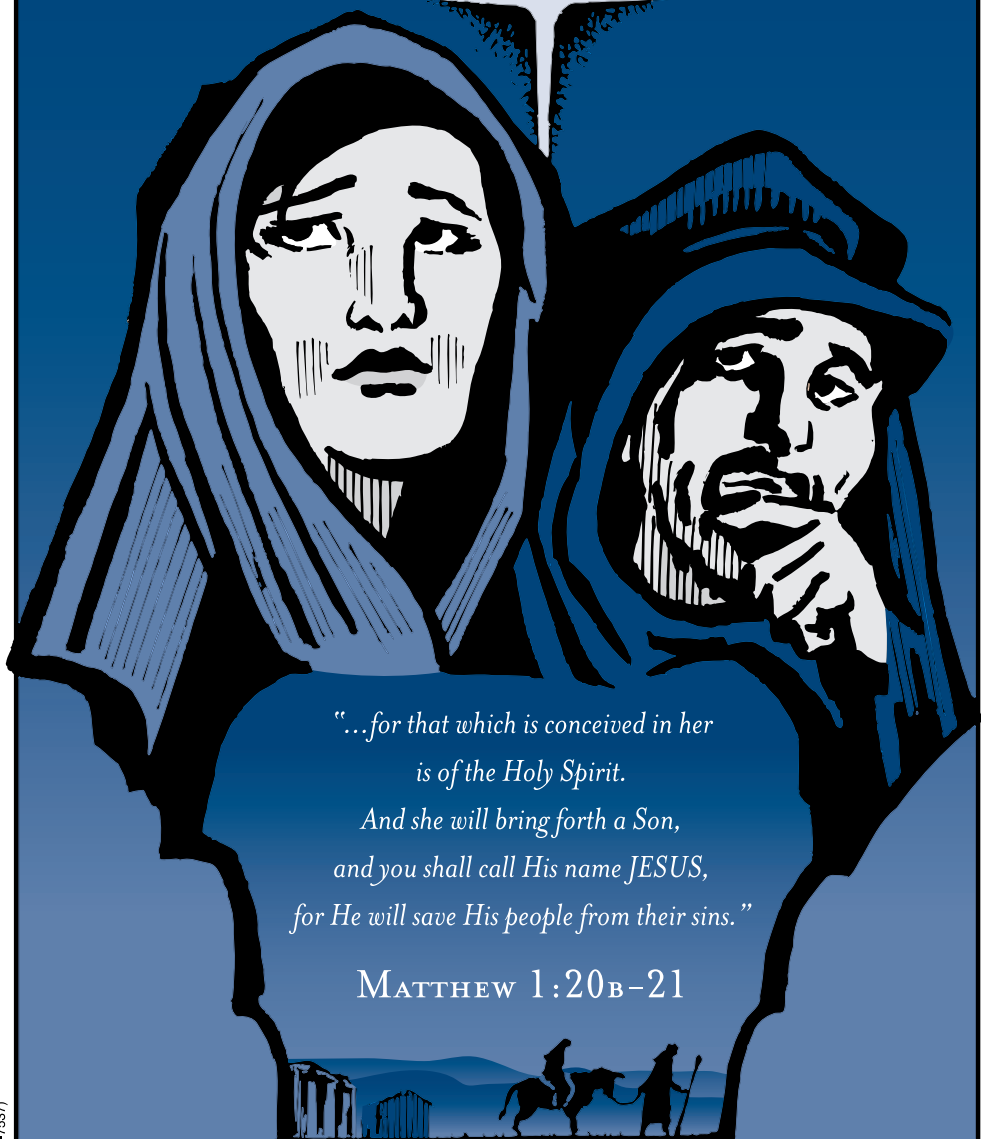


LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN



*"...for that which is conceived in her
is of the Holy Spirit.
And she will bring forth a Son,
and you shall call His name JESUS,
for He will save His people from their sins."*

MATTHEW 1:20^B-21

December 2008, VOL. 51 NO. 6

Looking For the Blessed Hope

The shepherds left their flocks in the Judean night and hurried to the village of Bethlehem. Their mission had them poking their heads into every cattle shed and peering into every manger in town.

But what were they looking for? A Child, we are told. But what sort of Child? A shepherd boy, destined to follow the sheep as had generations before? No, this One was destined to be a king. But what sort of king? A tyrant, careless of the welfare of the people, like so many that have ruled before and since? No, this King would be a Savior, the Light of the World. But what sort of 'savior' would that be? A self-appointed revolutionary, ushering in His new order through violence and chaos?

The answer to such questions is well-put by the words we find in St. Paul's letter to Titus: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying

ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (2:11-14).

The shepherds found a Child, as directed by the angel, and in Him they found "the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

Heaven's Solution

They weren't the first to seek this Child. This One had long been promised to mankind—a world of sinners—as heaven's solution for the world's sin. His work of salvation would bring comfort to those lost in sin "far as the curse is found" (TLH #87:3).

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For one who would be king, His birth would be in odd circumstances, yet He would indeed be "the Rod of Jesse" who would "free Thine own from Satan's tyranny" (TLH #62:2).

Those who anticipated what the shepherds were about to find were looking for the redemption of Israel; this Child would be the deliverer of a ruined and scattered people. "The government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

As Christmas approaches, what are we looking for? The Christmas celebration is the most anticipated holiday of our calendar. But what, exactly, do we find ourselves anticipating? A treasury of gifts under the tree? Or is it the coming of the Son of God in the flesh that makes our heart beat with wonder?

Do we seek mainly the camaraderie of family and friends at gatherings, the well-wishes of distant acquaintances? Or do we first of all rejoice to hear the well-wishes of the Lord God through the appearing of His Son? After all, it was His angels that sang "on earth peace, good will toward men" (Lk. 2:14).

