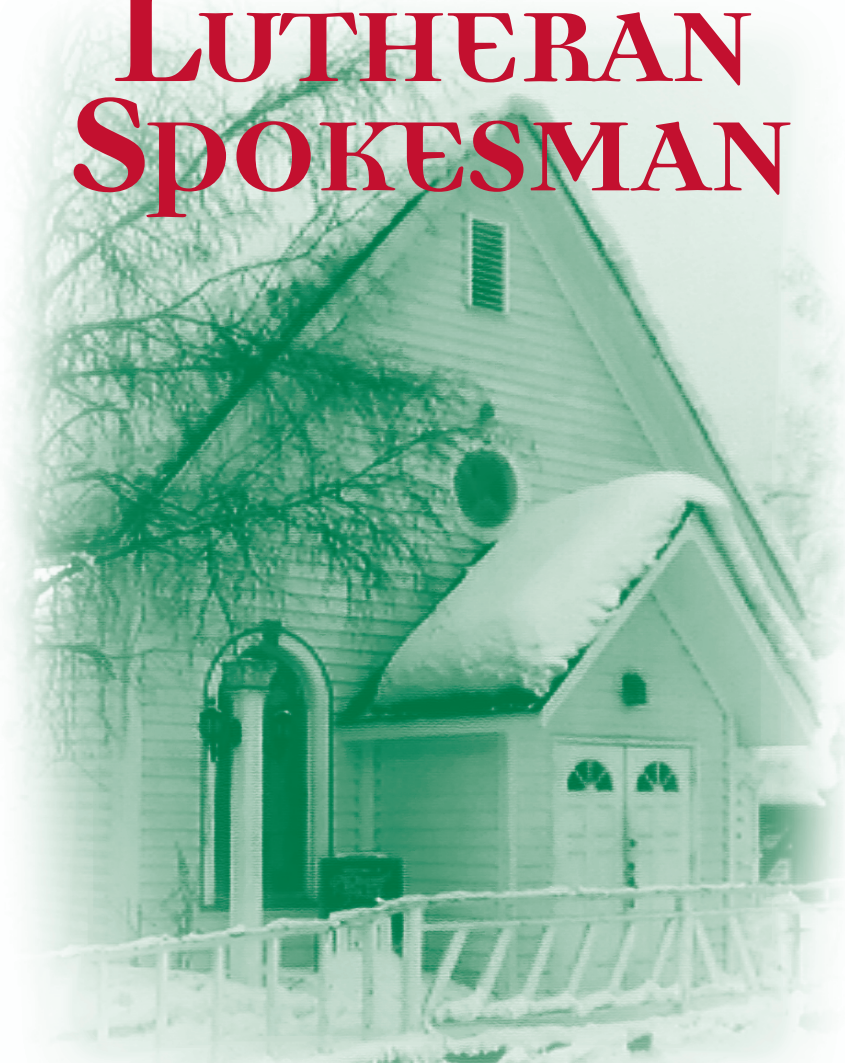


CHRISTMAS

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN



*Behold, a Branch is growing Of loveliest form and grace,
As prophets sung, fore-knowing; It springs from Jesse's race
And bears one little Flow'r In midst of coldest
winter, At deepest midnight hour.*

TLH 645:v.1

December 2005, VOL. 48 NO.6

“Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’” (Luke 2:10-11).

THE GIFT WITH A TAG AND A PURPOSE

It won't be long until we will be gathering in family groups to open up those gifts in fancy paper and shiny bows that have been sitting quietly under the tree (or may still be hiding in the closet or sitting at the store). When we begin to open those gifts, it may happen that, after we have retrieved the gift and turned it over in our hands we find—NO GIFT TAG!

When this happens, we have a two-fold conundrum! Not only are we faced with not knowing what is hidden under the gift-wrap; we also don't know for whom it was intended!

Well, thank God that, when He issued the most important Gift of all,

His messengers announced for all to hear exactly to whom this gift belonged; exactly to whom it was being given:

“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.”

This Gift belonged to Mary and Joseph and to simple shepherds—but it was not only for them. God made sure that we understand that this Gift is meant to bring joy to the hearts of “all people.” When the angel said ‘to you,’ he was including ALL of YOU. This Gift has your name on it and mine. God didn't send His Son to cause rejoicing only in Bethlehem and Jerusalem—but

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This Gift
is for you!



also in Watertown and Minneapolis and Eau Claire and Corpus Christi and wherever YOU live!

In other words, this Gift wrapped in human flesh and blood is for, well...Y'all!

When we open our gifts, it may also happen that some gifts fill a need, some are useful and helpful, while others are just plain puzzling. I know I should be happy about receiving a bright green turtleneck and a plaid necktie, but I'm just not so sure I'll ever wear them!

Once again, we ought to thank God out of joyful hearts because this Gift of God is useful, practical, and, most of all, necessary! Once again, that messenger of God explains:

"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

This is not a Gift we can afford to

set aside and open later. This is exactly what we need—a Savior! God isn't giving us junk here either—He gives us the one and only Savior! We have God's own assurance of this: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

This Jesus isn't just one of many options—He is Christ the Lord. He is God's hand-picked, chosen One.

Almighty God—the only One who truly and completely understood what we needed above all—gave us in His Son the one Gift that satisfies our every spiritual need.

Jesus would give the one sacrifice that can atone for our sin (anything we might give to God is flawed!). He is our one Mediator—our perfect go-between who as true Man knows what we go through and who as true God can speak directly with the Father.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and The Life. He is the certainty of our own resurrection to eternal life.

This Jesus is just what we need now and just what we have always needed. Let us treasure this special Gift and rejoice to know it is our very own!

—Pastor Andrew Schaller



Advent Devotion—

“I Have Gotten a Man—the LORD!”

