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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken." (John 10:35)



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“Behold, I Am Coming Quickly!”

“He’s coming! I’m so excited! It was three years ago that we were engaged, then he was sent overseas. I think about him every day. We text and e-mail, but I long to see him face to face and hold him in my arms. Now he’s coming home. We will be married and live happily ever after! I just can’t wait!”

If you can imagine the excited anticipation of that fiancée, then you can understand the joy, excitement, and preparation of Advent. Your Bridegroom is coming! You were betrothed to Jesus Christ when you were baptized and brought to faith in Him alone for your forgiveness and salvation. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *“I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Ever since your engagement, you have been physically separated from your Bridegroom. You think about Him daily and communicate with Him by reading His letters and talking to Him in prayer. In the approaching Christmas season you fondly remember how He came to this world to rescue you from the misery of sin and the bondage to Satan, and to unite you with God forever. During Lent you remember with great pride how He heroically went to battle for you and came out victorious on Easter morning. Then you think about how He ascended to take up His throne in heaven to rule everything in the world for your benefit. Doesn’t it give you a thrill to hear Him say that He went to prepare a place for you in the mansions of heaven, so you can live with Him there forever?

Now we hear, *“Behold, the Bridegroom is coming!”* (Matthew 25:6). Do you feel the excitement in those words? Your long awaited bridegroom is coming! And He promises, *“Behold, I am coming quickly!”* We don’t know what day He will come,

but it will be soon. When He comes, we will be part of the greatest marriage celebration ever, and truly live happily ever after with Him in Paradise. John sees ahead to that day and says, *“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints”* (Revelation 19:7-8).

When He comes, we will be part of the greatest marriage celebration ever, and truly live happily ever after.

Much of preparation goes into a wedding. Jesus has taken care of the most important arrangements. Paul says in Ephesians 5:25-27, *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”* Christ has cleansed us so that we can be His bride; now let us eagerly prepare for His coming.

Keep a good supply of the oil of the Spirit by continuing in His Word and Sacraments, to keep your faith burning bright (Matthew 25:1-13). Put on the wedding garment of Christ’s righteousness with repentant faith (Matthew 22:11-13). And prepare your wedding dress. Did you notice what your wedding dress is made of, according to Revelation 19:8? It is the *“righteous acts of the saints.”* Note that *“it was granted”* you to wear them *“for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”* (Philippians 2:13).

Advent reminds us of the excitement to which we look forward. Our Bridegroom is coming! May we put as much energy and excitement into preparing for *our* wedding day as a bride does for hers.



David Reim is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Vernon, British Columbia.

“He is Elijah, Who is to Come”

There are few Old Testament Bible accounts that captivate one’s imagination more than the story of the prophet Elijah.

Elijah served as the Lord’s mouthpiece in the northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. The nation was rife with idolatry. The Lord used Elijah to show the folly of worshiping Baal (the rain-god) and Asherah (the moon-goddess and consort of Baal), and hoped thereby to call the people to repentance. At Elijah’s word, there was no rain in Israel for three and a half years, and at his word, rain returned to the land. At Elijah’s word, the Lord sent fire from heaven to consume the waterlogged sacrifice and stones on Mount Carmel. When the Lord’s work for Elijah was complete, the Lord took His faithful servant, body and soul, to heaven.

Elijah is spoken of again, about 500 years before the birth of Jesus, in the closing verses of the Old Testament: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (Malachi 4:5). The people were watching for the great prophet Elijah to come again before the arrival of the Promised Messiah.

When John the Baptist began baptizing in the Jordan River, the people began to ask, “Are you Elijah?” To which John replied, “I am not” (John 1:21).

Yet, when Jesus speaks about John the Baptist, He says, “And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come” (Matthew 11:14). This seems like a contradiction! How can this be?

The Angel Gabriel helps us as he announces to Zechariah about the baby he and Elizabeth were going to have, “He will

also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).

John the Baptist wasn’t the physical return of the great Prophet Elijah, as the people expected. John the Baptist came

in the “spirit and power of Elijah.” The spirit and power of Elijah is found in the message that John the Baptist preached. He didn’t call fire from heaven, but came with the fiery message of God’s Law condemning sin and calling sinners to repentance.

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2). Now was the time for the people to repent of their sinful ways and bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And to the repentant sinner, John the Baptist pointed the way to the

kingdom of heaven. “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). By the blood of God’s Lamb, the sinner would find full and free cleansing from all sin. The kingdom of heaven had arrived and salvation was to be found in Jesus! This was the spirit and power of Elijah at work, calling sinners to repentance and pointing them to Jesus.

Maybe the ministry of John the Baptist isn’t as captivating as that of the prophet Elijah, but it continues to be just as important for us today. The voice of John the Baptist continues to cry out with the same spirit and power as Elijah’s. By the power of the Word, sinners are called to turn away from their sin and are pointed to Jesus, God’s Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world.



Pieter de Grebber (circa 1600–1652/1653) Title : Saint Jean Baptiste prêchant devant Hérode Antipas Date: 17th century Medium: painting Current location: Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille



Nathan Pfeiffer is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Spokane, Washington.

