

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

“...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken.” — John 10:35

O holy Child
of Bethlehem,
Descend to us,
we pray;
Cast out our sin
And enter in,
Be born
in us today.

TLH #647

First part of Verse 4

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church Hecla, South Dakota

On Sunday, September 16, 2012, Prince of Peace congregation celebrated fifty years of God's grace in its midst. Former pastor of the congregation John H. Johannes served as guest speaker. He used Romans 5:6-11 as Scripture text for a sermon message titled "You have Every Reason to Rejoice!"

Some sixty worshipers also enjoyed special music provided by both an Adult Choir and a Children's choir. After the worship service, Pastor Rick Grams read greetings from former pastors and others. A fellowship dinner followed.

As with many congregations of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC), the beginnings of Prince of Peace can be traced back to the doctrinal controversies which preceded the dissolution of the Synodical Conference (1962). A congregational History Book reports that "Prince of Peace was organized by Christians desiring a church that faithfully taught the Word of God and held to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church."

The congregation was organized on March 9, 1962, during the pastorate of Clifford M. Kuehne. It soon applied for membership in the CLC (which had been organized in 1960). Pastors who have served full-time include Kuehne (1961-63), Arthur Schulz (1963-68), Walter Schaller (1969-74), Norman Greve (1975-83), John Klatt (1984-90), Paul Krause (1991-96), John Johannes (1997-2002), Matthew Hanel (2003-05), Nathan Pfeiffer (2005-11), and Rick Grams (2011-present).

"The members of Prince of Peace are thankful for the many blessings which the Lord has showered on us. We are likewise thankful to be a part of the Hecla community and pray for the Lord's continued blessings in the years to come." (History Book)



Exterior & Interior of Prince of Peace, with "the people are the church" in the middle

Jesus' Father — Just and Loving

Pastor Paul Krause • Markesan, Wisconsin

"Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly."

(Matthew 1:19)

As I have told many a questioner who asks "Why?" regarding Bible matters: "God does not always choose to tell us why He did what He did; rather, we find His Word simply describing what was done."

One such "Why?" question might be raised concerning the angel's appearing to Mary—and later to Joseph—regarding the miraculous conception in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit.

Why didn't the angel make the announcement to both of them at once? Why put Joseph in such a heart-wrenching position (Mary, his avowed wife-to-be, was obviously pregnant with a child not his own when she returned from her visit with Elizabeth)?

The above Bible verse gives us the reason God waited to reveal the truth to Joseph. It provides insight into the character of the foster father of the Son of God.

Joseph is called, first of all, "just"—that is, a righteous man, not one who dreamed of earning God's favor but rather showed his faith by living a godly life.

Besides being a just man, Joseph was also a kind and loving man, one whose heart could not bear to see his betrothed made into a "public example." As a result, his plans were simply "to put her away secretly"—that is, to call off their marriage so that Mary need not face a public scandal.



Woodcut of Joseph — after a drawing by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (German painter, 1794 - 1872) published in 1877

How fitting that God the Father would choose a man such as Joseph to raise His Son while in the flesh on this Earth, for both traits we find here in Joseph are exhibited by God the Father Himself!

First of all, the Father is just and righteous. He Himself is holy and rightly demands that man, His creation, be holy. But how vividly He is aware that we and all mankind are anything but holy! By our sinful rebellion against Him, we have become His enemies. And our Father knows that we deserve nothing but eternal death.

Yes, we can see in Joseph an example—though imperfect—of righteousness as we see it in God the Father.

And regarding Joseph's love for Mary, that love is but a shadow of the love God the Father has for us poor sinners. Joseph was not willing to shame Mary because of the "sin" he assumed she had committed. Yet neither could he simply "look the other way." His solution was "to put her away secretly."

Not so with God! In His love for the world, our Father did not just "send us away" to suffer the hell we deserve for our sins. His heart of love would not allow Him to stand by and let all sinners die eternally. Instead, He sent His Son as the Child whom Mary was carrying in her womb. He sent Him to take our place, to live the perfect life we couldn't live, to make a satisfactory payment for all our sins, and to rise again from the dead so that we can be assured of eternal life with Him in heaven.