God first spoke of the promised Savior's coming when He informed Satan in the presence of a squabbling Adam and Eve, "I will put enmity between you and the woman

and between your descendants and her Descendant. He will crush your head, and you will bruise His heel" (AAT). Eve's "Descendant," of course, was the Lord Jesus. When Jesus came into this

world, Satan would “bruise His heel” on Calvary’s cross, but Jesus would, in turn, “crush” Satan’s head by triumphing over the grave on Easter Sunday morning.

To what was God referring, however, when He stated, “I will put enmity between you and the woman”?

God was pointing out His divine role in Eve’s conversion. By sinning, Eve had fallen from grace. She, who had been created in the image of God (see Genesis 1:27), had now fallen and lost that perfection. Instead of being an ally of God, she had now become an enemy of God and ally of Satan! She was unable to understand without divine intervention the truths of God, which originally were part of her mind-set at creation.

The apostle Paul explained Eve’s situation—indeed the situation of us all by nature—when he told the Corinthian Christians, “A natural man doesn’t welcome the things of God’s Spirit. He thinks they are foolish and can’t understand them, because you must have the Spirit to see their real value” (1 Cor. 2:14, AAT).

By stating that He Himself would “put enmity between” Satan and Eve, God was promising that He would send His Spirit to win back Eve’s heart through the preaching of the gospel—the very gospel God was proclaiming when He informed Satan of His plan to save His fallen creatures.

Apparently by the end of God’s conversation with Satan, the squabbling had stopped, and both Adam and Eve were listening!

What did the Spirit lead Eve to believe through these words about the coming Savior?

The Scriptures say very little, but

Eve’s comment upon the birth of her first son, Cain, suggests some very interesting and specific insights. When Cain was born, we are told that she said, “I have gotten a man, the LORD” (Gen. 4:1 AAT)*.

Eve’s comment suggests three things about her faith: that she believed God’s promise that a Savior was coming; that she knew that the Savior would be her physical Descendant—a true man; and that the Savior would have to be greater than a mere man to overcome Satan—He would have to be the LORD Himself!

Eve’s faith was correct in two of her three assumptions!

That Cain was not the promised Savior would become all too evident to Eve as he grew older and ultimately murdered his brother, Abel. But Jesus, God’s promised Savior, would be one of her descendants. He would not come in her lifetime. Rather, He would be born of the virgin Mary—one of Eve’s descendant daughters.

Jesus, God’s promised Savior, would also be the LORD Himself, conceived by the Holy Spirit and demonstrating both God’s almighty power and His sublime grace as He indeed “crushed” the head of Satan and brought about the salvation of all mankind!

May our eyes be opened by the Spirit—as were Eve’s—to the truths surrounding Jesus. He came as true man, but was at the same time true God—our Savior—the very LORD!

—Pastor Paul D. Nolting

* Note that the AAT has a literal translation of the Hebrew text at this point. Most other translations insert the word “from,” which is not in the Hebrew text.

Command Performance —the Herald Angels

Preceding the siege of an ancient city, the commanding officer would often array his forces against it, with men, weapons, and awesome machines of war on display. The purpose was to strike fear in hopes of persuading a surrender without a defense. When all was prepared, a herald was sent to the city gates to announce the offered terms of peace.

Ancient heralds generally were not sent to negotiate. They were commanded simply to announce by the word of King or General the way things were and would be, and even to praise their commander's prowess. Accept the terms and hopefully be spared—into slavery or exile; or, reject and be destroyed. For many in the besieged city, it would have been a frightening prospect.

The Bethlehem shepherds on the first Christmas night were not surrounded by an enemy, but by the glory of the heralds of God almighty. These heralds were not sent to demand surrender, but simply to announce merciful tidings and to worship the almighty God under whose command they served. Yet, initially their very appearance was a terrifying experience.

Recall the Christmas story. Every time God's angels were sent—to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds—human fear was countered with a message of assurance: "Do not be afraid!" That fear is quite natural and is the result of sin and guilt. Whenever sinners are confronted with the holiness of God, terror is the normal



response. Holy angels caused fright, just as God's Law—which is a reflection of His holiness—causes fear and trembling.

For the shepherds, the darkness of Christmas night was shattered by glorious light; their routine by holy words. Yet the news flash was not bad news—as we have so often experienced on TV—but gospel tidings of great joy to all people! The herald's news alert was not about a death of some famous person, but about a miraculous birth! This was the birth of God's own Son, the Anointed One from the family of David, appointed to die for all sin, yet destined to rule forever.

A Special Contingent!

In His display, God then turned up the volume and perhaps even the lights. All the angels of the infinite cosmos bowed in solemn worship, but a special contingent was commissioned for choir duty. The single herald's news of great joy was suddenly amplified by a whole Hallelujah chorus of angel heralds singing praises to God!

This was indeed a Christmas command performance. The heavenly choir did not explicitly announce war, but a message of peace and God's good will toward men.

But the war declaration was implicit, for there could be no lasting peace without war. God's Son was not sent to fight against mankind, but for it, as its Champion. The woman's Seed, promised from the beginning, had arrived to destroy the works of the devil.

The only surrender invited of sinners would be that of joyous trust and faithful obedience, with the promise of a gracious and eternal reward.

No doubt many a godly scientist wishes he had been there at history's first big event—the creation of the universe. No doubt many a Godly musician wishes he had heard the harmony of heavenly music sung at history's

second big event—the birth of God's Savior.

But all the faithful who have overcome surely will be present at history's third big event—a second command performance predicated on the first! On that great Day, the Last Day “when He again brings the Firstborn into the world, and says, ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him’” (Heb. 1:6), then all the resurrected faithful with their own glorious bodies and voices will see and hear innumerable angels bow and worship Him who is Savior and King of all. Surely we will join them.