HYMN 58

“O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee”

Imagine yourself as a Jew living in Jerusalem in the year we now call A.D. 30¹. Roman rule over Judea embitters your life. Your religious leaders — the Pharisees — have burdened you with numerous invented religious “laws” which they say you must follow in order to be righteous in God’s eyes. Sadducees, the other prominent Jewish social/religious/political element, control the high priest’s office and hold a majority in the Sanhedrin (the Jewish high court); but they are wealthy aristocratic appeasers of Rome who are entirely out of touch with, and much despised by, the common Jewish residents of Judea.

Then one day you hear exciting news—news that promises to change all that. You’ve already heard rumors: In the synagogue in Nazareth, a man called Jesus proclaimed Himself the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah (Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke 4:18-20). Unlike others who made that claim, however, this Jesus healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and caused the lame to walk. He declared that the Kingdom of God is at hand, and confirmed His divine authority and message by performing miracles. He confronted the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and they could not confute what He said. Surely, this must be the long-promised Messiah, and He’s coming here to Jerusalem for the Passover! Jesus is coming! How will you greet Him when He arrives?

This month’s hymn poses that question for us also today. **“O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee/ How welcome Thee aright?”** (v. 1) It answers **“I, too, will adore Thee/ With joyous songs and psalms”** (v. 2) and **“Rejoice, then, ye sad-hearted”** (v. 5).

Hymn 58 is an Advent hymn. Advent is the season when we celebrate the coming of God as man, in order to save mankind. The word *advent* literally means “coming” or “arrival.” During the Advent season, we celebrate the coming of the Savior



Paul Gerhardt

into the world to carry out His ministry of salvation, and we also look for His second advent at the end of the world, on Judgment Day. But there’s much more to Advent than those two singular events—one past and one future. We celebrate also the advent of the Savior *to each of us personally*. So this hymn says, **“I lay in fetters, groaning,/ Thou com’st to set me free;/ I stood, my shame bemoaning, Thou com’st to honor me.”**

Did you notice the stark contrast? We are bound; He sets us free. We have shame; He gives us honor. This dichotomy between our total unworthiness and God’s astounding grace in saving us is the difference between Christianity and all other religions, and Paul Gerhardt—theologically sound Lutheran that he was²—emphasizes it in this hymn.

So Gerhardt sings **“Love caused Thy incarnation,/ Love brought Thee down to me;/ Thy thirst for my salvation/ Procured my liberty”** (v. 4). Where is man’s participation in his own salvation? It is entirely absent. Again, Gerhardt tells us, **“He comes, He comes all willing,/ Moved by His love alone,/ Your woes and troubles stilling;/ For all to Him are known”** (v. 6).

There will be one more advent of Jesus. It will be His coming in Judgment at the last day. That advent will be **“a terror to His foes,”** but **“A light of consolations/ And blessed Hope to those/ Who love the Lord’s appearing”** (v. 9). Note also in this last verse the play on the word *Sun*: **“O glorious Sun, now come,/ Send forth Thy beams most cheering,/ and guide us safely home.”** The word *Sun* is capitalized to designate the Son of God, but it is spelled with a *u* to fit the image of glorious beams showing us the way home.

It is now Advent season. O Lord, how shall I meet Thee?



Craig Owings is a retired teacher and serves as assistant editor of the Lutheran Spokesman. He lives in Cape Coral, Florida.

¹ According to the chronology compiled by Philip Mauro, *The Wonders of Bible Chronology*, (Berryville, VA, Hess Publications, 1983) p. 101

² If you have access to archived copies of The Lutheran Spokesman, see the September 2007 issue for a profile on Paul Gerhardt. Available also at <http://lutheranspokesman.org/pdf-archives/>

How Far Is It to Bethlehem?

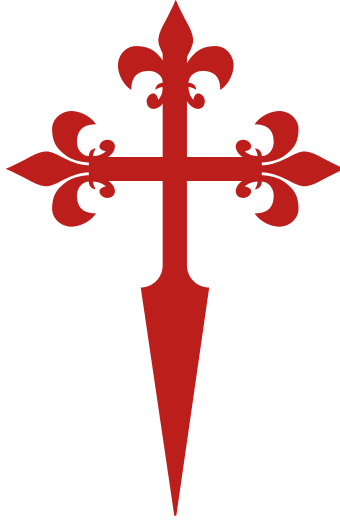
“Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, “Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—To do Your will, O God.” Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the law), then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”

(Hebrews 10:5-10).

The Way of St. James is a pilgrimage undertaken by many thousands each year. The main route across northern Spain is a journey of nearly five hundred miles that many travel on foot. I once met a man who told me that he had walked it twice. He said that if you make this difficult pilgrimage, at some point along the way you will find God.

It’s an old and enduring idea that you can draw closer to God by walking a long road or by struggling up a rocky slope on your knees. And this is only one variation on the common theme that we can and must lift ourselves up to God by our own efforts.

These verses in Hebrews teach that this task is an impossible one for us sinners. God’s Old Testament people couldn’t lift themselves up to God, not even by means of the sacrifices and offerings that God Himself had instituted for them. The writer quotes a portion of Psalm 40 to show that God had no pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices.