Dear Lord Jesus, thanks to Thee • Now and thro' eternity • For this grace and blessing!
(TLH #78:2)



October 9-10, Minnesota Pastoral Conference, Red Wing; Prof. John Ude (3rd from left), with pastors Eric Libby, Paul Nolting, Wayne Eichstadt, Norman Greve, Mark Tiefel, John Hein, Theodore Barthels, David Baker

“The Most Wonderful Time...”

Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer • Spokane, Washington

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

“It's the most wonderful time of the year.” So sings Andy Williams in his well-known Christmas song.

And it's true, isn't it? How wonderful to hear the children of our congregations recite the account of Christ's birth in Luke chapter 2. How wonderful to hear that “unto us a Savior has been born, who is Christ the Lord!” How wonderful to sing those beloved Christmas hymns. And then there are the decorations, the family gatherings, the gift-giving, just to name a few—all wonderful!

How wonderful it must have been for Mary and Martha to host the Lord Jesus in their home (as Luke reports)! What a wonderful time to have as a guest in their home the eternal, Almighty Son of God, the promised Messiah for whom the forefathers had longed, the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sin of the world—wonderful!

As wonderful as that must have been, what do we read about Martha? Jesus says she was “worried and troubled about many things.” Part of what worried and troubled her was her service—what she wanted to do for her house guests that day.

Serving others has its place. But Martha's serving was affecting her ability to BE SERVED by Jesus. We read that she was “distracted with much serving.”

Which of us couldn't apply those words to ourselves, especially at

Christmas time? As wonderful as the celebration of our Savior's birth SHOULD be, we too become Marthas, worried and troubled about many things. We are troubled by the long lines at the store and the heavy traffic. We are worried and troubled about what gifts to get our spouse or children. And we are usually so busy getting everything ready for Christmas that, like Martha, we are distracted from the ONE thing we truly need, especially at Christmas.

Mary knew what that one thing was. She knew she had her Savior as a guest in her home. As Peter did, she knew, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*" (John 6:68). Mary knew that even more important than her service TO Jesus was her being served BY Jesus. She wanted nothing to distract her from the words of Jesus, and so Mary sat at the feet of her Savior to hear His Word. Jesus commended her, saying, "*But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.*"

When Jesus was born, the Son of God came to Earth as our Guest. He came to be our Brother and our Savior. He came to serve us! "*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45).

He served us by taking the "worries and troubles" of our sin on Himself and removing them forever by His sacrificial death on the cross.

He took away our "worries and troubles" about going to heaven by giving us the gift of justification (being declared "not guilty" by God) through His resurrection from the dead.

Christmas reminds us that the Son of God came to be our Guest—our Immanuel ("God with us")—to serve and save us!

As we once again celebrate the birth of our Savior, may we like Mary choose the good part. As wonderful as are the tree, the lights, the turkey dinner, the gifts—these will all fade away with time. Let us not get "*distracted with much serving.*"

As we get worried and troubled about many things, let us remember especially at Christmas that only one thing is needed. Let us choose first to sit at the feet of Jesus, hearing His Word in our Advent and Christmas services, and each day in our homes.

That is the most wonderful part of Christmas that cannot and will not be taken away from us!



Born to Save Sinners!

Pastor Emeritus Daniel Fleischer • Oakdale, Minnesota

What does Christmas mean to those who brush lightly over or ignore the reality of sin in the world and in their personal lives?

At a funeral we attended in an ELCA [liberal Lutheran — ed.] church, appropriate Scriptures were read, but no spiritual application was made. Particularly noticeable was the fact that neither the readings nor what was called a sermon mentioned the word "sin."

How is it possible that folks gathered at a funeral hear no mention of the root cause of death until a passing reference in a short prayer at the close of the service acknowledges the "Redeemer of sinners"? Even that was quite meaningless since the sermon was not Christ-centered but was in praise and recognition of the deceased. What instruction is there for those who leave a funeral confirmed in the lie that a good life will get one to heaven? What comfort is there for those who are troubled by their sin and who realize that one day they will die?