Are you ready? Believe and do not be afraid. Praise God for His love! Tune up your own faithful voice! There are only (?) waiting days until the promised Day.

—Pastor David Fuerstenau



“...And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7)

Christmas Peace

Homonyms are words that sound alike but are spelled differently and have different meanings. The word “peace” is a homonym. There is the “peace” spelled P-E-A-C-E, and then there is the “piece” spelled P-I-E-C-E.

Peace is defined as “the freedom from strife of any kind, absence of war, tranquility of mind.” When used by us Christians, this peace refers to the absence of strife or warfare between us sinners and a just and holy God. It is the harmony and tranquility of oneness

we have with our God through Jesus.

The other piece is defined as “one of the parts into which a thing is divided, a fragment or part of anything separated from the whole.”

These two words, both pronounced the same way, fit together in a remarkable way when you are putting a puzzle together and when you look at the life of an individual.

How so?

Piece after piece is put into place in a puzzle until you are finished. I



learned puzzle-making from my mother. When I was young, we spent many winter evenings putting puzzles together. You feel a sense of excitement, as you are about to put in the last pieces. In fact, sometimes my sisters and I would snatch up a few pieces and hold them in our hands to make sure we got the last ones in.

How frustrating and disappointing it would be when we got done and discovered there was a piece or two missing! Because of a missing piece, an unfinished puzzle—after days of work—can make one frustrated or upset, certainly not at peace!

Our Lives a Puzzle!

One can draw the parallel between the puzzle and our lives. Our lives are like puzzles—every day a new piece is being added until the last piece of death or the Judgment is put in place. Some of the pieces are sinful thoughts, words and deeds—sins that condemn us before our God.

Because of those sins we cannot get into heaven by ourselves. We need another piece of the puzzle in our lives that tells us how we are saved.

For many in this world, that piece is missing or non-existent. Many people search all over the world looking for the piece of the puzzle that will give them peace, but do not find it. They may find pieces that they think fit, yet if it is not Christ, it is the wrong piece.

When they die, they die without the one piece that can give them eternal peace.

We know that the piece that fits is Jesus Christ, whose birth we are preparing to celebrate. This is the missing piece that completes us spiritually and brings us perfect peace. Christ came to live as one of us, for each of us. He came to suffer what we deserved: death and damnation, separation from God the Father. He died so that we would live; He descended into hell so that we could ascend into heaven. The Savior washed away our sins so that the Father now sees us clean and as white as snow.

This peace that we have—because the piece of the puzzle, Jesus, has been added to our lives—is beyond our understanding. How can God continually forgive us and live at peace with us?

Even though we cannot fully comprehend it, we believe it and this peace is ours. This peace also will “guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Like a soldier standing guard at the gates, so also God’s peace stands guard at the door of our hearts. This peace that we have with the Father, as a result of His grace in Christ, keeps us faithfully clinging to Christ and prevents worry, doubt, and fear from destroying the joy of our salvation. Even while tears may be streaming down our cheeks, we have this blessed assurance that we are at one with God, at peace through His Son.

In the puzzle of life, Christ is the necessary piece who makes peace between God and man possible. Thank God that He has put peace into our hearts and promises it will remain there today and always.

—*Pastor Mark Bernthal*

(Pastor Bernthal serves as Vice President of the CLC)

THE BENEDICTUS

*Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people,
And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David,
As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began,
That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us,
To perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant,
The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:
To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear,
In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,
To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins,
Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;
To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Luke records the circumstance of Elizabeth and her husband, Zacharias. Elizabeth “was barren, and they were both well advanced in years” (Lk. 1:7).

The angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias as he went about his priestly chores and told him that Elizabeth would bear a son. His name would be

John. Zacharias was incredulous. He asked, “How shall I know this?” (Lk. 1:18) Zacharias asked for proof. The Lord’s response through the angel Gabriel was, “...You will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place” (Lk. 1:20).

Indeed, Elizabeth conceived and bore a son, and Zacharias insisted—in the face of other suggestions—that the boy be called John.

The song is Zacharias’ response to the miracle of birth, even grander because of the circumstances and especially in light of the role that the Lord had chosen for John.

SONGS OF CHRISTMAS

In series:

The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

**The Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79)*

The Gloria In Excelsis (Luke 2:14)

The Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29-32)

From the first word of Zacharias, his song has been called the *Benedictus* (“Blessed” in Latin). Commentators have said that this is the last of the Old Testament prophecies and the first of the New.

The *Benedictus* is found on page 38 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Hymns 88, 359, and 512 are based on the song by Zacharias.

While the occasion for it is the birth of John, the *Benedictus* is primarily a song of praise to the Lord, “for He has visited and redeemed His people.” To the accomplishment of this redemption God raised up a “horn of salvation.” For an ox, the horn was a weapon of offense as well as defense. The use of this word as a reference to the Savior symbolizes strength which would vanquish all enemies and thus bring deliverance for His people.

Zacharias recognized that the Messiah and His victory were a fulfillment of prophecy: “As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us.” Zacharias also underscores the faithfulness of God as He recognizes that Jesus came “to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham.” The Messiah would bring deliverance, not from political enemies (of which the people of God had many), but deliverance from the power of sin, death, and Satan.

The result was that the delivered “might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our lives.”

The message of the *Benedictus* transcends a specific or remote time; it is



**“The Kingdom
of GOD
Is at Hand.
Repent and
Believe in the
GOSPEL!”**
Mark 1:15

one in which God’s people of all ages may rejoice, for through our Lord Jesus Christ we are all the recipients of the blessings of which Zacharias speaks.