Do we expect the celebration of Christmas to evoke such a universal kindness that war-mongers will simply lay down their arms? Or that the greedy will abandon their ambitions? Or that our own restlessness and discontent will melt away in a sudden rush of happiness?

Or do we find in that celebration the other-worldly peace of being justified (declared guiltless) in the sight of God—the firm peace that arises from the knowledge that the Christ-Child was born to make atonement for our sins and to reconcile us to the Father who sent Him? One prophet stated that His identity would be "The LORD our Righteousness" (Jer. 23:6).

The shepherds who first saw the Christ-Child lying in the manger, had great joy because they knew clearly what they were seeking and what they had found. For the first time, the grace of God had appeared in concrete form.

May we understand what it is that appeared to all mankind at that moment. And may we still be looking—"looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."

—Pastor Peter Reim
Loveland, Colorado



Good Tidings of Great Joy

Does anyone out there need some good news?

As I am writing this article, our country is witnessing negative politi-

cal campaigns as the Presidential election approaches. Our Congress just passed an enormous "bailout" bill. Unemployment is up, the construction

industry is stagnant, and the value of the U.S. dollar is plummeting around the world.

Could things possibly get any worse?

Time out! Take a deep breath. Consider the following.

What would your life be like today had Jesus not been born 2000+ years ago? What future would await you then?

Amidst the chaos and uncertainty of modern life, I want to remind you of the "good tidings of great joy" that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds. For whom was this good news intended? "...Which will be to all people." That means you!

No matter what your present earthly circumstance is, the "great joy" is yours. Regardless of how the election turned out, you have "born to you...a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

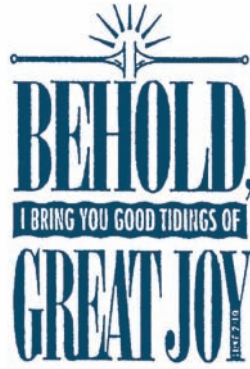
Remember that the Jews of Jesus' day lived under an often cruel, exploitative, domineering Roman government. The shepherds were night-shift lower-to-middle-class workers who no doubt had to pay their share of taxes.

Yet the shepherds rejoiced, "glorifying and praising God."

How are your financial investments faring? Did even your diverse portfolio take a hit in recent months? In spite of financial problems you may face, your future is secure.

The biggest "bailout"!

Christmas is a good time to contemplate the biggest "bailout" in the history of the world. Because of our sin and God's justice, our collapse was inevitable. Hell awaited us. Enter Jesus—Christmas! His perfect life and



sacrificial death and glorious resurrection bailed us out!

Many believe the Wall Street giants didn't deserve to be bailed out. They caused their own mess. Did we deserve to be bailed out? Did we cause our own mess?

How are the housing and mortgage crises affecting you? Some of you may lose your home. Isn't it wonderful to know that you have a mansion in heaven awaiting you because of Christ's payment in full?!

Perhaps the lesson to be learned is a simple one: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt. 6:19-21).

Does God guarantee an easy ride until we reach our heavenly goal? Certainly not. "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Jesus did promise, however: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (Jn. 14:27). This is the same "peace" which the angels proclaimed to the shepherds. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!" (Lk. 2:14)

In these uncertain times let us follow the example of the shepherds of yore and make "widely know the saying which was told them concerning this Child" (Lk. 2:17). Share the good tidings of great joy with a world desperately in need of good news.

Lord, how shall I thank Thee rightly?
I acknowledge that by Thee

I am saved eternally.
Let me not forget it lightly,
But to Thee at all times cleave
And my heart true peace receive.
Joy, O joy, beyond all gladness,
Christ hath done away with sadness!
Hence, all sorrow and repining,
For the Sun of Grace is shining! (TLH #96:3)

—Prof. Joseph Lau



A Shepherd's Christmas

It won't be long and people will be wishing each other a 'Happy' Christmas, a 'Merry' Christmas, or even a 'Blessed' Christmas. It is my hope and prayer that each of us may have a 'Shepherd's' Christmas.

What manger scene would be complete without shepherds?

Obviously, Jesus and Mary and Joseph are the central figures of the Christmas story. The fullness of time had come. God had chosen the individuals that would make up Jesus' family while He lived here on Earth. This pivotal moment in world history needed to be brought to the attention of the world. Who would bring this message of fulfillment so eagerly awaited by the Lord's faithful?

Angels were sent not to the palace of a king nor to some media outlet nor even to the religious leaders of the day. They were sent to shepherds "living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Lk. 2:8).

As agriculture increased in Israelite society, shepherding fell from favor. It was often the humble job of younger sons, hirelings, or even slaves. Yet, no matter how humble these shepherds

may or may not have been, they did humbly hear and obey the message of the angel. When told the Savior had been born—not only in their lifetime but rather this very night!—the shepherds said, "Let's go!" They couldn't wait to see this great event which God had made known to them!

Just as the shepherds heard and obeyed the Word of God in humility, so may we follow their example and wish each other a 'Shepherd's' Christmas!

The Promise Fulfilled!

The shepherds' obedience to the angel's message was rewarded with their discovery of the newborn Savior in the manger. How the angels' chant must have sounded in their ears as they gazed on their tiny Deliverer! How their hearts must have nearly burst with the thought that the Promise heard for thousands of years was now fulfilled! And how the treasure of their hearts poured forth!

We are told the shepherds "widely" broadcast this divine information they had received. Can't you almost see the shepherds stopping everyone they met along the road and asking, "Have you



heard? Our promised Savior is here!"

Just as the shepherds told others of the miraculous fulfillment of God's Promise, so may we wish each other a 'Shepherd's' Christmas and follow their example!

Do you imagine any of those shepherds gave up shepherding? The Bible doesn't tell us much more about them other than that they "returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen..." (Lk. 2:20).



An ADVENT Devotion—

Come, Lord Jesus!

Several of our Advent and Christmas hymns are prayers for Jesus to come. "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel," we sing during Advent. "Come, Desire of nations, come," we sing at Christmas.