Then too, what does Christmas mean if sin is treated lightly and even ignored? A Christian pastor who does not preach God's law—sin and its consequences—and His gospel at a funeral is passing up a wonderful opportunity to inform those who are ignorant of the way of salvation; worse, such a pastor is "*deceiving the hearts of the simple*" (Romans 16:18). The prophet wrote to Israel, "*...Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear*" (Isaiah 59:2).

Separation from God as a consequence of sin was not unknown to Adam and Eve. God had told them that at the moment of their disobedience, "*you shall surely die*" (Genesis 2:17). In fear Adam and Eve hid in the bushes, but they could not escape the reality that death was now their lot. Today too those who refuse to acknowledge

See the Sandals

Pastor Michael Eichstadt • Hales Corners, Wisconsin

Drop by our house and you'll likely see at least a couple pairs of shoes beside the door. If they could talk, they would tell stories of miles run through the park, of walks in the neighborhood, and of a familiar path to work. But what if, right beside all the usual footwear, there were a well-worn pair of leather sandals by the back door? What if they were made in a style not seen for 2,000 years? What if the sandals were God's? That would be phenomenal to think of God Himself being so close to us and our ordinary lives!

And isn't that the news of Christmas?! John the Baptist announced: "*There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose*" (Mark 1:7). The almighty, eternal God became man, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14). God wore sandals and walked on earth with us, so that we could one day walk with Him on the streets of heaven.

We live in the cozy warmth of centrally heated homes; Jesus came into the dingy, dirty world of the stable and manger. Our shoes take us to parties, festive meals, and trees stashed with presents; Jesus' sandals took Him to the death of the cross so that we might live. God Himself wore sandals that we might wear a crown!

But Christmas is not just about the past and the future. It's about the gift of Immanuel ("God-with-us") even now, wherever we are and whatever our circumstances. We would like to believe that at Christmastime problems take a holiday and fears disappear in the glow of twinkling lights. But they don't. The contrast between expectations and reality can be painfully stark.

Perhaps you find it hard to get into the Christmas spirit because of serious health issues, financial burdens, or concerns for family members. Just watching the evening news can be depressing. Maybe it seems as though everyone else is too busy to notice or care about you.

sin or who speak of it lightly are "hiding in the bushes." Yet they cannot escape the reality of God's Word, "... as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin...thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..." (Romans 5:12).

Why do people die? Because they (we) are sinners. Hiding from that reality does not change reality!

God's compassion for a fallen sinner and His desire to redeem sinners flow freely from the gracious heart of God who does not desire the death of the sinner. It was only after the fall into sin and paradise was lost that the Lord God promised the Savior. Before sin there was no promise of a Savior because there was no need. After the fall into sin the Father promised to send the Seed of the woman who would destroy the devil (Genesis 3:15), overcoming sin and death for us.

Our Christmas celebration—if it means anything at all—is a celebration of the faithfulness of God to His promise. That promise was fleshed out in the birth of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. To deny, reject, or treat lightly the reality of sin in our lives makes mockery of the Savior's birth, for He came into the world to save not the righteous but sinners!

The Christ-child born in the poverty of the stable manger is God's gift to you. He is your substitute upon whom was laid your sin that you might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). True Christmas joy is found in the testimony of God's Word: "*God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son*" (1 John 5:11), the beloved Son of God born to be your Savior.

The expression "Jesus is the reason for the season" is rendered meaningless unless we are comfortable to confess, "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief*" (1 Timothy 1:15).

That is what Christmas means. If we face the reality of sin and its consequences, we can meaningfully sing the hymn (translated by Dean Norman A. Madson) *I Am So Glad when Christmas Comes*, including the words:

*The little Child of Bethlehem, • The King of heavenly grace,
Came down from His exalted throne • To save our fallen race.*

*I am so glad when Christmas comes; • Let anthems fill the air!
He opens wide for every child • His paradise so fair.*

(Ev. Luth. Hymnary, #127:2,6)

Then look beside your door. See the sandals? You're not alone. The Christ-child is Your Savior too. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He knows what life is like, how hard it can be. He was an infant, child, teenager, and adult. He knows what you are facing, and He knows what to do about it. What to us is an insurmountable obstacle is for the Lord an opportunity to put His grace into action.

