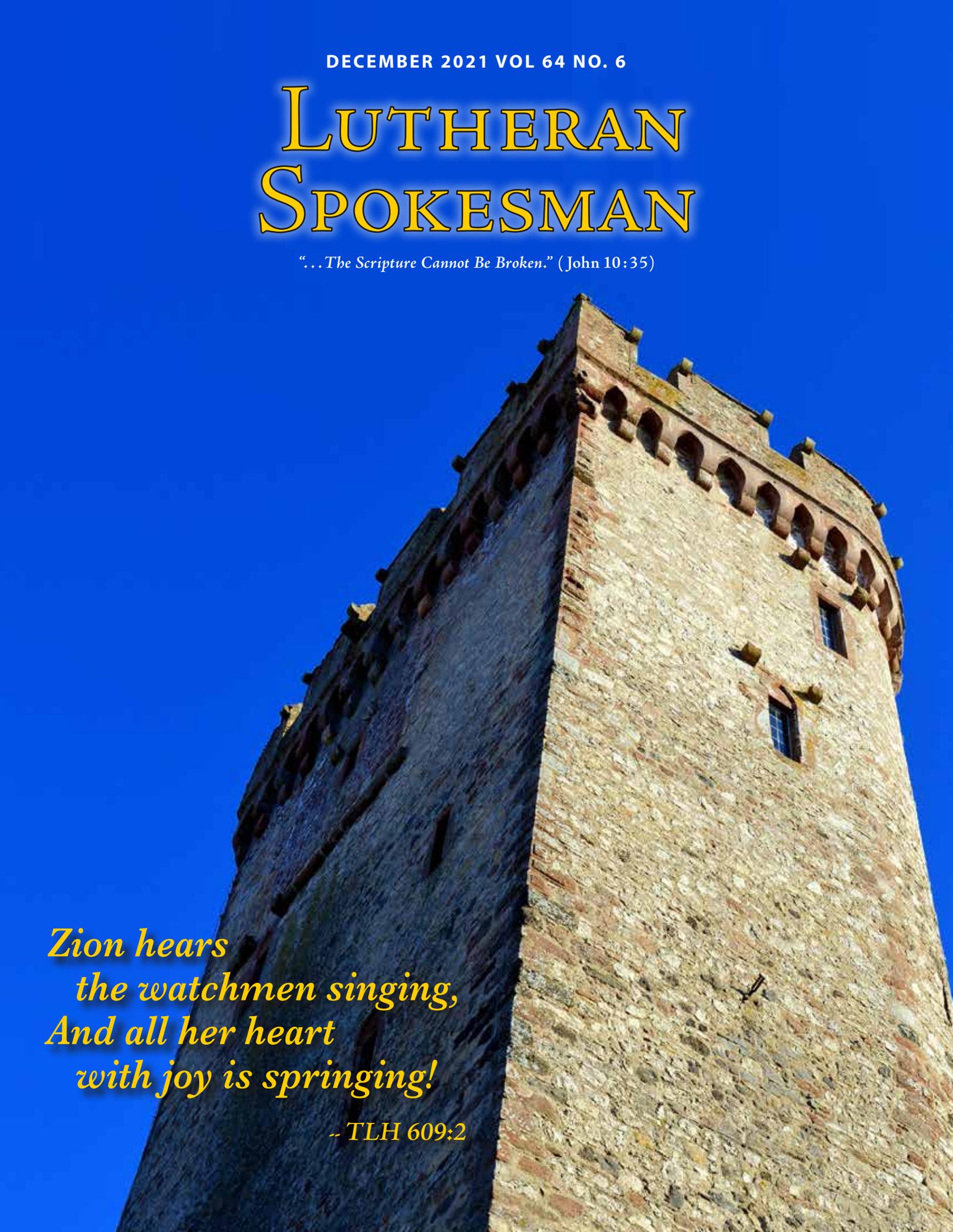


DECEMBER 2021 VOL 64 NO. 6

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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



*Zion hears
the watchmen singing,
And all her heart
with joy is springing!*

- TLH 609:2



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Watchmen On the Walls of Zion

In the days of the Old Testament, there were no satellites, radar, internet, or cell phones. People were dependent on one another to relay the news of the day. As for the more momentous news, they relied on “watchmen.” From a high tower or a mountain top, these watchmen would be on the lookout for friend or foe. They would then call out good news or bad news, a cry of warning or a shout of celebration.