We know that He has already come, for we remember and celebrate His coming into the world when He was born in Bethlehem. With our sung prayers for Him to come we express our faith in Him as the Christ who was to come, the Son of God sent by the Father to save us. With our prayers for Christ to come we look back at His coming.

Could the shepherds continue to 'glorify and praise' God by returning to tending sheep? Of course! The Lord has a station in life for each of us. Some of our positions may be none too noble according to this world's reckoning.

Yet each of us can go about our daily tasks, happy and secure in the knowledge that we too have seen and heard the wondrous story of our salvation.

Can you imagine that any one of those shepherds ever got tired of telling the story of the night an Angel of the Lord visited him—or the moment he saw the promised Christ in the stable?

Just as the shepherds of long ago made the wondrous works of our Father widely known, so may we wish each other a 'Shepherd's' Christmas and follow their example!

A Happy, Merry, Blessed, Shepherd's Christmas to all!

*—Teacher David Bernthal
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin*

But during the season of Advent we also look ahead to His future coming. We remember His promise to come again and receive us to Himself, so that where He is, there we may be also (John 14:3). Remembering His promise, we join in the Advent prayer of the church, "Come, Lord Jesus."

Those words, "Come, Lord Jesus," are among the closing words of the

New Testament. At the end of the book of Revelation, the apostle John reminds us of Jesus' promise to return in glory. "He who testifies these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.'" Then John responds to that promise with the prayer of faith, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

The apostle also encourages all who read his book to join him in that prayer. "Let him who hears say, 'Come!'" (Rev. 22:17)

When we do join with the apostle in that prayer, we are saying that we believe Jesus' promise to come again. We are saying that we continue to look for His coming. We have not forgotten His promise, nor have we given up on it because many years have passed since He ascended into heaven.

When we say "Come, Lord Jesus," we express our confidence that all things are in place for His coming. We look back at His coming in the flesh—His sacrifice of His life on the cross, His resurrection, His ascension—and we know that He did everything necessary for our redemption.

We believe that our sins are forgiven because Jesus paid for them all. We believe that we will be raised from the dead to live with Him forever, because He rose from the dead and lives forev-



er.

Nothing remains to be done for our salvation. All that remains is for Christ and His finished work to be revealed before all the world when He comes in glory.

Advent is a season of joyous expectation, a time for making preparations for the festival of Christmas. There is excitement in the air as we put up our decorations, do our shopping and baking, and rehearse our parts in the Christmas services.

As we do these things this year, let's remember that we are constantly in the midst of preparations for the Lord's second Advent. That we may remember, let us keep and treasure in our minds the promises of Jesus' coming and make use of the simple prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus."

—Pastor John Klatt
Rapid City, South Dakota



LET CHRISTMAS REMIND US OF OUR REAL HOME

(See 2 Samuel 7:8-11,16)

One of the many problems in our society today is homelessness. Hundreds of thousands of people even in America have no home; millions of people throughout the world do not

have homes as we have—with four walls, a roof, windows, and heat.

One of the most talked about expressions of the Christmas spirit is feeding the poor and housing the

homeless. Some advertisements suggest that that is what Christmas is all about. While Christian citizens will be concerned about such things, a real Christmas spirit is not centered in such worldly concerns; real Christmas spirit is centered in the GIFT of God—the Father's Gift of Jesus Christ on that wondrous night some two thousand years ago. Real Christmas spirit is centered in that great Gift of our Savior and all of the spiritual blessings we receive from Him.

One of those blessings is the gift of our REAL HOME that Jesus has earned for us to live in forever—the REAL HOME OF HIS HEAVENLY KINGDOM.

Let us realize we are all homeless without Christ, and let's

*LET CHRISTMAS REMIND
US OF OUR REAL HOME!*

The book of 2 Samuel deals primarily with the rule of King David. In the six chapters before our text, we read of David recapturing the city of Jerusalem and calling it the "city of David." Chapter 6 tells of David bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Throughout these six chapters we see again and again how God was with David and blessed him, giving him victory after victory over his enemies.

With peace and prosperity all around him, David decided to build a permanent home for the ark of the LORD—symbolizing the LORD'S presence among His people. Until this time the Ark of the Covenant had been in the tabernacle (a large tent) and was moved around.

That is where our text begins. The LORD told David that instead of David building the LORD a house, the

LORD would build a house for David, an everlasting throne and kingdom. The LORD reminded David that it was He who had brought David from herding sheep and had chosen him King. The LORD revealed to David that his rule over God's kingdom was all a part of God's plan of salvation. God's eternal plan was to set up the house of David from whom the Savior of the world would come.

These words were first fulfilled in David and Solomon's day when there was earthly peace for some time; its ultimate fulfillment, however, was found in the SON OF DAVID, Jesus Christ; His people are planted in Him, in His Word, into His Kingdom where He rules in their hearts, where no earthly enemies can oppress them. In Christ's Kingdom we have perfect and eternal peace.

God established a house for David,



Colored glass nativity window in the Ingram Library at ILC, Eau Claire

and He has done the same for us. The gift of the Christ-child assures us of this fact. Let the gifts at Christmas remind us of the Great GIFT EXCHANGE of Christ for us—death for life, sins for righteousness.

LET CHRISTMAS REMIND US OF OUR REAL HOME. 1) A HOME GRACIOUSLY PREPARED BY OUR HEAVENLY FATHER. Just as God faithfully worked things out in David's life to fulfill His promise of a kingdom, so also He will faithfully work things out in our life so that we receive the heavenly home prepared for us.

God said to David, I WILL MAKE YOU A HOUSE; He says to us, I HAVE MADE YOU A HOME IN HEAVEN! That's what Christmas says to us. Christ made His home here on Earth so that we would have a home with Him in heaven. The Lord has taken us homeless, lost refugees, and has made us His children—children of the King!