The declaration of both Messiah’s coming and His work fell to John. John was chosen for the grand work to be the “Prophet of the Highest.” As he fulfilled his advance work, he would “give knowledge of salvation...by the remission of their sins through the tender mercy of our God.” John would declare the Dayspring (Dawn) Who gives light “to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.”

By the grace of the Messiah, the feet of God’s people are placed on the path of peace and moved to walk on it.

The heaping up of words describing the love and goodness of God makes this song a precious source of peace and comfort. Neither the darkness of this world nor the darkness of the grave can rob the people of God of the Light of life or of the joy of salvation. In confidence and with anticipation we say, “glory be to God and blessed be His name forever!”

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer

THE GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!

The *Gloria in Excelsis* is probably the most sung Christmas song among us—though we may not even know it! This song, which was sung to the shepherds by the angels from heaven on the night of our Savior’s birth, is part of our worship service liturgy (*Gloria in Excelsis*, p. 7). It is also the source-text of eleven hymns found in *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

What a night this was for the shepherds! They were doing what they always did. They were simple men faithfully tending the sheep.

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared to them and announced the fulfillment of prophecy. The time for which many had waited had arrived! “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord...” (Lk. 2:11). God picked shepherds, the lowly and the despised, to be the first recipients of the message of Jesus’ birth.

While the shepherds were trying to absorb what they had heard from the dark sky made light by the glory of God, an angel choir appeared. There were no discordant notes in this choir. The angels knew the message and they



knew to whom belonged the praise. They would hold their peace for no man, for they were messengers of the Most High.

They could not contain their praise, but sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to men.”

These words are some of the most widely quoted in the Christmas season—as well as some of the most widely misinterpreted. The words cannot mean that there was something in man that made him worthy of receiving God’s peace. Furthermore, the peace that Jesus brought and brings is not a temporal peace or a cessation of war. It is not even peace from persecution. Rather, the angels glorified God for the expression of His will through which He has favored man with forgiveness and all else that Jesus won for His own—namely, the eternal peace and rest of heaven.

God’s good will toward all men is manifest in Christ; that good will brings the peace of heart which sinners so sorely need—both for their personal assurance of reconciliation with the Father, as well as for the hope God gives as His people traverse through

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this world of unrest and sorrow.

Peace is the fruit of the Savior's incarnation; This God-man Savior is the expression of the Father's good pleasure toward fallen mankind.

Christmas is not about man or the desires and aspirations of men. Christmas is about the Father's faithfulness and love, and about the "true God begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true Man born of the vir-

gin Mary," our Savior Jesus, Who gave to man more than man could hope or desire.

They who believe in God's gift, Jesus Christ, thankfully sing, "... We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee, for Thy great glory."

"Glory be to God on High!"

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer



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

The Return of Christ for Judgment

With this writing we conclude our 475th anniversary monthly feature articles on the Augsburg Confession. We thank the authors for their reminders of the timeliness and timelessness of this classic confession of our Christian faith. "Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word..." — The Editor

Whether you are listening to Christian radio or watching religious television programming or shopping for a book at a Christian bookstore, a religious topic oftentimes found is that of the "End Times." Especially those of the Reformed religious persuasion seem to revel in discussing what they perceive will take place prior to and after Jesus' second return to this Earth.

A prime example of the popularity of Reformed thought on this subject is the "Left Behind" book series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. This series of books has been on the New York Times Best Seller list. These best sellers are fictitious stories which spin tales as they lay out the teachings of Millennialism.



Fiction is not only the genre of these books, but it is also an apt description of the teachings of Millennialism in general.

Briefly, the contrived teachings of Millennialism would have us believe that when Jesus physically returns to Earth for a second time, He will set up a worldwide political kingdom where Christians will have the upper hand, ruling for 1,000 years. (Doesn't this sound like a tempting thought, especially when we consider how Christians are being oppressed in the

WE BELIEVE & CONFESS

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

A CONFESSION OF FAITH PRESENTED IN AUGSBURG
BY CERTAIN PRINCES AND CITIES TO HIS IMPERIAL
MAJESTY CHARLES V IN THE YEAR 1530

Psalm 119:46

*“I will also speak of thy testimonies before kings, and shall
not be put to shame.”*

ARTICLES OF FAITH AND DOCTRINE

XVII. The Return of Christ to Judgment

It is also taught among us that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the last day for judgment and will raise up all the dead, to give eternal life and everlasting joy to believers and the elect but to condemn ungodly men and the devil to hell and eternal punishment.

Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists, who teach that the devil and condemned men will not suffer eternal pain and torment.

Rejected, too, are certain Jewish opinions which are even now making an appearance and which teach that, before the resurrection of the dead, saints and godly men will possess a worldly kingdom and annihilate all the godless.

world?) Then, it is falsely taught, at the end of the 1,000 years Jesus will judge the world and usher in the eternal kingdom of heaven.

As many Jews in Jesus' day, so also today many religious folk fail to understand that Jesus' mission as the promised Messiah was not to restore a superpower theocratic government in this world (see John 18:36). Instead, Jesus' mission was to establish a spiritual kingdom of believers who would have a share in the everlasting kingdom of glory in heaven which would fully commence at His second coming on Judgment Day (see John 6:38-40).

Vs. Universalism

Also being peddled in our day as religious truth is the idea that everyone will go to heaven regardless of his religious beliefs or irreligious unbelief. This is known as universalism. Those

who hold to this misbelief scoff at the notion of a place called hell and a fate of never-ending punishment. How Satan must be rejoicing over this widely accepted lie, which deceives people into thinking they don't need Jesus as their Savior from sin in order to go to heaven! In fact, this lie says they don't even need to be religious, and that there won't be any consequence for a life of worldliness. God help the many hoodwinked souls to realize that hell and its fiery torments is not fictitious—before it is too late (Matt. 25:41ff.; Luke 16:19ff.). May God also grant these poor souls the grace to find their only hope of salvation in Jesus Christ (see John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Mark 16:16).