In Isaiah 52, the Holy Spirit speaks of a watchman with a shout of celebration. It has nothing to do with war or peace among the kingdoms of men, but of a celebration of peace in the Kingdom of God. *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’ Your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the LORD brings back Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”* (verses 7-10)

We see the watchmen on the walls of Zion, staring intently toward the mountains, waiting . . . watching. Suddenly, they see a runner coming over the mountains, cheering and waving his arms. “Peace!” he shouts. “Good news! Salvation! Your God reigns!” How beautiful in the eyes of the watchmen are the feet that carry this messenger. From eye to eye, they see. The Lord Christ is coming to Zion. They turn and shout the good news to the people. Their voices are as one, lifted up in a joyful song of praise. The people join the celebration. Even in the desolate wilderness the strain echoes: *“The LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.”* Not only in the land of Judah, but through all the nations the anthems reverberate. *“All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”*

On the hills of Bethlehem, those watching the sheep little

Suddenly, they see a runner coming over the mountains, cheering and waving his arms. “Peace!” he shouts. “Good news! Salvation! Your God reigns!”

know that they are appointed to be the Lord’s watchmen. Then, suddenly, the beautiful feet of angels appear and announce: *“Good news of great joy for all people. Unto you is born a Savior, Christ the Lord! Peace on earth; good will toward men.”* These new watchmen, in turn, make known abroad the saying which was told to them concerning this Child. Then, an evangelist records the Christmas Gospel.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers hear the words and become new watchmen for future generations and many nations. Behold how *“their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”* (Romans 10:18)

Even to this very day, from the mountains of Nepal to the valleys of India, from the desolate places of Africa to the wilds of Myanmar, from Australia to Mexico, from Germany to Bangladesh, from Canada to the United States the voices of the watchmen call out: *“Good news of great joy for all people. Unto you is born a Savior, Christ the Lord! Peace on earth; good will toward men!”* In the lowliest huts of third world countries to the mansions of America, the *alleluias* resound as the Gospel tidings of watchmen are proclaimed.

But it doesn’t end there, for the Lord’s watchmen are still watching, looking for signs that the Lord Christ is returning. The signs are here for them to see: nation rising up against nation, kingdom against kingdom, lawlessness, lovelessness, famines, pestilences (pandemics), earthquakes in various places, apostasy and false prophets abounding, the Gospel reaching all nations, *“and then the end will come.”* (Matthew 24:14) Christ’s second coming is imminent. The watchmen of today are calling out: *“Look up; lift up your head! Your redemption draws near.”* (Luke 21:28)

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20)



John Pfeiffer is retired from the pastoral and teaching ministry. He is a former president of Immanuel Lutheran College.

Beyond the Manger

My guess would be that most, if not all, of us have a *crèche* or manger scene that we display in our homes. These may range from simple hand-carved figures, to extremely expensive Fontanini's, to light-up plastic yard models. Now, before we begin, I want to assure you that my purpose for this message is not to ruffle feathers, burst bubbles, or ruin anyone's Christmas. But I believe it is important to remember that many things we "know" about Christmas are from tradition rather than Scripture.

There was most likely no lightly falling snow the night Jesus was born. Bethlehem was probably anything but "still" considering its influx of population due to the census. Jesus may have cried as much as any normal human baby. In the reading of the simple, straightforward account of Luke 2, the only reference to where Jesus was born is, "And she (Mary) gave birth to her firstborn Son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." (Luke 2:7) There is no mention of a stable or animals gathered around.

I'm suggesting that we get beyond the manger. Those of us who have been raised in the church and have heard the Bible stories in countless Sunday School lessons and sermons can fall into the danger of oversimplifying the accounts. First, we need to recall that Bible "stories" are Bible and world history. These Bible history lessons were recorded for the very special purpose of showing us good and bad examples and to give us proper understanding (1 Corinthians 10:11).

In the telling of Jesus' birth, we have the good examples of the shepherds who, when they were told the angel's message, immediately hurried to see the wonderful gift of a Savior given to them. Next, they went out to share God's grace by telling anyone and everyone the joyous news. And finally, these humble servants of God returned to their

labors "glorifying and praising God" (Luke 2:20), for all that had transpired.