In the body
prepared for Him
He would live
a perfect life
and then give
that perfect life
and sinless body
as an offering
for sin.

He had not given them as a means to do away with human sin and guilt, a feat that no work of human hands could accomplish.

How then could our sin be removed, if not by our efforts and strivings, our sacrifices and offerings? The answer is in the Psalm quotation here, where we hear the voice of Christ speaking in prophecy. A body had been prepared for Him, He says. He, the eternal Son of God, was to become incarnate in human flesh. With His sinless human nature He, the Christ, would do the will of God. In the body prepared for Him He would live a perfect life and then give that perfect life and sinless body as an offering for sin.

Christ came in the flesh as the prophecy promised. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a perfect life, and then in obedience to the saving will of the Father He offered up His life on the cross. His sacrifice for our sins was acceptable to God. By it we have been sanctified, set apart for God. We have been reconciled to Him and have become His own dear children.

Soon we will again celebrate the incarnation of Christ, His coming into this world in the flesh as a little child. This celebration is a pilgrimage of sorts, a journey to Bethlehem to see *“this thing that has come to pass”* (Luke 2:15), the Babe lying in a manger. It’s not a long journey, nor is it a hard one, but one made in heart and mind. It isn’t a struggle to “find God,” for in Christ God has come to us to bless us and save us.

John Klatt is pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Loveland, Colorado.



Your Enemy May Be Closer than You Think

(PLEASE READ JUDGES 9 FOR THE SETTING, PEOPLE, AND EVENTS TO WHICH THIS DEVOTION REFERS.)

Sunday school students are fascinated by the characters in the book of Judges — Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Samson. . . . You don't remember a Sunday school lesson about Abimelech? That's because Abimelech was not chosen by God to be the leader. Abimelech chose himself.

Using funds from the temple of Baal, Abimelech hired "worthless and reckless men" and murdered seventy of his brothers. That was how he established himself as ruler. Although his father was Gideon, a man truly called by God, Abimelech cared nothing about following the Lord; that was evident in his ruthless, bloody reign that lasted more than three years.

During that kind of an era, people often wonder, "Where is God?" It is worth noting that the name LORD (Jehovah) is found nowhere in this chapter. Neither the leader nor the people had any use for the LORD and His Covenant of Promise. God, however, remained very much present. "God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem . . . that the crime done to the seventy sons . . . might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech . . . and on the men of Shechem who aided him in the killing of his brothers" (Judges 9:23-24). No matter how vigorously the wicked work to assure themselves that God's opinion doesn't matter, His wrath is "revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18). The wicked may suppose they have gotten away with their sin, when in fact their judgment has already begun.

"Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech . . . And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads" (Judges 9:56-57).

We also note that the apostasy of the people in this chapter, along with the mayhem and murder that followed, took place in Shechem. This is significant because Shechem was the place where God appeared to Abram and



One generation will despise God-given truths that a previous generation embraced as precious.

said, "To your descendants I will give this land" (Genesis 12:7). Then Abram built an altar and worshiped the Lord there. Time and time again we observe in history how one generation will despise God-given truths that a previous generation embraced as precious. Abundant examples from history remind us not to take it for granted that the next generation will learn from the past or recognize transcendent treasure when passed along to them.

God sent Othniel to deliver Israel from the brutality of Cushan-Rishathaim, Ehud to save them from Eglon, Shamgar to rescue them from the Philistines, and so on. "After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola son of Pulah" (10:1). Tola was sent to deliver Israel from whom? No enemy or hostile nation is named. Could it be that he was sent to save Israel from Israel? They had abandoned God and followed a man who lifted up himself and

promoted his own agenda.

That sounds like us, right? Don't we all have the tendency to promote our own agendas? We are inclined to pursue what we want without stopping to ask what God wants; and that will always get us into someplace we don't want to be.

Aren't you glad you have a God Who doesn't decide how good He is going to be to you on the basis of how well you listen to Him? "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The Lord never grows weary of rescuing us—even when the enemy is us.



Delwyn Maas is pastor of Gift of God Lutheran Church in Mapleton, North Dakota.

What's Wrong with Fraternal Insurance?

Fraternal insurance is not provided by an insurance company, but rather by a fraternal benefit society.

Fraternals were developed in the 1800's as a way for people to join with others who shared a common bond and purpose.

Individuals who are insured through fraternal benefit societies are members of a fraternity bonded together by what they have in common. Profits are returned to the fraternity's members and to various causes which that membership supports.

The most familiar fraternal benefit societies in our circles are Thrivent Financial for Lutherans and its predecessors, Aid Association for Lutherans (Wisconsin) and Lutheran Brotherhood (Minnesota). When these Thrivent predecessors were formed, the fraternity was limited to confessional Lutherans who were members of the church bodies that made up the Lutheran Synodical Conference. The foreseen benefit was that like-minded confessional Lutherans could bond together in this fraternity, pay their dues, receive insurance coverage, and share funds that would be distributed to sister congregations for their ministries.