Still others (who claim to be Christians) say there will be no bodily resurrection and no eternal, physical life, either in a place called hell or in a

newly perfected Earth called heaven. This idea of heaven or hell is wrapped up in the here and now. It is believed that by making this world a better place in which to live they can deliver themselves from a hellish life and find heaven here on Earth.

In Article 17 of the Augsburg Confession, the Lutheran confessors stated very concisely the Scriptural truths about what will take place at Jesus' second coming—of the fate of believers on the one hand, and of unbelievers on the other. In an equally brief way the confessors dispensed with teachings in these matters that contradict the clear Word of God.

In fact, it took them only three sentences to do all this (see box; the second sentence would refer to the univer-

salists of that day and ours; the third sentence would refer to the millennialists of that day and our own).

As Christians who believe in Jesus' redemptive work, we look forward to our Savior's return, for on that day we will not be cast off into the fiery pit of hell; neither will we be left in this sin-cursed world for 1,000 years. Rather we will be transported to the newly perfected Earth of heaven, where we will live throughout eternity in perfect bliss (see 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Pet. 3:10-13).

Praise be to God for preserving these precious truths among us and for granting us the gift of faith to believe them (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-5)!

—Pastor Mark Gullerud



The Christian Citizen

—Sixth in a Series—

FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES: THE WAGING OF WAR

Of all the duties and powers given to governments, the most fundamental one is the responsibility to protect their citizens from harm and violence. This makes it necessary for governments forcefully to restrain and hinder the violent and criminal actions and intentions of any who would take advantage of the weakness of its private citizens.

To protect those dependent on it, governments pass laws with stiff penalties designed to deter the wicked

from such actions and to punish the wicked when they injure others. To enforce these laws, governments exercise their authority forcefully through police forces, court systems, prisons, and various punishments, even including capital punishment for some criminals. If this were not done, society might well become as it was in the days before the flood: "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen. 6:11).

Law and order is government's first mandate.

Of all the powers and authorities given to governments to protect their citizens, the most fearful and awesome is the authority to wage just wars. This power must not be used lightly. Rather, it must be exercised carefully by governments who take seriously their duty to protect the people under their care. Dangers, after all, may come not only from wicked individuals within, but also from dangerous foreign states or groups without. Our government must protect us from all dangers "foreign and domestic."

The need to remain constantly vigilant will always be present in this world. James speaks of personal disagreements when he asks, "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" His answer, however, is universal and points to the fallen nature of all mankind, "Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war" (Jms. 4:1-2).

What is true of people as individuals is true also—perhaps, especially!—of people in groups. The lust for power and for material benefits is strong and leads to all sorts of competitions and struggles, even to the waging of wars among nations and rulers of nations.

Our world is deeply divided by race and language, culture and religion. Within our world there exists a wide disparity between first and third world countries, between "have" and "have not" nations. This will never change. Indeed, one of the signs of the coming end of time is the prevalence of "wars and rumors of wars" (cf. Mt. 24:6) in

"...Our world is and will remain a dangerous and volatile place. What a comfort to know that the Lord sits in the heavens and has final control even over nations! (See Ps. 2)"

this world.

Our world is and will remain a dangerous and volatile place. What a comfort to know that the Lord sits in the heavens and has final control even over nations! (See Ps. 2)

This does not mean that wars are ever desirable. They are among the most apparent evidences that we live in a world gone horribly wrong. They surely must be resisted whenever possible. Some Christians have even asserted that the proper stance for the child of God is pacifism—a principled opposition to all war and a personal refusal to engage in any violence, even when provoked or attacked. They base this position on words from the Sermon on the Mount, "I tell you do not resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Mt. 5:39).

We certainly agree that individual consciences must not be coerced, even in important public matters. But what applies to an individual and warns against personal actions does not necessarily apply to all authority. I cannot lock up felons in my basement!

Paul clearly teaches that "the powers that exist are appointed by God" and "do not bear the sword in vain" (Rom. 13:1,4). This extends to waging wars which are deemed necessary to protect that nation.

The Augsburg Confession says that

we “teach that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and that it is right for Christians to bear civil office,...to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers...” (Art. XVI, Of Civil Affairs).

We thank God for leaders and a citizenry willing to make this difficult decision, when necessary!

The authority to wage war, however, has not always been used wisely and properly. History is filled with reports of wrong wars, selfish wars, greedy wars, wars of aggression. Therefore let us pray diligently that our leaders be filled with a great measure of discernment and wisdom, so that they might use this “terrible, swift sword” wisely and well.

On our part, we cannot accept a timidity that will never confront and

oppose evils which threaten our nation, for then security is lost. Nor can we accept an overly aggressive stance which eagerly seeks out wars, for then peace and security are lost.

In our American democracy we have a duty to assess (as wisely as we are able!) our national policies concerning war and peace. We will certainly acknowledge that those in authority have much information not available to us and we will desire to trust their judgment.

Yet such trust has its limits. We need much wisdom in choosing leaders who will both seek peace as well as keep us secure.

God grant us that wisdom and such leaders!

—Pastor Norman Greve



Luther Memorial Church & School, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, conducted an outdoor worship service on July 10, 2005.

Vacation Bible School children sang a hymn during the service. Pastor David Naumann directed the children.



INTRODUCING the Books of the Prophets

Joel

“Now, therefore,’ says the LORD, ‘Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm” (Joel 2:12-13).

As I am writing this article, the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina is still making the headlines. It is said that this was the worst natural catastrophe ever to hit our country. No doubt, for many years to come people will be talking about the flooding, the failure of the dikes, the heroic rescue efforts, and the thousands of refugees.