Remember Mary's question after the angel announced that she would be Jesus' mother? "How can this be...?" she asked. Gabriel explained the miracle of the Incarnation, spoke of aged Elizabeth's miraculous conception of John, and then reminded Mary, "For with God nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

The God-Man who reconciled the world to the Father by His redeeming work is certainly able to work out the earthly problems in our lives in ways far better than we can even imagine. You're not alone. See the sandals! They have traveled from Bethlehem to the cross to you. See the sandals. Better yet, let's listen to the comforting voice of their Owner!



CHRISTMAS DEVOTION

*"...The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in [Bethlehem] tonight."
(Christmas Hymn, TLH #647:1)*

Hopes and Fears Meet Together in Christ

Pastor Paul Fleischer, Cheyenne, Wyoming

The Scripture's Christmas account reveals a tragic truth about mankind—that the hearts of "good" men and women are often distressed and filled with fear.

Checking the biblical record, we find four illustrations of those whose fears were removed during and by the Christmas miracle. Let's recount them.

When the fullness of the time had come, the angel Gabriel appeared to one of God's servants, Zacharias, who did not exactly welcome the angel, for we are told: "...When Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him..." (Luke 1:12).

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THE DISCOURSES OF CHRIST

MEDITATIONS ON JESUS' SERMON ON THE MOUNT: MATTHEW CHAPTERS FIVE THROUGH SEVEN

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them.

For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

(MATTHEW 5:6-8)

Where and How to Pray

Pastor Mark Gullerud, Bowdle, South Dakota

When you are with your family or by yourself in a restaurant, how do you handle the table prayer?

Do you say your meal prayer out loud? Do you bow your head and pray silently? Do you simply forego praying? Is there hesitancy to pray in public (either out loud or silently) because there are so many strangers around, and you wonder what they will think?

In this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the matter of both public and private praying. He gives helpful counsel to keep in mind for our prayer life.

Casual readers of Scripture might mistakenly conclude from Jesus' statements here that He discourages praying in public and directs us instead to pray in the privacy of our homes—for He says not to pray out in public as some do, but pray in the privacy of our room.

Our Lord certainly doesn't restrict us as to where and when to pray. This is obvious from other passages of Holy Scripture. The apostle Paul expresses the following desire that is well pleasing to God, "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere..." (1 Timothy 2:8). In his letter to the Thessalonians the same apostle exhorts us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:8). God wants us to be in communication

with Him wherever we may be and whatever the time.

When Jesus speaks of those who pray out in the open before others, why does He refer to them as hypocrites? Because they weren't as interested in being heard by God as they were about being seen and heard by others so that they would be acknowledged as being religious. While man judges by the outward appearance, God judges by what is found in the heart (see I Samuel 16:7).

So then, is it fitting to pray in public places, such as at a restaurant? Most certainly, provided it is a God-pleasing prayer. And if others observe it, our hope would be that it serves as a good example of the importance of acknowledging the Lord as the Giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17).

Since the Word of God encourages us to pray anywhere and at any time, why does Jesus say, "*When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place*"? With all the activity going on—including various electronic devices like TV, video games, music players, smart phones—there can be many distractions to our communing with the Lord in prayer. In order that we might give full attention in our prayers, go to a quiet spot away from the hustle and bustle.

When we pray, whether in public or in private, Jesus warns about using "*vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.*"

How often do we have to offer a certain prayer to God for it to be heard by Him? If it is a God-pleasing prayer, God hears it the first time. Think of those familiar memorized prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer, the meal prayers, or our evening prayers. How often haven't we been guilty of praying while thinking of something entirely different? Whenever prayer does not come from devout hearts, the words are only vain and empty. When we intend to speak to God, let us make sure our prayers and petitions are coming from our hearts and not just from our lips (Matthew 15:8).

What an amazing privilege we have as children of God in being able to speak to God about anything on our minds and hearts, and to do so at any time and anywhere!

May God help us to not abuse but rather to make good and faithful use of the privilege of prayer.