Although we are told that "all who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds" (Luke 2:18), we don't hear of any of the townsfolk taking the initiative to see the child for themselves. And even though this attitude is slightly better than Herod's fear at the news of the King's birth, it is worlds better than the lukewarm response of the priests who knew of the birth, knew of its importance, and yet did nothing.

Yet all of this was for naught if Jesus didn't go beyond the manger. Jesus didn't come to earth to be a cute, cuddly child to be adored, but rather a grown man whipped and bloodied on the path to the cross. Jesus didn't come to earth to bring us Christmas presents, but to bring *us* into God's presence. It is only through His

death in our place that our sins have been paid for in full. It is by the transmitting of His righteousness to us that we can be sure of our salvation, for which we worship and praise His name!

We have all heard the old saw, "Familiarity breeds contempt." Let us pray this is never true of us in regard to God and His Word. After all, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning." (Lamentations 3:22-23) If the Lord is willing to renew His love and mercy for us daily, shouldn't our praise and appreciation arise to match? Grant us, O Lord, to daily appreciate the familiar Bible accounts that You have made known to us!



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Each article in this series offers an overview of one of the chief teachings of the Christian church.

The Inspiration of Scripture: “For the Bible Tells Me So”

Imagine most of us were taught to sing, “Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so.” What a memorable, to-the-point statement! It stays with you as you age and makes a meaningful connection between the Savior’s love and the written-down certainty that we know it’s true. “The Bible tells me so.” Thinking back more recently, didn’t we celebrate our Reformation heritage summed up in the three *solas*? By grace alone, through faith alone, based on Scripture alone. “*Sola Scriptura*”—that’s Latin for “the Bible tells me so.”

To put it another way, the God Who loved us and made us to be His people forever, the same God Who redeemed us from sin in the sacrifice of His Son, is also the God Who put all of His saving truth, all that we need to know for our Christian faith and life, in one secure place accessible to all people. We know it as “*the word of the LORD*” that “*endures forever*” (1 Peter 1:25), which He has permanently provided in the Holy Bible, the inspired Word of God.

There will always be those who raise the question, “How can you be so sure?” Our flesh wants to raise that question too, but there will be no rational proof or apologetic argument one can make that will satisfy human skepticism. In fact, there is nothing that can top what the Bible claims about itself. Yes, the Bible tells me so also when it comes to the origin of the Bible and its unique characteristic of having been inspired by God, even down to the very words.

Recall the confirmation class passages taught in Luther’s Small Catechism: “*From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,*

for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:15-16) “*Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*” (2 Peter 1:21) “*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches.*” (1 Corinthians 2:12-13)

In the passages above we have God’s say-so that He is the source of the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Both Testaments have the Gospel given as the power of God for salvation, which brings the wisdom of saving faith to young and old alike. As each part of Scripture came into existence, God decided who the writer would be and what he would say as God’s own words, which were “breathed into” the man by the Holy Spirit. We can think of the Holy Spirit as the Author and men like Moses or Matthew as the appointed writers who, like Paul in 1 Corinthians 2, received not only the thoughts, concepts, and details from God, but even the words by which the divine details were to be expressed in their written form.

This doctrine, the *verbal inspiration of Scripture*, involves God doing the miraculous, with the guaranteed result that His Word is completely given in the Bible, completely true, and completely reliable. The value of the content, after all—the Gospel of our salvation in Christ—was far too precious to leave the state of the Bible’s integrity in fallible human hands. Praise be to God and His verbal inspiration of Scripture, so that of all its doctrines we can confidently say or even sing: “the Bible tells me so.”



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When Things Go South

["Going south" is an idiom that generally alludes to directional maps, on which south is down. Thus, south means lower in value, or going into a bad or worsened situation.]

It is not surprising that the great heroes of faith are also portrayed as great sinners. Such heroes were but sinner-saints with great weaknesses and faults, challenged with great temptations and falling with heavy splashes into the slimy pit of shame. And yet they are heroes, people we can strive to emulate, learning from their mistakes. We do it humbly, knowing that if it could happen to them it could easily happen to us.