At Joel’s time, the land of Judah had recently experienced just such a natural disaster—except theirs came in the form of locusts. It was a plague the likes of which hadn’t been seen before. As Joel spoke to the elders, “Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Let your children tell their children, and their children another generation” (1:2-3).

Just what was it like? Everything was destroyed: “The field is wasted, the land mourns; for the grain is ruined, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails” (1:10). The prophet compares the numbers and strength of the locusts to that of an invading army: “A nation has come up against My land, strong, and without number” (1:6); and again: “Their appearance is like the appear-

ance of horses...with a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array” (2:4-5). “The Lord gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?” (2:11)

In other words, this was not just your garden-variety plague of locusts. It had been sent as God had foretold, first through Moses and then later to King Solomon: “When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:13-14).

A Divine Shake-up

It was because of the unbelief and the heathen idol-worship of God’s people that this “great and very terrible day

Outline of JOEL

I. An unprecedented plague of locusts in Judah (1:1-20)

II. The Day of the Lord (2:1-3:8)

III. Retrospect: The Day of the Lord. Full blessings. (3:9-21)

(Outline adapted from The Introduction to the Books of the Bible, Drewes, Concordia Pub. House, S. Louis, Mo., 1965)

of the Lord” (2:11) had come. God was trying to shake His people up, to get them to see their sins and turn back to Him in repentance: “‘Now, therefore,’ says the LORD, ‘Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm’” (Joel 2:12-13).

God does not desire that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Yes, His anger burns hot against sin, yet for Jesus’ sake He is willing to forgive those who repent.

Joel’s prophecy is full of promises of grace, restoration, and deliverance: “Then the LORD will be zealous for His land, and pity His people. The LORD will answer and say to His people, ‘Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil. ... So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten... You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. ...’” (2:18, 19, 25, 26).

Bible scholars are not agreed on the exact date of Joel’s life, ministry, and prophecy. We can identify the various familiar places that he mentions, but nothing in them can pinpoint the exact date of this locust invasion. All we know about the prophet Joel himself is the name of his father, Pethuel (1:1).

The lack of a definite time frame does not take away at all from Joel’s timeless message. That plague of locusts—as well as the hurricanes and other calamities of our time (see Matthew 24:6-7)—are meant to be a forewarning of that “great and terrible day of the LORD” (2:31). The time has already been fulfilled when, as God says, “I will pour out My Spirit in those days” (2:29). That happened at Pentecost.

We are living in the last times, awaiting that Last Day. As Joel predicts, on that Day there will be “multitudes in the valley of decision” (3:14). Then the Lord will “roar from Zion” (3:16), and He will “judge all the surrounding nations” (3:12). But “in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance” (2:32); “... Judah shall abide forever ... for the LORD dwells in Zion” (3:20-21)—in other words, “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (2:32).

May God’s message through His prophet Joel move us to repent of our sins today, and to call on the name of our Lord for salvation. In that way, the Last Day will not be “great and terrible” for us, but a day on which we lift up our heads, because our “redemption draws near” (Luke 21:28).

—Pastor Paul Krause

*Be come,
O C O M E
Emmanuel*

#11: “So here I am!”

Here I am in a wheelchair. Here I am in a nursing home. It's not my home, and I am not with my spouse and children. My days of earning a living are over; I can't sit at my own table with friends for a visit, and I can't look out the window at my own yard and garden. I miss all that! Sometimes I think I'd just as soon be dead if I can't have my life back!”

Well, dear friend, you can't have your old life back again, but God can give you a better one!

Let's take a few minutes to hear what Jesus says about this, and let's understand what He meant—because it's your life, too, that He is talking about in John's Gospel, chapter eleven, verses 17 through 27. (Read the Bible text now.)

Martha started the conversation in sadness but finished it in happiness. She was sad because she missed her brother Lazarus, who had died and been buried three days earlier—which she says Jesus could have prevented because He could cure cancer, a stroke, or diabetes (whatever had killed Lazarus). She wanted her brother alive, not dead!

So Jesus gave her some good news, saying to her, “Your brother will rise again.” He meant that dead people will not stay dead, but be brought from the dead to be judged by God—and He meant that He Himself was the only hope for Lazarus ever living again.

Martha clued in on that, for she

believed God's Word on the resurrection—that all people will have their bodies reunited with their souls to face God on Judgment Day. But she had not known that Jesus would be in control of the end of the world, of the resurrection of all people, and of life everlasting.

Jesus said to her, “I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die (before Judgment Day arrives), he shall (at that time) live (come back to life), And whoever is alive (when that Day comes) and believes in Me shall never die.”

How can this be? Because Jesus is in charge of the resurrection, and He has the power to grant eternal life to you. “Do you believe this?”

“Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come (has been predicted and promised—and came!) into the world.”

Dear friend, this is the solution to death. Jesus is the answer. When you get raised from your grave on Judgment Day, you can be with God forever as one of His favored children. Believe it! Entrust yourself to Jesus! You will see how well He makes things turn out for those who depend on Him, now and forever.

So here you are, perhaps in a wheelchair and in a nursing home—but you are safe with your Savior in control of your life, both here and hereafter!

—Paul R. Koch

Studies in First Thessalonians

“...(We) wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10).

Chapter 2: 1-12

The Well-behaved Gospel

Paul and his associates arrived in Thessalonica with a plan; they pursued an agenda that involved people there, as it had many other cities in Macedonia. They came to the Balkan peninsula (after running out of places to go in Asia Minor).

They came to Thessalonica after being driven out of Philippi. To some, that might have been a red flag.