When the synods of the Lutheran Synodical Conference no longer universally followed the truth of Scripture, the fraternity of the benefit society continued even though the common ground of fellowship and unity in the confession and proclamation of Scripture were no longer present. As a result, members of the fraternal benefit society were supporting the work and ministry of churches and organizations which no longer taught or upheld God's true Word.

Today, Thrivent has expanded the fraternity to include anyone who is a nominal Christian or associated with someone who is. This means that the fraternity now includes a vast array of confessions and varying degrees of faithfulness and unfaithfulness to Scripture. Given the nature of a fraternal benefit society, this means that the proclamation of all kinds of messages—some close to God's Word, others

far from it—is being mutually supported by the members of the fraternity. In addition, charitable donations are made to groups and programs that are distinctly not Christian and which pursue activities that are in conflict with God's Word.

Whenever we as conscientious Christians consider becoming involved with organizations and groups in the world, we seek to follow the light of God's Word and ask ourselves, "Would my membership in this organization hinder my proclamation of the Gospel? Would it glorify God? Would it obscure my Christian witness? Would it put me in the position of supporting and promoting false teaching?"

Jesus, our Savior, calls upon us to avoid any organization which unites us with or involves us with supporting the worship of a false god, a system of false spiritual beliefs, or anything else that is offensive to God. *"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. . . . Walk as children of light . . . finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them"* (Ephesians 5:6-11).

The only way a fraternal benefit society can be God-pleasing is if the mutual benefits which its members produce do not support teachings or programs that are contrary to Scripture. A fraternity that is intended to support biblical ministries but is filled with differing beliefs concerning Scripture, or one that supports activities fitting the cultural norm instead of the clear Word of God—such fraternities cannot be pleasing to God.

Your pastor will be happy to discuss these matters further as we seek to mutually encourage one another in letting our light shine before men (Matthew 5:16) in these matters of earthly associations.



Wayne Eichstadt is pastor of Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Spokane Valley, Washington.

In preparation for the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, we are presenting a brief survey of the life of Martin Luther. The series will culminate in the October 2017 issue with an account of his posting of the Ninety-Five Theses.

Life of Luther (1483)

The World into which Luther was Born

Martin Luther has been said to have been the last to be born in the Middle Ages and the first to be born in the Modern Era. What do we know about his birth and the world into which he was born?

Political World

Although we say Martin Luther was born in Germany, the Germany we know today did not exist at that time. Germany was the largest territory within the Holy Roman Empire, a huge conglomerate of kingdoms in central Europe, founded in A.D. 962. Later in Luther's life, it was the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V who confronted Luther at the Diet of Worms.

Within Germany was the smaller district of Saxony (similar to a state within the United States), where Luther was born and would spend the majority of his life. The Elector of Saxony would one day protect Luther from his enemies.

Religious World

The Pope of the Roman Catholic Church was the head of the church in Germany at the time Luther was born. For centuries the Catholic Church had been straying from the truth of God's Word. In addition to the false teachings of the supremacy of the Pope, purgatory (A.D. 593), the sale of indulgences (A.D. 1190), and transubstantiation in connection with the Lord's Supper (A.D. 1215), the Catholic Church had been intent on obtaining secular power and wealth, often surpassing that of the earthly kings of the day. They had also compromised the Gospel message with the veneration of saints and penance requirements to atone for sins committed. To silence opposition they resorted to the Inquisition, which used torture and death against "heretics."

Cultural World

Many exciting things were taking place in the world into which Luther was born. Born in 1451 in Genoa, Italy, Christopher Columbus was in his thirties when Luther was born, and already pestering European leaders for an opportunity to explore the world. In 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain gave him the financial backing he sought



to make that now-famous voyage across the Atlantic. In a large part because of Luther, those who would seek refuge in the New World in the future would be Protestants, many of whom would be among the founders of the United States.

Around 1440 the moveable type printing press was invented by Johannes Gutenberg, a goldsmith. It would be this invention that would spread the ideas of the Lutheran Reformation throughout the known world. By A.D. 1500, printing presses in western Europe had already produced more than twenty million books. Among those writings that would soon be mass produced were translations of the Bible and Luther's Catechism.

Family

Not much detail is known about Luther's early life. We do know that he was the oldest of eight children born to Hans and Margarete Luther (originally "Luder"). He was born in Eisleben, Saxony, on November 10, 1483. The following day, Luther was baptized and named Martin, after St. Martin of Tours, whose celebration day it was. Eisleben (population four thousand) has the distinction of being both the birthplace of Luther and the place he died, but he actually spent very little of his life there.

Luther's father, Hans, although a descendant of farmers in the region, did not inherit farmland. He turned to copper mining to make a living. To advance his career, Hans moved the family to Mansfeld soon after Martin was born. In Mansfeld he seemed to have enjoyed modest success as a smelting master, and even became a city councilman. Frugality, however, was a way of life for the Luthers. Martin felt loved by his parents, but they were strict and used physical discipline when necessary.



There was nothing exceptional about Martin Luther when he entered this world, but God had great plans for him in proclaiming His Gospel message.