2) THIS HOME HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED THROUGH THE SENDING OF HIS SON. Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Prince of Peace, has established His kingdom—His rule—in our hearts through faith. His kingdom of loyal subjects, His believers, shall never come to an end. His Believers shall be taken from this world to their REAL HOME in eternity.

3) And what a home! IT IS A HOME OF EVERLASTING PEACE AND REST. Many homes today are broken—broken because of sinful pride, arrogance, stupidity, foolishness, hatred, selfishness, and self-love. Even in Christian homes there is often disharmony, anger, rebellion, even lying. No home is filled with perfect

peace—life's problems, dilemmas, and frustrations cascade upon us every day so that we are seldom at rest.

But the Lord grants us true spiritual peace and rest from our worst enemies and greatest fears: the power of Satan, the curse of the Law, and everlasting damnation. Our heavenly home is secured and prepared; all that remains is for the Lord Jesus to return and take us to our REAL HOME of PEACE and REST.

Yes, the Christmas message should fill our hearts and move us to proclaim it to others. And what do we proclaim? "Help for the homeless"? YES! Jesus Christ has prepared for us a home, a real HOME IN HEAVEN. Do we declare "peace on earth"? YES! There is real peace on Earth—peace between God and man because the barrier of sin has been removed. Do we declare "blessings for the poor"? YES! The greatest blessing for the poor in spirit has been given, forgiveness of all sins.

What a tremendous truth! God has built an eternal home for us through His Son who came into this world and never had a home of His own. The homeless Jesus earned and established for us our ETERNAL HOME!

Let us ponder these truths as we go to sleep in our warm, cozy, earthly homes this Christmas Eve.

—Pastor Mark Bernthal
Madison, Wisconsin





Old Testament Bible History

"All History is GOD'S STORY!"

No. 7 in Series: Genesis 9-11

"...Good for Those Who Love God..."

Please read Genesis chapters 9-11.

The Scriptures are full of passages in which God gives comfort and reassurance to His people. One of those passages many of us learned in Confirmation class: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

History—which is HIS-story, the story of Christ and of God's plan of salvation in Him—bears out the truth of this promise. In life it is not immediately clear how all things are working together for good to those who love God.

Likewise, in reading through these three chapters of Genesis, the "good" isn't immediately apparent. However, as we view these events through the prism of Christ and our salvation, we will indeed see how God makes all things work together for the good of His Church.

Please direct your attention to two examples:

Genesis 9:18-29 — The Curse of Canaan

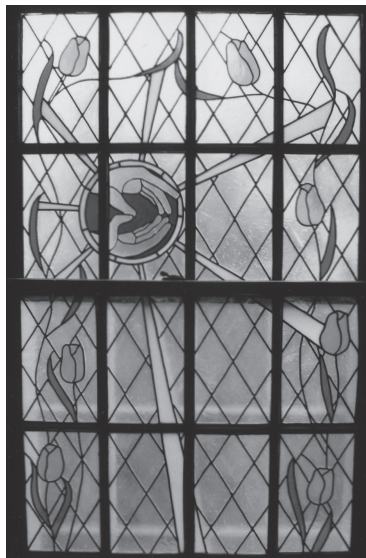
Here we are reminded that even after the Flood, sin still remained in the

world. We read that Noah was still a sinner, became drunk and lay naked in his tent. When Ham found his father in this condition, he went and spread the news to his two brothers. In so doing, Ham dishonored his father (fourth commandment) and also dishonored his father's name and reputation by spreading the news of his sin (eighth commandment).

When the brothers heard about it, they respectfully brought a blanket to cover their father, walking backwards so as not to look upon his nakedness.

When Noah sobered up, he cursed Canaan, the son of Ham, for Ham's sinful behavior, saying: "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren." But Noah blessed the LORD God for his sons Shem and Japheth. "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant" (9:25-27).

What cannot immediately be seen is how God made this cursing and blessing turn out for good to those who love Him. However, fast-forwarding a few centuries, we begin to see how God made this work out for good to those who love Him—it would be the



Another Ingram Library window showing God's Creative Hands

descendants of Canaan who would build fortified cities and homes and would care for the land as farmers in what would become the Promised Land of Israel.

God would use this for His people's good when a mighty nation would arise from one descendant of Shem—a man by the name of Abraham.

By the mighty right hand of God, the descendants of Abraham, the Children of Israel, would rout the descendants of Canaan and enter a land prepared for their arrival. The Children of Israel would move into those cities and homes and would farm the land prepared by their servant Canaan—just as God had promised through Noah centuries earlier.

And it would be in this land that the Savior of the world would eventually arrive. Born a descendant of Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Jesus Christ would be born in the city of

Bethlehem, where the Son of God would come into the world to save sinners.

While it was not immediately evident in Genesis chapter 9, God certainly made this work out for good to those who love Him!

Genesis 11:1-9 — The Tower of Babel

Immediately after the floodwaters had subsided, one of the commands God gave to Noah and his descendants was, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (9:1). As we come to read of the events at the tower of Babel, we hear that those people were deliberately disobeying this command of God. At this time there was only one language (the language of Noah, no doubt) and they used this blessing to set themselves against God. "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (11:4). They refused to fill the earth as God had commanded.

But the Triune God thwarted their sinful ambitions by confusing their speech. "Come, let Us [the Triune God] go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (11:7).

Upon doing so, God in turn scattered them from that one location to all over the face of the Earth.

There is a time in history when God overcame this language barrier. When He wanted to send messengers throughout the world with a very important message, God gave the gift of speaking in tongues through His Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

In Acts we read that people from at

least fifteen different regions were amazed that these unschooled fishermen were "speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11). The important message these men were carrying was a message for the whole world—Christ Jesus, God's one and only Son, had suffered, died, and rose again to give eternal life to all who believe in Him.