'End of the World' Scenarios

(Second Installment)

Pastor Andrew Schaller, Watertown, South Dakota

In the first of our two articles we examined what some 'scientists' and blockbuster Hollywood movies suggest regarding how this world will come to its end. In this article we move out of the fiction section to the absolute non-fiction that is God's Word.⁸

In Holy Scripture the Almighty God Himself speaks of the first truly cataclysmic event that really did change the face of the entire Earth. That event was not set in motion by an asteroid or by changes in the ozone layer due to liberal use of hair spray.

It was set in motion by the Creator Himself who chose to bring judgment on humankind because of sin (please refer to Genesis chapters 6:5-7; 7:10-11,17-24).

There we are told that God caused waters to burst from below and from above, covering the Earth. That was certainly a catastrophic event that changed the face of the Earth! All air-breathers that moved on the Earth died: birds, livestock, wild animals (including dinosaurs!) and insects.

In His mercy God chose to save Noah and his family and the animals which were brought to Noah.

However...sin wasn't wiped out! Noah and his family still had sinful natures and still committed sin in thoughts, words, and actions! When the floodwaters receded, and Noah again set foot on dry ground, he acted in faith, offering up the first animal sacrifices, as recorded at the close of Chapter 8 of Genesis.

But neither was faith wiped out! "*Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt*

offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done" (Genesis 8:20-21).

Noah took from among the clean animals⁹ and offered up¹⁰ the first recorded burnt offering to the LORD. The LORD was pleased and graciously accepted Noah's offering. Then it was that the LORD God made the promise that springs to mind whenever we see a rainbow in the sky.

The LORD also promised that He would never again strike down every living creature as He had done by means of the Flood. This fact alone ought to cause a collective sigh from the hearts and minds of human beings. But the LORD, ever gracious and merciful, appended yet another promise which has application to us today. He said: "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease." (Genesis 8:22)

There are those who claim that a Christian farmer is no different from a gambler who throws his money into a one-armed bandit. "Hogwash!" (As the farmer might say.)

The Christian farmer plants in hope and banks on the promise of God that while the Earth remains, there will still be times for planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night.

The Christian farmer also gives thanks to the LORD God as did the Israelites of old for the early and latter rains, the first fruits, and the final harvest. We can bank on this promise of the LORD that these things will not be interrupted by some accidental cosmic or earthbound event.

Granted, there will be times when the rain does not fall on our fields and lands.¹¹ There will be times when there is no bumper crop due to drought. Yet this will never be the case across the face of the Earth, for God has promised that these things will continue until He brings an end to all things on the great and awesome Day of the LORD.

Is there a shelf-life to this promise?
Is there any reason at all to believe it no longer stands? There is none!

Why be afraid of an asteroid striking the Earth and causing a dust cloud that suffocates all life, when God has promised that while the Earth remains, these regular blessings (seedtime and harvest, and so on) will continue, and our needs will be provided for by the hand of a gracious God?

While writing this paper, I had a discussion with our Christian Day School teacher, who said: "The end of the world will be the result of an act of God, not an act of nature." Now, that is worth remembering! This is not to say that an asteroid will never hit the Earth. This is not to say that a super volcano will never erupt, but we can be confident that such events will not result in the end of the world.

So...yes, the promise found in Genesis 8:22 serves well to relieve the anxiety and fear of Christians who are being bombarded with so-called 'scientific' end-time prophecies!

Why be afraid of an asteroid striking the Earth and causing a dust cloud that suffocates all life, when God has promised that while the Earth remains, these regular blessings (seedtime and harvest, and so on) will continue...?

8. John 17:17 (NKJV) – "Sanctify them by Your Truth. Your Word is Truth."

9. I assume this refers to the ceremonially clean animals and fowl (cf. Leviticus 11, 20:25) although exactly what was meant by 'clean' and 'unclean' wasn't recorded until later on.