But they weren't about to give up. To achieve their goal, they would have to move a lot. Every place they visited, they managed to stir up trouble. Time and again they suffered imprisonment and indignity (“spitefully treated in Philippi”, v. 2); they were willing to work incessantly (“for you remember, brethren, our labor and toil”, v. 9); they were ready to forego personal rights (“nor did we seek glory from men...when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.” v. 6)

Often enough, when we come across someone as driven as Paul seems to be, we are a little uneasy. Such a person may well have an agenda that will mean us eventual harm. Or such a one may be just a little crazy. Our first instinct is to keep our distance.

But not the Thessalonians. Most of Paul's contacts there were Jews, and

his message (which he calls an “exhortation”, v. 3) struck a chord with them. Quickly there arose a deep affection and trust from some toward Paul and his associates (“when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God”, v. 13).

Earning Trust...

Paul calls to mind the apostolic behavior that earned the trust of these new believers: “...For our exhortation did not come from deceit or uncleanness, nor was it in guile. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts” (v. 4).

It was apparent to those Thessalonian believers that there was great sincerity on the part of the preachers. This was so because these ministers spoke as men who could not but speak—men who were full of a glorious, gracious message! The message was bigger than they were, and it claimed their whole being.

The apostles' love and concern for their hearers was an extension of the love they had come to know in their

Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. Though sinners of various stripe and background, they had been “approved” by the Lord God—found acceptable to preach His Word. They never forgot in whose Name they labored.

And so they labored toward their goal, exercising motherly tenderness (v. 7) and fatherly conviction (v. 11) to “charge every one of you ... that you would have a walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

They wanted to see others claimed by God’s grace—regenerated and renewed to live and move through life as God’s holy children. They wanted to see others respond to the message of a Savior who had given Himself up in order to redeem others. They themselves strove to be the most prominent examples of such faithfulness.

Not a few of those reading this are called into the public ministry. Paul leaves us all with a high standard of

behavior; let sincerity and faithfulness shake from us any callous, cynical, and selfish mind-set. We also serve a Lord who accepted humiliation to glorify God, and we represent our Savior by our behavior, while we bring His gospel to others through our preaching and teaching.

Many more of our readers have the opportunity to observe such servants—people like Paul who are eager and focused on bringing the gospel to bear in the lives of others.

Just as Paul’s words were meant to generate gratitude and thanks to the Lord for the servants He sent to Thessalonica, so they remind us all of those who even now have been “approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel” (v. 4).

These servants serve a Master more awe-inspiring than our earthly minds can comprehend.

—Pastor Peter Reim



CROSS PURPOSES



DESIGN OR CHANCE ?

The debate is again heating up as to whether or not man came into existence through happenstance and chance, or whether creation and man is a consequence of an intelligent design by an intelligent designer.

We continue to be amazed by those people who profess to be intelligent but who prefer to believe that they are a consequence of a crapshoot or chance.

The whole question, of course, comes down to whether or not one

believes that there is a God. For the believer in Christ there is no question, no debate, no doubt. If God does not exist and He did not make us, then nothing about life is understandable.

If there is no God, then all the affliction, trial, sickness, hatred, war,

inhumanity of man to man, deceit—and all the other problems in the world, and finally death itself—suggest that life (however it came to be) is a cruel hoax if, when death comes, there is nothing better beyond.

Design or chance? Scripture tells us, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). We also read, “And the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life... (2:7). Job said, “Your hands have made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity...” (Job 10:8).

In the psalms we read, “For You have formed my inward parts” (139:13); and again, “Your hands have made me and fashioned me...” (119:73). The Psalmist said, “You who laid the foundations of the earth...” (104:5). The unbeliever rejects the facts of Scripture because he rejects God and Scripture, but the believer in Christ says, “O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all” (104:24).

Consider man’s ability to go to space and his ability to target the planet around which he seeks to fly and upon which he can even land. Consider the precision with which the Earth spins and rotates so that there are days, and months, and seasons, and years. This is not a result of happenstance chaos but of intelligent order!

Consider the intricacies of the human body. The unbiased observer of nature is compelled to recognize that creation is a result of design by an intelligent Designer, and that intelligent Designer is God!

The evolutionist mocks the Christian faith and the Christian’s acceptance of intelligent design. Yet it takes more

“faith” to believe in a chaotic beginning of man and nature than it does to believe the Word of God! The big difference is that the “faith” of the evolutionist is built on the sand of decaying reason. On the other hand, the faith of the child of God who recognizes the Lord as the Creator is founded on the bedrock of the Word.

Sin’s Contamination

Subsequent to Adam’s placement in the Garden of Eden, God’s perfect creation was contaminated by man’s sin. All that God intended for man in the perfect world, which God had made, was disturbed by sin—and life itself became but a pilgrimage to death. But the Creator God (Who manifested His power and His grace in the creation of all things) manifested His compassion and His mercy in promising the Savior from sin.

The promise of a Savior from sin became the focal point of history. All events that occur—however man thinks of them and whatever their effect—are directed and/or permitted by God, and serve the good and gracious saving will of God.

This gracious, saving will of God was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ Who has reconciled us unto God, and Whose blood has cleansed us and made us fit to be partakers of life hereafter.

Those who deny the Triune God, robbing Him of the glory of being the intelligent Designer, also deny the God of merciful compassion. Yes, denial of creation strikes at the gospel.