Joe Lau is a professor at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Count It All Joy

What a joy it is to be able to again celebrate the birth of our Redeemer this December! We look around at a world gone haywire and then we look at the infant King and know why we celebrate His coming. Can there be any better answer to this world's fears and worries than the Lord who calms our worries and casts out our fears? Can there be any better alternative to this world's ingrained hate than the One who laid down His life in love to atone for all the world's sin? Can we do more to bring this message to our neighbors, friends and strangers, those near and those far?

What a joy it is to see the Word go forth with our little Gideon's band to far-flung places! In the areas where I have served and am serving overseas it is a great joy to me personally to find those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and to see the perfect satisfaction of that in Jesus.

Poverty and want are no limitation to the Gospel's course and victory. Wealth and self-satisfaction are hindrances to seeing the answer to life's troubles. There are certainly those who, upon entering the house where Mary, Joseph, and the infant King were after the wise men left, would focus on the treasures at His feet instead of on Him. This natural tendency of man to hanker after mammon and all that it seems to offer is rampant in our world. So when we heard a man at a hillside meeting in Etago, Kenya, say that what they needed was the pure Word, it was a joy. He said this after others had asked us to bring them many things, including schools and hospitals. When we see men enter the training programs in our sister churches in India in order to be pastors, it is a joy. They are not asking for salaries, nor would they get them. They are appreciative of the breadth and depth of training in the Word that they receive. They are appreciative of seeing Christ, just as were the shepherds who glorified and praised God for all they had heard and seen.



Bible study at the Alexander Pack-Blumenau house

What a joy it will be to turn the year into 2017 and celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation! God gave back what had been taken, hidden, diminished. The papacy claimed that it had authority over the church and the government. Again it was taught that only Christ has control of the two swords: the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God that is for the church, and the sword of punishment and reward that is the government's under

God's rule. The Word of God burst forth with Hebrew and Greek language study which again had been undertaken. The Word was given to the people in their own language, which had been forbidden. That which was hidden was revealed. And with that came the understanding that there can be no diminishing of grace by works, no diminishing of simple faith by man's efforts. It was a joy for the people to know that they are saved by grace, not by works even a little. The saving faith that is in Christ alone, as revealed in the Word, causes the rafters to ring with joyful *alleluias* to Him who was and is and is to be.

Yet our Reformation celebration is tinged with some sadness. In the land of Luther in Germany, the supposed Lutheran churches do not teach and preach from the Word purely and simply. There is the form of religion but not the substance. As we traveled in Germany recently to visit contacts in a dozen cities, we heard all that was false that caused individuals and groups to separate from the state church. This causes us joy to see a remnant seeking to return to the sure way. It was also a joy to visit over two days with Iranian Christian refugees who know the joy of having Christ as their Lord and Savior. May they and we follow the joyful path that leads to life!



David Koenig has served as a foreign missionary in Africa, India, and elsewhere. Though officially retired, he continues to be active in the synod's mission endeavors.

“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS DECEMBER 2016

TLH = The Lutheran Hymnal, 1941; WS = Worship Supplement 2000; [] = Biblical Events Noted

Date	Verse	Reading	Comments [Festivals of the Church Year]
Dec 1	WS 796	Jeremiah 31:3-9	God never forsakes His believing children, but nourishes and cherishes His remnant.
Dec 2	TLH 493	Ezekiel 2:1-3:4	Although Ezekiel was being sent to a rebellious people, the power of God's Word would be working through Him.
Dec 3	TLH 424	Jeremiah 32:1-25	Jeremiah wasn't buying a field to farm it. The acreage was a reminder of God's promise to restore His people.
Dec 5	TLH 207	John 20:1-18	"I have seen the Lord!" – Mary Magdalene could say it, and you and I will say it.
Dec 6	TLH 515	Jeremiah 33:1-9	Yet again God's judgment is accompanied by a revelation of His mercy. The people are never left without hope in Him.
Dec 7	TLH 63	Jeremiah 33:10-18	Behold, a Branch is growing! Jesus Christ, our eternal King and Priest fulfills the gracious promises made here.
Dec 8	TLH 436	Ezekiel 34:1-16, 31	Those who were supposed to shepherd Israel had not, so God would step in and be the Good Shepherd.
Dec 9	WS 711	1 John 3:7-8	This is why Christmas happened.
Dec 10	TLH 75	Ezekiel 36:16-38	The Lord would cleanse the people of Israel from their sins and give them new hearts of faith—as He has done with each of us.
Dec 12	TLH 60	Ezekiel 37:1-14	The Lord's "restoration project" was about more than land. It was about souls, too.
Dec 13	TLH 372	Jeremiah 39:11-18	When Jerusalem fell, Jeremiah the prophet was saved by faith.
Dec 14	WS 709	1 John 4:7-12	The birth of Jesus shows us God's great love.
Dec 15	TLH 95	1 John 4:14	Savior of the nations, come!
Dec 16	WS 704	Revelation 1:4-8	The angels brightened the sky at Jesus' birth, but at last He who loves us and has freed us with His blood will appear in the clouds.
Dec 17	TLH 73	Daniel 3:1-29	The king was absolutely right when he said, "No other god can save in this way." Salvation belongs to the Lord! [The Men in the Fiery Furnace]
Dec 19	TLH 65	Psalms 147	Praise be to God Who created, sustains, and blesses us. [Creation of Adam and Eve]
Dec 20	WS 703	Zephaniah 3:14-17	Rejoice in the Lord's deliverance!
Dec 21	WS 702	Haggai 2:6-9	Come, Desire of nations, come, fix in us Thy humble home.
Dec 22	TLH 87	Zechariah 9:9-10	Jesus' peace is greater than "world peace," and His rule is gracious and loving.
Dec 23	TLH 85	Malachi 3:1-4	Who can stand when He appears? You can, for He purges away your sin like a refiner's fire.
Dec 24	TLH 94	Revelation 5:6-14	Gloria in excelsis Deo! [Birth of Christ, Dec 25]
Dec 26	WS 710	Revelation 7:9-17	With St. Stephen (Acts 7) and all believers, we shall join that host arrayed in white. [Martyrdom of Stephen]
Dec 27	WS 714	Revelation 12:7-12	Satan has been thrown down, and by the blood of the Lamb we are victorious over him.
Dec 28	TLH 81	Revelation 14:6	The Gospel is indeed eternal—good news that never fades away, spoils, or perishes.
Dec 29	WS 799	Revelation 19:6-16	"Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" [Birth and Death of King David]
Dec 30	TLH 80	Revelation 22:1-11	Eternal life flows from the Lamb of God. Remember how Jesus once said, "I am the resurrection and the life"?
Dec 31	TLH 343	Revelation 22:12-21	Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end of every year, the everlasting God.