Abraham was a great hero of faith. He trusted in the promise of God and is called the father of all believers in Christ Jesus.

But not always did he act so. Perhaps his greatest shame involved a trip to Egypt (Genesis 12:10-20). Shortly after arriving in the Promised Land of Canaan, Abraham almost immediately left it. Because of a severe famine, he obviously felt he had no choice but to move south. But God did not instruct Abraham to go to Egypt, nor did He give him permission to leave the Promised Land. Surely God could have provided for Abraham in any situation. It seems as if Abraham was not convinced of it.

What started out as mistrust quickly spiraled downward. Abraham's wife Sarah was a very beautiful woman. Abraham feared that Pharaoh would desire her, make Sarah part of his harem, and have him killed. And so he convinced Sarah to say that she was his sister. That made Abraham a liar—to save his skin.

What Abraham had feared, happened. Gorgeous Sarah became the talk of the town and was taken to Pharaoh's house. However, instead of killing Abraham, Pharaoh treated him well, giving him much livestock and many servants. And Abraham took them all, refusing nothing. That made Abraham something worse.

But the worst was not even the way in which Abraham dishonored his wife, but in the way he threatened God's very plan of salvation. For if Pharaoh had succeeded in his

lustful desire of keeping Sarah, there would have been no heir and promised Seed through her, and no redemption for mankind.

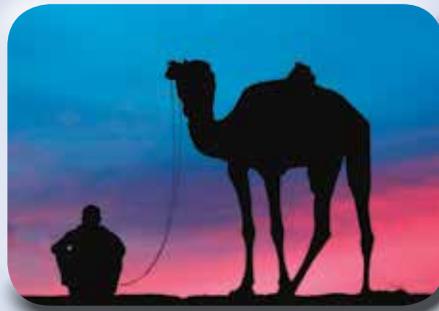
At this point the Lord intervened, sending plagues upon Pharaoh. Getting the message, the king confronted Abraham with his lies and deceit and kicked him out of the country. Good riddance!

"Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." (Romans 5:20) Despite Abraham's foolishness, God protected both Abraham and Sarah, delivering them northward to safety. God even allowed Abraham to keep all that Pharaoh had given him. God reiterated His covenant promise to Abraham, eventually gave him the promised son, and made Abraham the father of a

great nation. How gracious and merciful the Lord is!

Surely we can sympathize with Abraham as we recognize our own weakness. We also can fear and panic in tough times. We can lie and deceive to further our cause. We can disgrace and betray those whom we say we love. We can build roadblocks to God's path of salvation, even doubting Christ and compromising His Gospel. God would be just to leave us to our miserable fate.

But where sin abounds, grace abounds much more. Where sin abounded, God sent His Son to save mankind. Where sin left us dirty and ashamed, God washed us clean by the atoning blood of Christ. Where sin continues in our lives, God daily forgives us and keeps His promises still. He gives us protection, spiritual enlightenment, and every other needed blessing. O Lord God, who in all the world is like You? Have mercy upon us, and lead us upward to our promised homeland.



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The Christian's Wait

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” (James 5:7-8)

The Christian faith is a faith of waiting. James compares the Christian's waiting with that of a farmer. In Biblical times, the farmer depended on the early and late rains, both to begin the growing process for the plants, and to see them to complete maturity. Any attempt to speed things along would only injure or kill the plant. It all had to happen on God's timetable. We too are reliant upon God's timetable while we wait for the Lord to come. Any attempt to rush God along only results in our own spiritual harm. But can we be certain that He will come?

In 1953, playwright Samuel Beckett published his most famous play, titled “Waiting for Godot.” The plot consists of two individuals conversing with each other while they wait for a mysterious person by the name of Godot. While Godot often sends word that he is on his way, he never shows up in the end. The play became so popular that many now use the expression “waiting for Godot” to mean a disappointing, hopeless waiting for something that will never come. There are some who believe that a primary purpose of Beckett's play was to poke fun at religion and people of faith. The unbeliever thinks that the whole Christian faith is an example of “waiting for Godot.”

Sometimes even Christians can be tempted to think in this same way: “I've prayed and prayed, and yet God hasn't answered. Will He ever answer me? Will He ever show up?” We worry and wonder if God has somehow forgotten about us, if He has left us to our enemies and failed to show

up, if our waiting for God has been empty and useless all along.