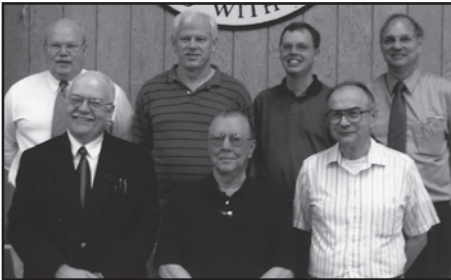
Because the gospel was spread in people's native tongues, they were then able to share the message of Jesus with friends and neighbors. The fruits of this blessing are seen in what you are doing right now! While it is very likely that English was not spoken at Babel, God made sure that English-

speaking people were able to hear the gospel in their native tongue. "So then, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

As we view HIS-story, we find again and again that it was not always immediately evident how God was making all things work together for good to those who love Him. However, when viewing HIS-story from the cross of Jesus Christ, there really is no doubt that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

—Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer
Hecla, South Dakota

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Peter Reim, David Fuerstenau

The Christian Prays for the State

The campaigns are finally over. A new President has been elected. What some have feared and what others have hoped has been determined by the election.

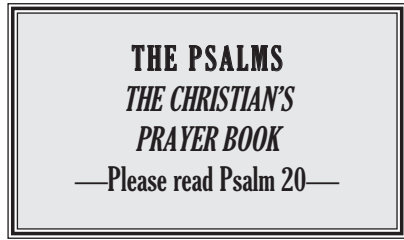
So how is the Christian to respond? Let us consider the example set before us in Psalm 20.

This psalm was written for the people of Judah to pray as the nation faced a critical time in its history. The nation was about to go to war. The people prayed for the blessing of the Lord to rest upon their country's leader. They prayed that the king's worship and sacrifices and prayers be acceptable to the Lord. They prayed for a devout and divinely blessed king.

With such a king they would be victorious and delivered from their enemies, for God would bless them through their king.

Yes, we should always keep our President in our prayers, but especially now as we look forward to a new administration and a new congress. We have access to God through Christ. This is an important truth and a great advantage. As we pray for the President-elect of the United States and for the rest of our nation's leaders, we pray with the confidence that God hears our prayers and will act upon them.

As we ask for the Lord's blessing upon our country and its leaders, we know that—if it is according to His will for the good of His Church and the advancement of the gospel—He will bless. We need also pray that our leaders be guided by the Lord that they honor His name and follow His Word



and His will in their governing.

For this to happen—for their prayers and their worship to be acceptable to the Lord—our nation's citizens need to know and comprehend the gospel of Christ Jesus. Many no longer comprehend the gospel, but rather equate Christianity with "being a nice person."

We pray that the Lord would grant us the blessing of Christian leaders who find their righteousness and life in the merits of Jesus, in His holy life, in His innocent sufferings and death.

Founded on Faith in Jesus

As we pray that our leaders' "offerings" and "sacrifices" be acceptable to the Lord, we are praying that these be founded upon faith in Jesus. Only then will the desires of the hearts of our nation's leaders be in accord with the will of God.

How important are our prayers for our nation and its rulers!

Please note in this psalm the King's response to the prayers of his people. "Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand" (v. 6).

He appreciated the prayers of his people. He confessed that the king's strength was in God, his Savior. He

didn't trust in the numbers of chariots or horses that were at his disposal. He looked to the Lord with faith in His heart.

The gospel of Christ remains "the saving strength of (God's) right hand." This is true whether in a time of war or a time of peace.

The security of the nation is not in the hands of the armed forces, but with the Lord our God. The strength of our economy is spoken of often. It is described as being very resilient. The economic security of our nation does not lie on Wall Street, but in heaven with God.

Let us remember the name of the Lord our God (v. 7), for He who has promised to be faithful shall be faithful

forever. Let us remember the name of the Lord our God, turning to Him and praying for our nation.

He who is the King of kings and Lord of lords will answer when we call.

And so we pray:

Save, Lord, and bless our nation. Cause Your saving Word to prosper in our nation. Cause our leaders to know You and put their trust in You, and may Your blessing rest upon them. Direct them in the governance of our land, according to Your gracious good will and to the glory of Your name. In Jesus' name. Amen.

—Pastor Theodore Barthels
Austin, Minnesota



The Discourses of Christ

Faithful/Evil Servants—Luke 12:35-48

You don't want to go there

The word "fear" is used or alluded to in the New Testament more often by Luke (in his Gospel and in the book of Acts) than any other writer. In English this word has become "phobia"—but unfortunately that emphasizes only the negative side of the word. The Bible knows also a positive side.

Imagine a dial such as a temperature gauge in a car or a pressure scale on a boiler. Now imagine a dozen or more gradations on this scale.

It seems that, in the New Testament, the word "fear" has many shades or

nuances, running all the way from great anticipation on the left side to sheer terror on the right.

You have already read in these articles that the word "fear" appears in Luke chapter 12, verses 4 to 7, and then again in verse 32 ("Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom").

This verse 32 is a good threshold for the thoughts under consideration in our section (verses 35 to 48), which start out in sheer joy and end up in sheer horror.

Open up to Luke chapter 12 and take

a look.

We know what God's Kingdom is. When we hear the passage—"Seek first the Kingdom of God..." (v. 31)—do we know the signs and sounds of that Kingdom? Sure—the Means of Grace and the forgiveness of sins. Here we find Jesus Christ our Lord, the One who was crucified for our sins, now risen and soon returning!

Every morning God's mercies are new in Christ. We start every day in anticipation of His blessings. Our morning devotions are filled with awe, amazement, admiration, respect, and reverence. See the needle move up the scale! This is the good area of fear in which we want to remain—to live, to serve, to witness, to bear the cross, and then to depart this life.

The other end of the scale? You have

to look at it, but you certainly don't want to go there! Certainly not to stay. We get a glimpse of the fright and sheer terror through some of the parables Jesus gives in verses 45 to 48, which are aimed at our self-centeredness.