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church

Lemmon, South Dakota

Started as a mission in the early days of the Synodical Conference, St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church was founded in 1909. In March of 1908, the Herman Ferking family was making its way from Greenway, South Dakota, to Lemmon. At Roscoe, South Dakota, there was a layover of several hours between train connections, and Pastor Scherf of the Minnesota Synod in Roscoe was sent for to perform a baptism. Roy Ferking was the child to be baptized. Pastor Scherf, however, was not in town at the time, so the Ferking's boarded the train for Lemmon.

The child, however, was not forgotten. Soon Pastor Scherf, together with Pastor Keller of Bowdle, South Dakota, came to Lemmon for services. Pastors Scherf and Keller ministered to a fledgling group of Lutherans in the Lemmon area until they called a student from the seminary, Vicar Julius Lenz. To him was given the privilege of finding Lutheran families in the Lemmon-Meadow area, and of conducting worship services. The worship services were held in various homes.

In 1909 the first resident pastor was called—Pastor William Pankow. Under the shepherding of Pastor Pankow, St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized. The congregation began planning at once for a church building. The grand total of the cost of the building and its contents was \$2,400. The building was dedicated in the fall of 1910.

The congregation, along with the town of Lemmon, experienced a steady growth in its early years, yet not without hardships. During WWI the German language was prohibited by South Dakota state law, so services were moved to the homes of various members in North

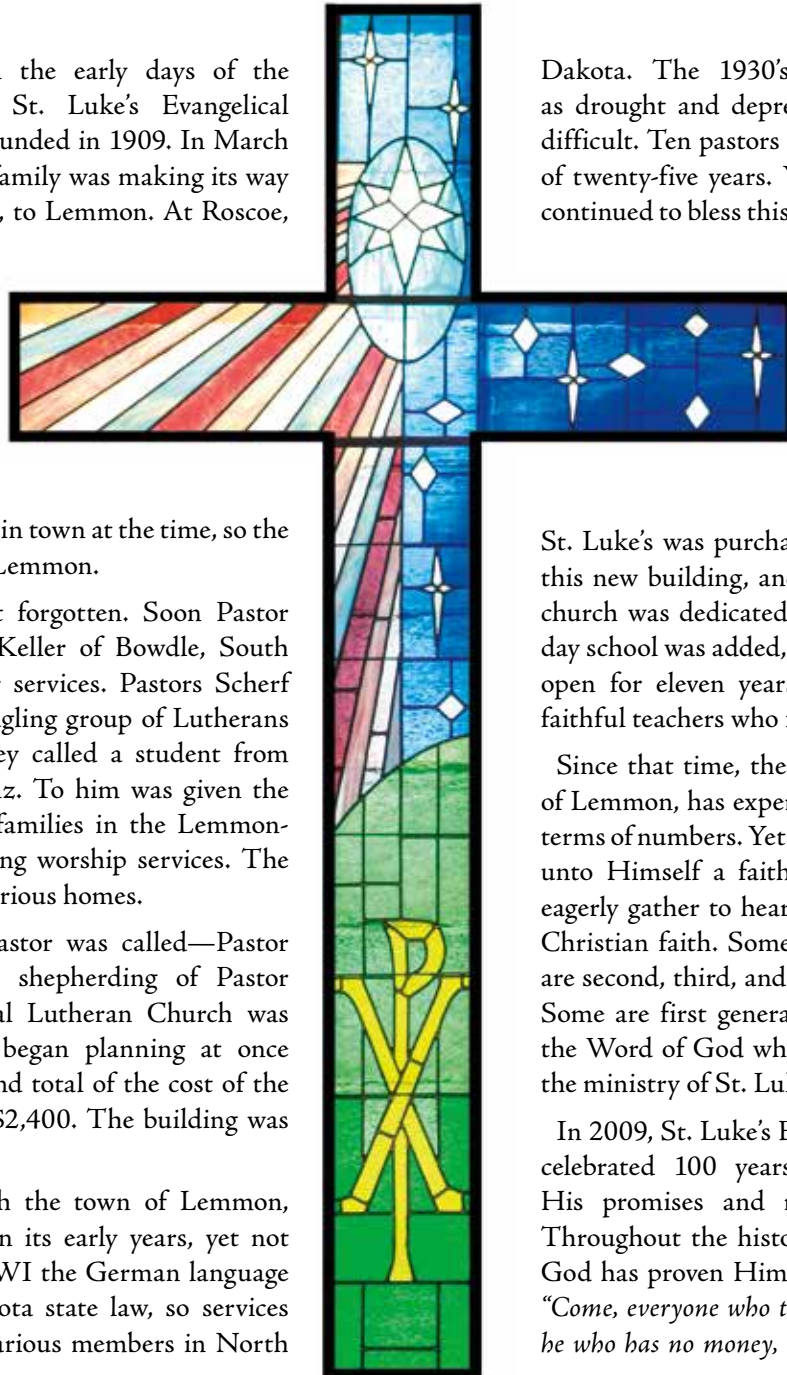
Dakota. The 1930's brought additional trials as drought and depression made life in the area difficult. Ten pastors came and departed in a span of twenty-five years. Yet, through it all, the Lord continued to bless this flock of Jesus through Word and Sacrament.