How can we be certain that all our waiting for God is not some endless, useless “waiting for Godot” who will never show up in the end? However, it's because God already has shown up. “When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” (Gal. 4:4-5)

The God Who loved you so much that He showed up in the person of Jesus Christ to die on the cross for your sins is the same God Who promises you that He will come again to receive you to Himself, that where He is, there you will be also. Therefore, the Christian's wait is not empty or useless, but full of certain hope in the God Who loved us and sent His Son to die for us on the cross.

And so, why fret and worry about where God is and what He's doing? Our God shows up! Just as He did for the Israelites when they were trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea. Just as He did for His disciples when He calmed the storm. Just as He did in the person of Jesus Christ to slay sin, death, and Satan by dying on the cross and rising the third day. Our God shows up! He comes with grace and mercy, bringing eternal victory!

Like the farmer, we are encouraged to be patient as we wait for the coming of the Lord. As one Bible commentator put it, “If the farmer can be patient in waiting for a crop of corn, surely then the Christian can be patient in waiting for a crown of glory.”



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One of the hallmarks of the Lutheran Church is its proper understanding and application of the Bible's two main teachings—Law and Gospel. Dr. C.F.W. Walther's seminal work, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, is the basis for this two-year series. Note: page numbers given are accurate for the 1929 and 1986 editions of the book.



Contrition is Essential, But Does Not Merit Forgiveness

“Thesis XII--In the eighth place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the preacher represents contrition alongside of faith as a cause of the forgiveness of sin.”

The main subject in this thesis is the contrition that precedes faith. There is no ambiguity that contrition is necessary if a person is to obtain forgiveness of sins. After all, Christ Himself said at the beginning of His earthly ministry, “Repent, and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:15) Likewise, at the end of his earthly ministry He told His followers that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name.” (Luke 24:47) Those believing they are healthy do not need a doctor. Those who think they are righteous need not a Savior. Only a broken heart and a contrite spirit is receptive to the Gospel.

However, it would be wrong to say that contrition is a cause of the forgiveness of sins. Contrition prior to faith is a byproduct of God’s Law alone, not a good work on the part of a sinner. Although typically a false teaching of the Catholic Church, Lutherans at times mingle Law and Gospel by saying either too little or too much about contrition. Walther states, “God does not require contrition as a means by which you are to atone for your sins, but only to the end that you may be roused from your security and ask, ‘What must I do to be saved?’” (pages 250-251). When Luther finally understood the true meaning of repentance, it provided him comfort, knowing that penance (making up for sin) was not required of him, only an acknowledgement of himself as a poor, lost sinner. People do not merit God’s forgiveness because of their contrition.

It is dangerous for pastors to accept partial contrition, that is, contrition over a specific sin, by someone with an unawareness of the depth of his ongoing sinful state. It would also be wrong for a pastor to demand a certain outward demonstration of remorse as proof of true contrition. Only God can know the heart, so we must rely on a sinner’s

confession, regardless of the outward appearance.

Many Pietists teach that faith must be preceded by a lengthy period of penance, perhaps even months or years. What a terrible teaching! God would have the assurance of the Gospel proclaimed as soon as possible to those convicted and burdened by their sin.

Walther also speaks of contrition of another type—that which involves the Christian’s daily sorrow over sin. This contrition is a fruit of faith produced by the Gospel in a believer’s heart. It is not only a confession of sins known and unknown, but the trust of forgiveness through Christ for those sins.

Perhaps the most influential false teaching regarding contrition is found in the Catholic Church’s belief that repentance has three parts: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. If sinners can fulfill all three, then they merit forgiveness before God. “Satisfaction” requires the doing of something to atone for sins committed. Only sins enumerated in the Confessional to the priest can warrant redemptive satisfaction prescribed to the sinner. This false teaching only heightens the sinner’s uncertainty about his forgiveness and raises doubts about the surety of heaven—doubts God does not want Christians to have. As a Catholic monk, Luther himself struggled with trying to make satisfaction for his sins, which left him in utter despair.

What a comfort to know that our forgiveness is NOT dependent on something in us or from us! It is solely based on Christ’s perfect life and sacrificial death on our behalf, as our Substitute. Even our reception of that gift is by grace, an undeserved work of the Holy Spirit. To God alone be praise!