Therefore the teaching and promotion of evolution is not harmless and it is not safe. It is anti-Christian teaching (that is not made less antichristian through attempts to meld evolution and

—The Bread of Life—

Daily Bible readings for home devotions

January, 2006

The path of God's love and justice for His people is repetitive: Serving the Lord from one's heart brings blessings, but disobedience produces disaster. The work of God's spokesmen, the prophets, was an arduous but blessed labor. Let's review a few highlights from the labors of Elijah and Elisha.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Text</u>	<u>A thought from the reading</u>	<u>Hymn</u>
1	2 Kings 2:1-11	Off with the old; on with the new	120
2	2 Kings 4:1-7	The Lord provides for many days	118
3	2 Kgs. 5:1-19	And Gentiles shall come	121
4	6:24-33	When troubles come knocking at your door	123
5	7:1-20	If the Lord would make windows in heaven	431
6	11:4-12	(Epiphany) Long live the King!	360
7	13:14-20	A king, a preacher, and a grave-digger	126
<i>We have followed the Kingdom of Christ for about 3,500 years, from Creation to the Exile. During these years, God delivered His Word through the prophets. To acquire a feeling for the interplay of history with prophecy, we continue with readings (alternating) from the Prophets and the History.</i>			
8	Joel 2:12-32	After repentance comes the rain	326
9	2 Kgs. 17:5-23	The Lord is still in control	396
10	Jonah 3:1-10	God would have all men to be saved	331
11	2 Kgs. 17:24-41	Religious syncretism/unionism is not new	378
12	Amos 8:1-14	I will send a famine on the land	266
13	2 Kgs. 19:1-19	A trembling monarch seeks God's Word	281
14	Hosea 2:16-23	You are not/ARE My people	384
15	2 Kgs. 20:1-11	God can turn back the clock	43
16	Hosea 6:1-11	Come, let us return to the Lord	325
17	2 Kgs. 20:12-19	A visit from Babylon ... to Babylon	38
18	Hosea 14:1-9	I will heal their backsliding	358
19	2 Kgs. 23:1-8,19-25	What a godly king was Josiah!	41
20	Isaiah 2:1-4	Keep your eyes on God's Word	283
21	2 Kgs. 25:1-21	Thus God chastened the remnant	34
22	Isaiah 6:1-13	I saw the Lord sitting on a throne	249
23	2 Chr. 36:11-21	God arose early in compassion	33
24	Isaiah 7:10-17	The sign of the virgin's Son	356
25	Isaiah 9:2-7	The Child upon the throne of David	352
26	Isaiah 12:1-6	Draw water from the wells of salvation	277
27	Isaiah 25:1-9	Behold our God! We have waited for Him	279
28	Isaiah 28:14-19	In Zion a stone for a foundation	385
29	Isaiah 39:1-8	At least, not in <i>my</i> day	591
30	Isaiah 40:1-11	The voice of one crying in the wilderness	61
31	Isaiah 42:1-9	My Servant will bring justice to Gentiles	510

(We thank Assistant Editor Paul R. Koch who has consented to continue providing you, our readers, with these special Bible readings for home devotions for the coming months.)

creation together as an act of God). The Lord God knows Who He is. He knows what He has done. People who have been overcome by the Spirit, believing the Word, find their peace in the Christ of the Gospels.

The creation/evolution debate will rage on so long as man thinks he knows better than God and so long as the patient God lets this sinful world exist. But He Who sits in the heavens laughs at their pomposity (Psalm 2); whereas Christ-believers, who here

suffer the arrows of ridicule and rejection, shall rejoice with God in heaven.

Let those who believe that they are a product of chance so believe, if they will not listen to the Word. In the meantime we, the redeemed, shall say with awe, “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well” (Ps. 139:14).

—*Pastor Daniel Fleischer*



Grace Lutheran of Fairbanks, Alaska—

Praise God for His Mercies!



The members of Grace Lutheran Church, Fairbanks, Alaska, with their pastor.

“I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47).

In August 2002 my family and I moved to Fairbanks, Alaska—seemingly the end of the Earth! Upon arriving, there was a strange sense of being in another world. Everything was different in Fairbanks, except for the one

thing that mattered, our Lord.

Up here one tends to feel “cut off” from the rest of the world, as there is so much distance between here and anywhere. The closest CLC congregation is a “mere” 900 miles or so to the south in Ketchikan, Alaska.

We found ourselves in a place where there were no like-minded believers, something we had previous-

ly taken for granted. That was really a strange feeling. There was literally no one with whom to enjoy Christian fellowship. We were going to have to be content having worship services at our home with just the family.

However, the Lord had something else in mind. During our first year, I received a phone call from a pastor-friend who said he had a family moving up our way. This was news that was very exciting, since we had thought that fellowship with like-minded believers was something we would have to live without.

The harsh lifestyle of the Interior of Alaska, together with the distance from any CLC people, had made us long for the fellowship that we had left behind.

Upon the arrival of another CLC person, we continued having services in our home until this man was established and his family moved up. After the arrival of his family, we were led to rent a place to worship.

We first rented the Agricultural Museum at the local State Fair Grounds. The Lord blessed our efforts, giving us visitors and two new members. We were now a strong and committed twelve!

After a little more than a year, the Lord led us to rent a chapel located in a famous tourist attraction known as "Pioneer Park." The CLC Board of Missions made it possible for us to make the move, giving us a grant to get started. That was enough to pay both the year's rent and our liability insurance.

The move was further blessed by the Lord. Upon moving into our "church" building, we began to experience some numerical grow. We gained two by way of adult instruction, and another CLC man who was transferred up in the Air Force. Now we total eighteen. We still

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have visitors, and recently a young family of four has expressed interest in inquiring into church membership.

It is truly a wonder to behold the blessings our Lord gives. "So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Cor. 3:7). Fellowship with like-minded believers is a precious treasure which dare never be taken for granted.

Grace Lutheran Church of Fairbanks now has worship services, Bible class, Sunday school, and confirmation class. Praise God for His mercies showered upon us in abundance!

—Pastor Jay Hartmann

Cover: M. Schaser. This month's cover depicts the church home of Grace congregation, Fairbanks, Alaska