In the late 1950's, the membership of the congregation outgrew the size of the original house of worship. In 1961, the present site of

St. Luke's was purchased. Construction began on this new building, and on April 5, 1964, the new church was dedicated. A decade later a Christian day school was added, and though it only remained open for eleven years, the Lord blessed it with faithful teachers who fed Jesus' little lambs.

Since that time, the congregation, like the town of Lemmon, has experienced a downward trend in terms of numbers. Yet the Lord continues to reserve unto Himself a faithful core of Christians who eagerly gather to hear His Word and to live their Christian faith. Some of the current membership are second, third, and fourth generation members. Some are first generation members who treasure the Word of God which they have heard through the ministry of St. Luke's.

In 2009, St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church celebrated 100 years of God's faithfulness to His promises and mercy toward His people. Throughout the history of St. Luke's, our Savior God has proven Himself faithful to His promise: *"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy*





Top: sanctuary of St. Luke's Lutheran Church; above: members enjoy a fellowship meal.

wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to



me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David" (Isaiah 55:1-3ESV).

Frank Gantt is pastor of St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lemmon, South Dakota.

The CLC in Europe

The mission work of the CLC in Europe is different from our work in other countries of the world. We have no indigenous church body with whom we are in fellowship. We have contacts with several individuals who, for various reasons, have left their previous fellowships or are in the process of leaving. In the past few years the CLC has sponsored two free conferences to try to determine whether these are men who are in agreement with us in doctrine, or who may be brought to a correct understanding of Scripture's teachings. A free conference is a meeting of interested persons who gather to read and discuss papers presented on various topics. Retired missionary Dave Koenig, who has arranged these conferences in the past, conducted personal visits with many of the men this year in lieu of another conference.

Last fall I had the opportunity to attend the second of these free conferences. It was held in Gebenhain, Germany. It was interesting on many respects, one of which was the language barrier. Although there were French and German translators present who did a capable job of keeping the group up to speed with the discussion, I couldn't shake the feeling of missing out on some of the nuances which are very often present in oral discussions.

Another interesting side of the conference was the opportunity



Above: Pastor and Mrs. Jean Pierre Blanchard; top right: attendees at the Gebenhain free conference.



to meet some of the men with whom we have contact there. Two contacts with whom we are in fellowship are David Weiss and Jean-Pierre Blanchard.

David Weiss is a member of Messiah, Eau Claire. He is a German national, approximately 26 years old and is planning to attend ILC this January. His aim is to take some college and seminary courses so that he may return to Germany better equipped to interact with those interested in learning what the CLC has to offer. He also hopes, Lord willing, to begin his own congregation. David was our English-German translator.

Jean-Pierre Blanchard is about 65 years old and is retired from secular work. He does outreach and ministry in the Paris area. He has had some success in reaching out through his website.

Unfortunately, space allows us to mention here some of the other men in Europe only by name. Philipp Volff, a friend of Pastor Blanchard, acted as our English-French translator at the conference. Pastor Steinbrecher, Pastor Mueller, Pastor Voigt, and Pastor Drechsler are among the more than one dozen men scattered over Europe (and one in Russia) with whom the Lord has brought us into contact. These men see the problems in their former churches and have reached out to us for information on what Scripture has to say on a variety of doctrines. We give thanks to the Lord for having given us the opportunity to proclaim His Word. Time will tell whether the Lord will grant visible fruits from this labor.



Joel Krafft serves on the CLC Board of Missions. He is a member of St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Dallas, Texas.

Surprise!... Again!