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[To read Walther’s The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel for free on-line, and to access related Bible class materials, go to www.ilc.edu/Walther]

OUR LITURGICAL LEGACY

*Ever wonder why we Lutherans use the form of worship we do?
In this series we examine the depth and meaning of the various elements of
our worship service, beginning with the history of Christian worship itself.*

Worship in the Apostolic Era

The first mention of Christian worship in the book of Acts occurs immediately following the account of Pentecost. The company of believers in Jerusalem, their numbers having increased dramatically, gathered regularly for worship. At their meetings in the temple courts and in homes, they worshiped the ascended Lord, received instruction from His chosen apostles, and took Holy Communion (Acts 2:42-47).

When the Christian faith spread to the Gentile world, the new congregations in Asia Minor and Greece likewise met together regularly. It appears that Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection and of the coming of the Holy Spirit, quickly became the day for Christians to gather (Acts 20:7). We have no order of service from any of those early Christian gatherings, yet we know something of them from Paul's epistles. They observed Holy Communion together (1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:17-34). They sang psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Some passages from the epistles appear to be quotations from these early Christian hymns (1 Timothy 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:11-13).

Why was it that Christians from the beginning considered it not only important, but also necessary, to gather regularly for worship? It was because they believed that in Jesus they had a risen, living, and reigning Savior.

They remembered Jesus' promise to be present whenever and wherever any of His disciples were gathered together in His name, even when it was only two or three of them (Matthew 18:20). What greater incentive could they have had to gather regularly to worship Him than the assurance that whenever they did this their beloved Jesus would be present among them?

Jesus had also shown His disciples that His promised presence at Christian worship is real. After He gave His life as an offering for sin and rose from the dead to show

His victory over sin and death, Jesus gave His disciples abundant evidence of His ongoing presence with them by appearing to them during a period of forty days. When they were huddled in fear in a locked room, Jesus was there with them to calm and strengthen them. As two of them walked to Emmaus in gloom and despair, Jesus walked with them, restoring their faith in Him by explaining the Old Testament prophecies to them. When some of them were returning from an unproductive night of fishing, there was Jesus on the shore filling their nets with fish and inviting them to eat with Him. With these visible appearances, Jesus demonstrated the reality of His ongoing, constant presence with His disciples, even when they no longer saw Him. They could gather in His name and be certain that He was truly present with them to receive their praise and to hear and answer their prayers.

The disciples realized the importance of gathering for worship also because they remembered His command when He instituted the Lord's Supper: "*Do this in remembrance of Me.*" (Luke 22:19) To carry out His command and receive the promised blessing of the Holy Supper the disciples needed to gather in His name just as they had gathered around Him on the night in which He was betrayed.

Jesus' promise of His continual presence with His disciples when they are gathered in His name is the foundation of Christian worship for every age. It is the reason that Christian worship has continued and flourished for nearly 2000 years. It is the reason that Christians throughout the ages have given of themselves to devise beautiful and meaningful ways to worship the living Savior to Whom we owe our life and salvation.



John Klatt is a retired pastor. He lives in Watertown, South Dakota.

WHAT'S NEW WITH YOU?

Updates from congregations around the Church of the Lutheran Confession

Resurrection Lutheran Church Corpus Christi, Texas

Greetings from your fellow members of the Body of Christ who also happen to live in the Body of Christ. *Corpus Christi*, you see, is Latin for "the body of Christ." This name gives us an easy opportunity to bring up our faith when we're talking with other residents of our city. Located on the Gulf Coast of Texas, Corpus Christi is close to as far south as you can travel and remain in the United States. The border between the USA and Mexico is about a two-hour drive south.

Our part of the Body of Christ consists of a few dozen members who do their best to practice the love of Christ, for "*there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.*" (Ephesians 4:4) This one hope we share with you is the sure hope of the resurrection as witnessed in the firstfruits of the resurrection, our Lord, Jesus Christ. What a great and noble calling Jesus has given to all of us to spread the news of His redeeming work and our hope for everlasting life!