But verses 35 through 44 are so encouraging for us. Here Jesus gives us Himself. Verse 37 reminds us how He girded Himself to serve His disciples just before His death. He gives us saving faith and the desire and eagerness to serve Him right up to the end. Here he gives us seriousness and soberness, a sense of responsible employment, and a lively hope.

This is the area in which we want to stay, and watch, and serve, and be ready. He's coming!

—Warren Fanning, *Pastor Em.,
Sun City, Arizona*



CROSS PURPOSES



WHO IS JESUS?

We are told that we live in a religious age. We are not impressed!

Man, it has been said, is incurably religious. Israel was religious, Judah was religious. The Gentiles were religious (as is evident in reading the book of Acts). What age has not been religious?

Religion talk has become part of political rhetoric. When religion is injected into the political arena, it becomes clear how deeply pervasive unbelief is in our society and/or how abysmally ignorant of the Christian faith people are.

We are not espousing a religious test to hold political office in our pluralistic society. What we are underscoring is the blatant abuse and misuse of the Bible and of our Lord by those who claim to be Christian, but whose words, actions, and lives betray their lack of understanding.

Even less do we have respect for those who use the Bible and our Lord's name to further their own ends, political or otherwise. Then, of course, there are those who may not even claim to be Christian but who blaspheme our Lord and His Word. The latter is to be



expected.

No doubt we have all heard how some politician defending the presidential candidate of his choice equated Jesus with a "community organizer." Someone who was affronted at the community organizer comment suggested that Jesus was not a "community organizer"—thank you, because we all know that Jesus was a carpenter.

Mary's husband Joseph was a carpenter. As a lad growing up in Joseph's home, Jesus may well have worked in the carpenter's shop. However, that the people asked of Jesus "Is this not the carpenter...?" (Mk. 6:3) proves nothing but the ignorance of the people who did not know who Jesus was.

Who is Jesus? The same question was asked in Jesus' day. There were many ideas as to who He was. (By the way, as far as we know, community organizer was not among them.) Jesus posed a critical question to His disciples, "But who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (Mt. 16:15,16).

The Messiah!

Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One. He was promised by God the Father. Jesus was "the Word

made flesh" (Jn. 1:14).

Unless one believes in Him, confesses Him, and trusts in His atoning work, one's claim to Christianity and use of the name of Christ is a farce, and one's religion is only a shell of the real thing. Unless one believes in the person and nature of Christ as Scripture teaches, one is in fact without God. What he worships as god is an idol. Paul wrote to the Ephesians of their pre-conversion state: "At that time you were without Christ...having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

No one can deny what Paul says without denying the Word of God and Christ Himself. One cannot deny those words and claim to be a Christian in the same breath.

So what is the Christian faith? Who is Christ? With the everlasting Scriptures as his source, Luther answers our inquiry on both points: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God begotten of the Father from eternity and also true Man, born of the Virgin Mary is my Lord. He has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sin, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with His holy precious blood and with His inno-

cent suffering and death...even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity."

Jesus is not a social do-gooder, community organizer, carpenter, another lawgiver, an example, or whatever "religious people" want to make of Him. He is the Son of God—yea, God Himself—and the Savior of the world.

Furthermore, Scripture teaches that here is no other foundation of faith, hope, and salvation than Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). "He who has the Son [that is, believes in Him] has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 Jn. 5:12). No one comes to the Father except through Jesus (John 14:7). John, the apostle of the Lord, speaks even stronger words when he writes, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (Jn. 5:23).

There are many manifestations of a

committed Christian, but it begins with a steadfast confession of the divine human nature of Christ, and all that He has done for sinful man. Jesus said, "Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 7:21).

What is the will of God but that we believe in Him? To such is given the promise, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him up from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

Who is Jesus? That is a critical question, the answer to which demonstrates whether one understands Christianity and upon which depends one's eternal salvation!

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer
Corpus Christi, Texas



Eighth and final in a series on the life of

Samson

**GOD GIVE US
"THE RIGHT STUFF"!**

Please read Judges chapter 16.

One of these days we are going to hear someone like General Schwarzkopf say that the allied forces have defeated the Iraqies because we had "the right stuff." Our military had superior training, superior morale, superior tactics, superior equipment, superior support, etc., all the right stuff to guarantee victory.

That phrase almost fits our anti-hero Samson during his heyday when God backed Him up and gave him victory as His desert shield and desert storm against Philistia; Samson had much more than the physical and military right stuff, for he had God with him and by him; he had God's Spirit to rescue him from defeat.

Yet as we open the last chapter of his

biography, we find Samson sacrificing all the right stuff in the company of that harlot Delilah, as his heart turned away from his Lord in order to revel in his own dissipations. Losing his seven locks of hair to her scissors was but the outward sign of what he had already done in his heart—he had turned God off and tuned God out; and so he walked alone.

That truth was spelled out for him in his own blood. We are told that "he awoke from his sleep (on Delilah's lap) and thought: 'I'll go out as before and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the Lord had left him" (16:21). When he made his bed with that heathen girl, he did not realize that he had chosen to escape from the protection of his Creator and Redeemer.

Only when he was pinioned to the bed and her compatriots were jabbing at his face with their javelins did he catch on—too late!—that he should have listened to his parents and to his conscience. He had gone much too far out on a limb of his own, and now God was letting him bear the bloody consequences.

When Samson thus snatched defeat from the jaws of victory, it must have been devastating—and I am not referring to the atrocity of his ravaged face—I mean the horrible realization that God had left him to his own devices, for he had deserted God.

How he survived those next weeks and months we know only in barest outline. Samson, the slave of sin, who refused to see where he was headed, was harnessed like a blind horse to power a gristmill—there to be the target of teenagers who could mistreat him from their coward's safety. I think we can see what God was doing for

Samson—He was giving Samson cause and time to come to his senses. The Lord used his blind isolation and the shame of his degradation to get through to Samson's stubborn heart and to break down his sinful self-confidence.