10. "The Hebrew word is derived from a verb meaning 'to go up' and indicates that the entire animal went up in smoke and fire, leaving nothing for ceremonial feasting." Roehrs, W. H., & Franzmann, M. H., joint authors. (1998). *Concordia Self-study Commentary* (electronic ed.) (Genesis 8:20). St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

11. As was the case in the days of Joseph, cf. Genesis 43:1.



The Beauty and Joy of Christian Fellowship

Pastor Em. David Lau • Eau Claire, Wisconsin

(Third of eight)



Already now those who are believers in Jesus Christ are enabled to experience to some extent the beauty and joy of Christian fellowship.

We think of the fellowship enjoyed by the early Christians in Jerusalem after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The Holy Spirit through law and gospel proclaimed by the first believers added thousands to their number. *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers”* (Acts 2:42).

Christian fellowship is built on the doctrine or teaching of the

apostles. They had the apostles in person. We have the apostles teaching us in the Scriptures.

This is the way Jesus Himself pictured His family, His Church, when He looked out at the crowd of people listening to His teaching and said of them: *“Here are My mother, and My brothers!”* (Mark 3:34). Those who continue in the teaching of Jesus and His apostles and prophets are truly His disciples who have fellowship with Him, as He said in John 8:31-32.

It happened very naturally at first in the Jerusalem congregation that *“all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need”* (Acts

2:44-45). No apostle told them that this was the way they had to live. It was the way they desired to express their fellowship and their unity and their love for one another. It was as close to Paradise as they could be in this sinful world. The words of Psalm 133 come to mind: *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”*

“They ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46-47). But of course, it was not perfect, and there are two reasons for that.

One: Faith in Christ can be faked; Christian harmony can be imitated externally.

Two: True Christians retain their old Adam, and this old Adam constantly interferes with and hinders God’s working with the new man created in the image of God.

So we read in the book of Acts that very soon internal problems arose, not just the external problems caused by unbelievers. Ananias and Sapphira were exposed as hypocrites (Acts 5), and complaints were raised about the unfair treatment of

Greek-speaking widows (Acts 6). So we deduce that Paradise perfection was not possible in the congregation. But this does not mean that the beauty and joy of Christian fellowship were non-existent. They prayed together. They were not ashamed to be persecuted for their devotion to Christ. *“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul. ... And great grace was upon them all”* (Acts 4:31-33).

The early Christians were often admonished by the apostles and other spiritual leaders to put off the old man in them and let the new man arise and shine. They were encouraged to promote the one mind and one spirit that is the working of the Holy Spirit. To the Galatians Paul wrote: *“Through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (Galatians 5:13-23).

To the Corinthians Paul wrote: *“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the*

same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). Paul also made a big point of comparing the congregation of God’s people with the members of a human body, each member contributing its part to the working of the one body (1 Corinthians 12). At the end of his second letter he was still reminding them: “Be of one mind, live in peace” (2 Corinthians 13:11).

In his letter to the Christians in Rome Paul dealt with the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, and the relationship between weak Christians and strong Christians. Always he encouraged unity and harmony and love. “Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Romans 14:19). “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:5-6).

Later, when Paul was a prisoner in chains in Rome, the fellowship he enjoyed with his fellow-Christians was continually on his mind. To the Christians in Philippi he wrote: “I thank my God... for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now... I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the

gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace” (Philippians 1:3-7). Paul was hopeful that when he heard from them again, he would be given good news, “so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).

Paul had already experienced the beauty and joy of Christian fellowship with his believing friends and associates in Philippi, and he did all he could in his letter to promote a spirit of harmonious working together in the cause of the gospel. “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:2-4).

What a difference there is between such Christian fellowship and the spirit of pride and selfishness that prevails in the world! What a beautiful picture Paul paints of this Christian fellowship when he describes Christians as “children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life” (Philippians 2:15-16).

(to be continued)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

“As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to those of his household.”
(Martin Luther)

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Prof. Joseph Lau, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Green, blue, light blue, tan, and red.

Mine’s tan. That is the color of Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism* I used when growing up—the 1956 edition, originally edited by C. Gausewitz. It’s funny how we grow attached to a particular translation.

My wife’s is also tan, but our four children learned from the red Sydow catechism (1988 edition).

Recently I compared the two and noticed that Luther’s explanation to the First Commandment is exactly the same in both—the only commandment where this is so! “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” No doubt the various translators found it difficult to improve on such clear, simple, and straightforward language.