Surprises. They make up a big part of Christmas anticipation, don't they? Packages of all shapes and sizes begin to appear under the tree, and with them the growing expectation of wonderful, exciting surprises. Who knows what might be in that small, square box—perhaps a ring? And it's not just the presents we give and receive. Have you ever been left breathless at seeing a son or daughter or friend from a thousand miles away standing before you on Christmas morning? Christmas surprises are great!

But what if you received exactly the same gift each year, say a pair of generic black socks? They would be warm and useful, but after a couple of years, the anticipation and surprise would be long gone, replaced by the dull sameness of the gift. When you think about it, doesn't that happen with any earthly present? Each year there is the buzz about what will be the big gift everyone wants. It might be a toy character from a popular animated movie, a new tech gadget, or maybe a must-have hat or jacket. But would you want to receive that same gift every year? Our closets and basements are filled with "things" which have lost their appeal and are now just junk. That is why Jesus urges, *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven"* (Matthew 6:19-20 NIV84).

There is no greater surprise gift than that of God's own Son. It was not that God didn't announce it. In Eden, thousands of years before the first Christmas, He promised to send the Seed of the woman. He repeated the promise and elaborated on it through the prophets. And in the fullness of time, He fulfilled it in the manger of Bethlehem. Each year during Advent we prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus' arrival into our sinful world. We know He has come. We know just how and when we will celebrate His advent again this year, right

down to the time of the Christmas Eve children's service and the Christmas Day song service.

So where's the surprise? It is in the depth of God's love and the lengths to which He went to make it all happen. Faced with a world totally corrupted with sin, with no goodness or any other redeeming quality, what could one realistically expect the holy God to do? What would you do if you had been in God's place? The only rational, sensible thing to do would be to condemn mankind to hell, destroy the ruined creation, and start over. What's more, justice demands it. *"The soul who sins is the one who will die"* (Ezekiel 18:20 NIV84). There was nothing preventing God

from doing just that—nothing except His surprising love.

St. Paul marvels, *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"* (1 John 3:1 NIV84). We were God's enemies by nature, yet He gave us His dearest treasure. We wanted nothing to do with Jesus; He came to be our Brother and keep the Law for us. We hesitate and balk at the slightest inconvenience for Him; He suffered hell for us on the cross.

So this Advent and Christmas season, prepare to be surprised all over again. Anticipate great things when you go to midweek services and hear the Lord's call to recognize your dire spiritual need, turn from sin, and look to the Christ child for true peace. And when you hear the angel's familiar announcement to the shepherds of a newborn Savior, let the good news of great joy fill your heart with love for Him who so loved us! May God's Gift always be the greatest of delightful surprises!

Michael Eichstadt is pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Hales Corners, Wisconsin, and president of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.



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SEEN IN PASSING

Items of interest from various sources of religious news and opinion, in print and on the web.

Hollywood Used to Celebrate Christmas – And Marriage. Paul Kengor, professor of political science at Grove City College, was looking for a lineup of good Christmas movies that he could watch with his family. He was happy to find three in a row—all romances—on a cable channel. They included *I’ll be Seeing You*, *Holiday Affair*, and *Christmas in Connecticut*. He was struck by two things: “First, Hollywood once made lots and lots of major films with major stars celebrating Christmas. Second, in each case, no matter how different the plot, there was always a common end-goal: marriage. From the outset, marriage is the assumed, unquestioned objective, from the moment the guy and gal catch one another’s eye or heart. The goal isn’t a one-night stand or wild weekend or trip to Vegas, or living together to try out each other for a few months or years. Think about other favorite Christmas movies from the era. At the core of *It’s a Wonderful Life* is the wonderful life Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed forge together. Look at *White Christmas* . . . that’s all about getting together Bing Crosby and Rosemary Clooney in a church before a preacher. The two that conspire to bring them together, Danny Kaye

and Vera Ellen, end up marrying as well—after they all sing ‘White Christmas.’ That America, sadly, is gone. For countless Americans, marriage is no longer the goal. It has become redefinable, optional, replaceable, switchable, less preferable to living together.” Kengor, Paul. “When Hollywood Celebrated Christmas and Marriage.” *Media and Culture*. VisionandValues.org, 17 Dec. 2015. Web. 4 Oct. 2016.

Tell Us Something We Didn’t Know. People who attend Sunday worship are happier, according to two new studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Not only do they feel better during the time they are in church, but they are significantly happier throughout the week than non-churchgoers. The researchers attributed part of the disparity to the fact that non-churchgoers spend more time in passive activities such as watching TV and less time with family and friends in social situations. But the effects of faithful church attendance clearly go beyond that—according to the study, spending time in social rituals that reinforce faith also provides individuals with meaning and positive coping skills that contribute

to better mental health. Briggs, David. “The weekend activity that can help you feel happier throughout the week.” *Ahead of the Trend*. The ARDA Foundation of Religious Data Archives, 30 Aug. 2016. Web. 10 Sep. 2016.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

In accord with our usage and order, **Terrel Kesterson**, who was called by Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia, Illinois, to be its pastor, was installed on October 2, 2016. Preaching for the service was Pastor Michael Wilke.

—Pastor David Schaller

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation



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