Serving the Lord

Along with that reawakened sense of guilt, he also remembered the blessings of God's goodness enjoyed for many years from his mother's arms through puberty into the full virility of manhood—how God had supported him when he fought for God rather than for himself. He remembered his calling as God's strong arm on Earth, and his heart was reawakened to wish to serve God again. Just to be able to serve the Lord, to give everything in service to Him...rather than lose everything in selfish indulgence! As time passed, he became willing to suffer everything—even death, rather than fall away again.

Indeed, sometimes God lets a person hit rock bottom before he will face the truth about himself, will turn to the Lord with contrite heart, and will ask Him for forgiveness and a chance to enter again into His service.

You will remember the closing scene from those picture charts in Sunday School: Samson braced himself between two main support pillars in the temple of Dagon, as those revelers in their ranks of thousands sniped at him for their entertainment, he "called to the Lord, saying, 'O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!' And Samson took hold of the two middle

pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. Then Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' And he pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life" (16:28-30).

What shall we say, then, of Samson? One sacred writer lists Samson along with the other heroes who "through faith conquered kingdoms, whose weakness was turned to strength....Some faced jeers and flogging, while others were chained and put in prison...." These were all commended for their faith.

Seen in the light of his motives, Samson's death does not fall under the condemnation we generally pronounce on suicides. Rather, it seems to have

been God's will to release Samson from his earthly pilgrimage after having given him the desire to serve God and God's cause by a spectacular method more destructive than a Scud missile multiple warhead.

We do well to remember Samson's life history, loaded with warnings against choosing the wrong companions, against self-indulgence and macho pride and the pleasures of lust. Don't let yourself go away from God who has called you to belong to Him in body and soul!

May you always have God's right stuff for serving Him—that is, the Spirit from above that will possess and guide your heart and soul to not forsake Him who has loved and redeemed you for eternal blessedness! Lord, have mercy! Amen!

—Paul R. Koch (*chapel address at ILC, Eau Claire, Wis., dated March 1, 1991*)



The Word From Immanuel
Chapel Talks to the student body of Immanuel
Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin
To our young readers - This is for you!

"MODESTY COMES FROM THE HEART"

(Monday, September 15, 2008, Chapel Address)

Search us, O God, and know our hearts; test us, and know our anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting. Amen.

The following statement is made in our ILC student handbook:

"Keeping in mind the Scriptural

principles of modesty and the importance of learning that different situations require different levels of dress, the following guidelines will be our dress code: 1) Neatness, cleanliness, and modesty in dress are expected at all times."

I think that we all know what neat-

ness and cleanliness are. But what is modesty? Is modesty a matter of personal opinion, so that one person's idea of modesty is going to be different from another's. If so, how can we make modesty the basis for our dress code?

Listen to these words from our Lord; they are recorded in 1 Sam. 16:7—"For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

These words show us a fundamental difference between man and God. God is capable of seeing everything, even our inner thoughts and desires.

As for us, we live by our senses: taste, touch, smell, hearing, sight. These senses are used by man when he evaluates things and people. Man looks at the outward appearance.

So, what does modesty have to do with this? Well, here is the dictionary definition of modesty: "Having or showing a moderate opinion of one's own value, abilities, achievements, etc.; not vain or boastful; unassuming" (<http://www.yourdictionary.com/modest>)

This sounds like a biblical concept, although the word that we are accustomed to is "humility." A modest person is a humble person; he is one who does not try to draw attention to himself.

There are many ways that we do draw attention to ourselves. All of them have to do with outward appearance—sight, sound, smell, taste, touch. We draw attention to ourselves by the way we look, the way we talk, the way we smell, and so on.

But why should we draw attention to ourselves? What is there about us that is worthy of attention? Every good

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thing in our lives is the gift of God. Every evil thing is our own doing.

So, when we dress or we talk or perfume ourselves for the specific purpose of drawing attention to ourselves, then we are being immodest. And be assured that when we draw attention to ourselves, our sins and evil deeds will also be seen.

Christians shouldn't draw attention to themselves. That is what the world does. That's why the world deliberately designs clothing to attract attention, especially to their sexuality.

In our daily bulletin is a picture which shows what modesty was like in 1898. Back then the hemline went down as a girl got older. Nowadays it is the exact opposite. Things have certainly changed. The world does not understand modesty.

Not Of The World

But we are not of the world. Therefore "...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may

prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

It should be the desire of every one of us not to draw attention to ourselves but to God. We should talk and act and dress in such a way that we are not the center of attention. Rather we will want others to see, to hear, to sense in every way that our God is good.

It is the goodness of God that made us what we are today—the goodness of the Father, whose love provided the way of salvation; the goodness of the Son, who in love sacrificed Himself in our place; the goodness of the Holy Spirit, who in love reached down from heaven and rescued us from sin and damnation by bringing us to faith in Jesus.

When the Spirit brought us to faith, He changed us inwardly and made us different from the world.

Modesty is more about what is on the inside than on what is on the outside. If the inside is right, so will be the outside. Many times our Lord has made this point. "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good

things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things" (Mt. 12:33f).

The Lord looks on the heart. He does not evaluate us based on what is on the outside, but on what is on the inside. He knows that if the inside is right, so will be the outside.

Look, Jesus already knows what is inside of us. We cannot fool Him. It is ourselves that we fool.

Therefore, when you get dressed tomorrow, ask yourself whether what you will be wearing is designed to draw attention to yourself or not. If the clothes draw attention to yourself, then in all modesty don't wear such clothes.

Let modesty be our attitude in everything: in the way we dress, the way we talk, the way we act. Let God be the center of attention in our lives, not ourselves.

PRAYER: Search us, O God, and know our hearts; Test us, and know our anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting. Amen.