Since our last article in the *Lutheran Spokesman*, Resurrection's membership has had periods both of increase and decrease. The Lord fulfilled His promise of eternal life for Anita Villarreal, John Fisher, and Stella Cothran by calling them to their eternal home. The Lord has also granted spiritual life through Baptism and adult conversion for various individuals in our midst.

Tucked away from busy roads in a small neighborhood, our church has low visibility to the general public. Thus it is incumbent upon us to find other ways to spread the message of the forgiveness of sins, life after death, and the love of Jesus. We have recently updated our website and started taking out Google advertisements to increase our online presence in our community. We are



Top: Resurrection Lutheran Church, Corpus Christi, Texas. Bottom left: The church's entrance and steeple. Bottom Right: Interior of the sanctuary.

also looking into advertising on the local bus benches to let the local community know about us. Ultimately, of course, there is no better way to spread the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ than personal interaction and confession of one's faith. This is and can only be accomplished by the members of the Body of Christ. We strive to do just that. Finally, we spread the Good News of Christ's redeeming work at a local assisted living facility. Every Thursday, Pastor Naumann conducts a simplified worship service to individuals from a wide variety of religious backgrounds, and points them squarely toward Jesus as their sole Savior from sin.

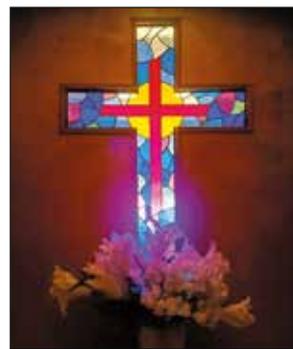
Along with seeking to save the lost in Corpus Christi, we also aim to strengthen the bond of fellowship and the faith of all our members. Every New Year's Eve we gather for an afternoon of fellowship involving board or card games and conclude with a song service, during which we



Above: some members of Resurrection Lutheran Church.



Far left: September 2021 flooding. Buildings were fine.



Left: Glowing cross and altar on Easter Eve.

sing all the congregation's favorite hymns. Our faithful organist, Allen Hovda, likes to call this service the "stump the organist" game. We also hold a midweek Bible study on Thursday afternoons for the retired members of our congregation. One exciting development is that we have restarted our Sunday School. Bible Class always takes place at 9:30 A.M., right before our worship service, and now Sunday School does as well. Lynne Lassig is now guiding the lambs of our congregation to the Savior's waiting arms on Sunday mornings.

The congregation has recently completed renovations to prevent flooding. Our location on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico means that we can regularly receive greater than five inches of rain in a few hours. This past September we received ten inches of rain in a 48-hour period, and the

raised piers on the church helped prevent damage from floodwaters. Truly God protects us from the floodwaters both literally and figuratively. *"He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters."* (Psalm 18:16)

We know our church is one of the more remote churches in our fellowship, but that only makes us appreciate our communion in the Body of Christ with all of you even more. If you're ever in the area, you're more than welcome to stop in, visit, and join us in the worship of our Head, Jesus Christ.



Samuel Naumann is pastor of Resurrection Lutheran Church of Corpus Christi, Texas.

Delivered from Death to Life— My Experience With COVID-19

[Editor's note: the following is an account from CLCI Chairman, Pastor Jyothi Benjamin, in his own words. The report is lightly edited for clarity.]

After this year's Easter celebrations, following the jubilant cries of victory over sin and death that Jesus Christ won for us on the cross, most people were returning to normal life. But for me and my family, life became a personal war.

In the last week of April, I developed my first symptom of COVID-19, the deadly coronavirus which by April had claimed 444,000 lives across India. It started with a dry cough and slight fever. After a few days, I began to feel tightness in my chest. As the time progressed, my temperature started to rise and I was finding that I had to take long, deep breaths. With severe sweating and uncontrollable shaking, I became weak.

My COVID-19 test came back positive. I was scared, confused, and troubled about so many things. It was an entirely new experience for me to learn about "difficulty in taking breath," a frightening symptom of COVID-19. You feel as if your ribcage is restricted and you have to inhale much deeper than usual. Soon I was taken by ambulance to the hospital and admitted to the ICU. It was very hard and so painful to experience COVID-19 treatment at ICU. I couldn't eat and swallow, and I couldn't chew when they took the tubes out of my throat. Everything in me wanted some relief from the intensity, some cool air on my skin.