Since Luther saw a great need for a handy booklet which summarized the chief teachings of the Bible for children, the Reformer wrote his *Small Catechism* in the year 1529.

As helpful as Luther’s *Small Catechism* explanations (for all six chief parts) often are, it is wise to

The First Commandment

You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean?

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

remember that only Holy Scripture is God’s Word, breathed into human writers by the Holy Spirit Himself. “...*Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*” (2 Peter 1:21).

We treasure Luther’s two Catechisms (in the same year he also wrote a *Large Catechism* intended for pastors and teachers) for the sole reason that his explanations reflect the truths found in Holy Scripture.

The First Commandment, recorded in both Exodus 20:3 and Deuteronomy 5:7, states: “*You shall have no other gods before Me.*” God should come first in our lives. Jesus, when confronted by the Pharisees, put it this way: “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment*” (Matthew 22:37-38).

The first three commandments

establish our duty toward God. They are often referred to as the First Table of the Law. The other seven commandments speak of our duty toward our fellowmen and are considered the Second Table of the Law.

As we begin this series on the ten commandments, it can be said that if humans were capable of obeying this first commandment, they would be capable of obeying all of them.

Our Disobedience

Adam and Eve disobeyed this commandment when they failed to trust in God, putting their desires above His (See Genesis 2).

In Biblical times it was common to express disobedience through the worship of man-made images often adopted from those of heathen nations surrounding Israel. In the medieval church the use of icons in worship was considered idolatry by some. Today, in the non-Christian world, idols are still the focus of false worship.

Lest we imagine we can gain some self-righteousness for our never having bowed before an idol, let us carefully examine our own disobedience to this commandment. For us also any thought, word, or deed which places something else above God in our lives is a sin against God's person protected by the prime commandment.

What are some idols today? This writer would suggest such things as "science," materialism, secular humanism, leisure time, and egocentrism ("me first" in all things). Though perhaps more subtle or less obvious, such "gods" are just as deadly as putting other unmasked "gods" first in one's life.

Let's ask ourselves—rather than trusting alone in our Savior-God, the one true God—have we ever placed our trust in a job, an insurance policy, a doctor's check-up, a full pantry, our intellect, our muscles, our spouse or family?

In connection with this commandment in his *Large Catechism*, Luther writes of another kind of false worship: *"All churchly orders are founded on it. It concerns the conscience alone, which seeks help, consolation, and salvation in its own works. This conscience imagines that it can wrestle heaven away from God and thinks about how many requests it has made, how often it has fasted, celebrated Mass, and so on. Upon such things it depends and boasts, as though unwilling to receive anything from God as a gift. For it wants to earn or merit heaven with abundant works."*

A few warnings from Scripture which touch on this first commandment would be appropriate.

"You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of

the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

"Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD" (Jeremiah 17:5).

Each of us will surely confess that we daily disobey the first commandment and daily need forgiveness.

Jesus' Obedience

Scripture teaches that *"God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law..."* (Galatians 4:5). Without Jesus' active obedience—that is, His own perfect keeping of the whole Law—His innocent death on the cross and subsequent resurrection would not have accomplished our salvation. A spotless lamb was required to be sacrificed as atonement for sin!

Thanks be to God, although Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, He perfectly obeyed the first commandment all His life. When, for example, He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, Jesus used God's Word to ward off the evil one (see Matthew chapter 4). That was Jesus' "active obedience" for us.

And in the Garden of Gethsemane during His passion, Jesus fulfilled His Father's will in taking the cup of suffering. That is called His "passive obedience" for us.

Putting this briefly, Jesus—both actively and passively—daily and in all circumstances revered, honored, loved, and trusted His Father above all things! Thus He, the sinless One, could be the Savior. *"For [God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Our Obedience

When God introduced the Ten Commandments, He said to His people, *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt"* (Exodus 20:2). This is our Savior-God talking to us.

It is only the gospel message of sinners saved through Christ's redeeming work that can empower us to live in accord with His will. As those born anew by the Spirit working through the sacrament of Holy Baptism, the new man in us desires to place God first in our lives at all times. *"We love Him because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19).