—Prof. John Pfeiffer



**Women's Retreat
West was held at
Chadron State
Park, Chadron,
Nebraska,
September 12-14,
2008.**

**Theme:
"God will hold the
pillars firm"
(Psalm 75:2-3.)**

"THE BEST SERMONS ARE LIVED RATHER THAN PREACHED"?

On the face of it, the statement sounds good (the question mark is ours). Since it was a sign at a Christian church, we can assume the point being made is that the Christian faith needs to be lived, practiced. Nothing wrong with that. The book of James teaches, "be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (1:22ff). It teaches that "faith without works is dead" (2:20).

Indeed, Christians will want to live their faith-life for all to see, as Jesus teaches: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5:16).

So what is our problem with the sign-saying?

A number of things. For one, the saying could be on a sign of any church, non-Christian as well as Christian! By itself the sign tells—teaches—passers-by that the "best sermon" is a life of good works which wins or gains favor with God, whoever He is. Thus the sign plays into the hands of Satan and of all people who are self-righteous by nature!

The sign-message leaves other mistaken impressions: 1) that "faith" is superfluous; 2) that one religion is as good as another; 3) that all that needs to be done (the "best" one can do) is live a good life (by the way, according to whose standard?); 4) that "deeds not creeds" is the church's proper stance before the world (that's something we reject, but it's a subject for another article).

Further, what the sign-message

does or says—whether intentionally or not—is leaves the impression that preaching, if it is important at all, is of secondary importance.

So what about it? According to the Bible, where does/should preaching "rank" in importance?

Think of Jesus' earthly ministry. Was preaching and teaching important to Him? He went about preaching and teaching in the synagogues. How often Jesus seized opportunities to teach His disciples, whether they were walking along the road, seated in a house, or relaxing on a mountaintop (Sermon on the Mount). How often the Savior preached to the crowds that followed Him, expounding on spiritual truths suggested by the circumstance or situation. It is Jesus who is frequently heard to say, "He who has ears to ear, let him hear!" (Mt. 11:15 etc.). In fact, it is Jesus who tells His disciples: "...What you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops" (Mt. 10:27). It is Jesus who says: "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it" (Lk. 11:28). In His Great Commission (Mt. 28:18ff), the Savior instructs His disciples to teach all nations—in fact, to teach "all things that I have commanded you..."

Obviously, preaching was important to Jesus, as it was also to all of His apostles.

Law and Gospel

Consider Peter and John telling their accusers: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot

but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (4:19f). The apostles preached Jesus as the Christ—they preached of His suffering, death, and resurrection.

None preached more (or better) than the apostle Paul, who would write to the Romans: "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (10:14) To his young co-worker, Paul wrote: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching..." (2 Tim. 4:2).

Another thing. The saying we are critiquing here begs the question: "What sermons are the 'best' preaching?"

When preachers preach, what makes a "good" or "the best" sermon? (We are talking here about sermon content, not methodology—which is covered by Seminary professors in "homiletics" classes with budding, young preachers.) The "best" sermons—as any Seminary professor worth his salt will teach—are those which properly divide law and gospel (cf. 1 Tim. 2:15). The "best" sermons preach the law of God to expose sin and convict the sinner and then God's gospel which proclaims repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.

While we will grant that methodology has a place in the discussion of what makes the "best" sermon, the over-riding consideration will be law-gospel content. When judged on that basis, far too much preaching in our day—by popular radio and television preachers, as well as by many pulpit preachers in churches across our land (and world)—deserve a failing grade.

And that is no light matter. God Himself says through the prophet: "Behold, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who use their tongues and say, 'He says.'...I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all,' says the LORD" (Jer. 23:31f).

With what has been said, we are confident to assert that some of the "best" sermons that can be heard in our day are preached in our conservative, orthodox Lutheran churches whose pastors "tremble at God's Word" (Is. 66:2), bringing messages that reflect a holy awe and respect for the divinely inspired Scriptures.

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Is. 52:7)

Through such preaching the Holy Spirit will be at work to produce fruits of a living faith—all to the glory of God alone.

—Pastor Paul Fleischer
Cheyenne, Wyoming

**GLORY
TO GOD
IN THE
HIGHEST**
Luke 2:14

Announcements

Another E. Schaller Volume!

Volume VI of E. Schaller's *Selected Sermons* has been published and is being made available to our readership.

These forty-six sermons have been assembled to follow the calendar year beginning with the Sunday after Christmas and proceeding through Lent and the Trinity season of the Church Year. The closing triad of sermons concentrates on the three congregations addressed in Revelation 2 and 3.

This volume appears in time to order as Christmas gifts. The cost is \$8.00 per copy, plus postage.

Order from Paul R. Koch, 3425 Morgan Avenue, Eau Claire, WI, 54701-7023; Phone 715-835-5083; email: parekoak@aol.com



Poems of Prayer & Praise

This book is also in time for Christmas. Our readers may recall that the *Lutheran Spokesman* has, on occasion, printed some of the devotional-type poems by L. Dale Redlin. In his retirement Pastor Redlin has brought together an 125-page, 7x10 booklet of his original poetry.

CLC teacher Craig Owings writes in the book's Foreword: "Here you will find poetic devotions from the heart of a shepherd, written for the flock of the Good Shepherd. These are Christian poems—they reflect a Biblical worldview, and they express the love of God for us in His Son, Jesus Christ. They comfort the afflicted, and they also afflict the comfortable. Most of all, they focus the attention of the reader on the Savior Jesus Christ and on His gracious love, His redeeming life, and His sacrificial death for us. This is not

'modern' poetry; it is timeless poetry."

The cost is \$10.00 plus postage. Order from: L. Dale Redlin, 225 Crystal Circle, Mankato, MN 56001; e-mail: hope-dale@juno.com



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For more information contact:

Pastor Todd Ohlmann
tohlmann@swbell.net
(636) 225-3458 — office
(314) 517-0177 — mobile

Deadline for applications:

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