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we have sinned by not always putting You first in our lives. Send us Your Spirit to strengthen our faith in You so that we fear, love, and trust in You above all things as did Jesus. In His holy and saving name we pray. Amen.



Hopes and Fears Meet Together in Christ

Six months later, when Gabriel went to Nazareth and entered the house of the virgin, Mary, we are told: "...[Mary] was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was" (Luke 1:29). Imagining the scene, it's not difficult to understand why Mary was troubled.

The angel also appeared in a dream to Joseph and said: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20). Joseph's heart was fearful and troubled.

Finally, Luke writes of the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem: "And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid..." (Luke 2:9).

What was the basic reason behind such fears? Think of how the angel introduced himself to Zacharias: "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God..." (Luke 1:19). When sinners know they are "in the presence of God," they will be conscious of their sin and sinfulness. The Bible shows plainly that sin and damnation go together. The verdict is: "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4); and again: "There is none who does good, no, not one" (Romans 3:12). All people, sinners that they are, have reason to fear before the holy and

righteous God.

But we can also see how God removes such fears.

The angel, God's messenger, said to the priest: "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard..." (Luke 1:13). To the virgin mother he said: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God..." (Luke 1:30). To Joseph in his dream, the angel said, "Do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife" (Matthew 1:20). To the Bethlehem shepherds, terrified by the glory of God, the very first words of the angel were: "Do not be afraid..." (Luke 2:10).

Four times within the Christmas account we hear, "Do not be afraid!" Why? Had the holy God's righteous anger over sin changed? Yes and no. In each case God was announcing that, in the fulfillment of prophecy, He was in the process of providing the very antidote they needed for their sin and its wretchedness—His own Son, the long-awaited Savior!

To Zacharias the angel announced, "Do not be afraid...for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John" (Luke 1:13). How would Zacharias' fear be removed? "...He [John] will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah...to make ready a people prepared

for the Lord..." (Luke 1:16f). It is clear that the hopes and fears of all the years would meet together not in John but in Mary's Son and God's, whose way the forerunner would prepare. In his *BENEDICTUS* prayer (Luke 1:68ff) Zacharias rejoiced "that we...might serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life."

On her part, Mary's perplexity also found its answer in the Lord's promise through the angel: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest..." (Luke 1:31f). The hopes and fears of the virgin met together in Him who would be miraculously born of her, as Mary had sung in her *MAGNIFICAT* (Luke 1:46ff): "His mercy is on those who fear [honor] Him from generation to generation..."

Joseph's fear was a bit different. The announcement that his wife was pregnant, though not by him, led him to draw some wrong conclusions. But the angel told him: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, 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 1:20f). Joseph's heart found peace and joy as he became the human guardian of the eternal Son of God.

Our believing hearts overflow

with joy as we hear: "So it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger..." (Luke 2:6ff). With the shepherds we cherish the angel's words: "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 2:10f).

Yes, the hopes and fears of all our years meet together in the person of the Bethlehem Christ-child. To Nicodemus Jesus said: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Note the words "the world" and "whoever." Then write your own name in their place, for God Himself writes your name there!

Jesus is the Answer—the only Answer—to our fondest hopes and our worst fears. Enfolding the Christ-child Savior in our hearts by faith, we hear the soothing words of the Christmas angel: "Fear not!" And with nothing left to fear, we look confidently to the glorious Day when we stand before the judgment seat of holy God, redeemed forever from sin, death, Satan, and hell.

Hallelujah and Amen!



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Installations

According to our usage and order, David Rodebaugh, who was called as Professor at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, was installed on August 20, 2012.

According to our usage and order, Professor Steven Sippert, who was called as President of Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, was installed on August 20, 2012.

— *Pastor Theodore Barthels*
ILC Board of Regents

The Bread of Life 2013

Day-by-day readings

This booklet of daily Bible readings is once again available on the website of the *Lutheran Spokesman* (www.lutheranspokesman.org).

We heartily thank retired Prof. Paul R. Koch, Eau Claire, Wis., who has again prepared these readings for us.

— Editor

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“...THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN.” — JOHN 10:35

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