Health problems aside, COVID-19 had robbed my peace of mind. I have had a successful career, been blessed with a good wife and two wonderful children, and had perfect health. I have been faithful to God. But all of a sudden I went through these deadly sufferings. It reminded me of Job from the Bible. Without any warning I lost my health, and most all the money that I have. But Job said, Job 2:10, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" I firmly believed that God was with me in my suffering because God is compassionate and merciful. I



kept praying: "Lord, have mercy on me. Lord, give strength to my body."

I could feel the deepest ache in my chest like nothing I have ever experienced before. The breath was being squeezed out of me. Since I am a diabetic, and 58 years old, things became very serious. Gradually I started losing hope for my life, but prayed continuously for victory, declaring the power of Jesus to overcome evil.

Many people in the CLC and in the CLCI prayed for me. With those prayers, Jesus did a miracle in my life. I truly believe this moment was the decisive point when my Lord and Savior broke in and won the battle for me. My fever began to go down. The Lord had heard my prayers and seen my tears. After a 45-day stay in the hospital,

including eighteen days on a ventilator, by the grace of God, I recovered from COVID-19 and I am gaining my health back.

Dear brothers and sisters, I wholeheartedly thank you for all your prayers and support. From the day I entered the hospital, I received on my phone, computer, and in the mail box prayers for my speedy recovery. How grateful I am to have such lovely brothers and sisters in the CLC! Because of your prayers, God really kept me as the apple of His eye. I cannot express the gratitude I feel for all of you.

Praise the Lord that I am now able to participate in church activities again. Please continue to pray for this unworthy servant. We pray for your wellbeing also. From the bottom of our hearts, we once again say, "THANK YOU!"



Pastor Jyothi Benjamin is the Chairman of the CLCI. His home is in Nidubrolu, Andhra Pradesh State, India.

Christian Day Schools as Part of a New Approach to Domestic Missions

At this past year's CLC Convention, the delegates recognized a need for a new approach to domestic missions. In order to encourage a new approach, the following resolutions were passed: (1) Resolved that the Board of Missions encourage domestic subsidized congregations to open Christian day schools and provide counsel and financial assistance as appropriate; (2) Resolved that the Board of Missions be directed to develop and implement a model for a Christian day school program as an outreach tool in domestic subsidized congregations; (3) Resolved that the Board of Missions and the Board of Education and Publications with the help of the Standing Constitution Committee explore other ways to make use of subsidized Christian day schools as mission tools and report their findings to the 2022 Convention.

The Board of Missions has formed a subcommittee which includes pastors, former teachers, and laymen to help formulate an approach to these three resolutions. The initial work has focused on the importance of Christian education, in general, and discussions about how we can better use our Christian day schools to spread the Gospel. The subcommittee has also discussed various models that could be used to start a school, including a homeschool co-op, a "start small" approach which involves starting with a

preschool and adding the next grade each year, the idea of a teacher at large whose focus would be on starting a school in one congregation and then moving on to another, in addition to a more traditional startup method. The subcommittee has spent time discussing the financial aspects of starting schools, considering factors such as startup costs, salary and housing for a teacher, and potential costs associated with having space for a school such as the possible need for an addition to the church building or perhaps a new building. The subcommittee is also putting together a Christian day school Startup Checklist which can be used to help congregations to consider all the aspects involved with starting a school. Going forward, the subcommittee plans to put together a CLC School Promotion Packet and develop a presentation on the importance of Christian day schools that could be presented to churches for a Christian Education Sunday.

Please pray that the Lord will grant wisdom to the Board of Missions and our subcommittee as we consider the important work of promoting Christian education and spreading the Gospel.



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“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS DECEMBER 2021

TLH = The Lutheran Hymnal, 1941; WS = Worship Supplement 2000; LSB = Lutheran Service Book, 2006

Date	Hymns	Reading	Comments
Dec 1	56 (TLH)	Malachi 4:1-6	The Old Testament ends with the promise of the rising S-u-n. This S-u-n is none other than the S-o-n of God, Who will arise over the nations with healing for us sinners.
Dec 2	75 (TLH)	Romans 13:8-14	The night of this world will soon end. Cast off the works of darkness. Put on the Lord Jesus in faith.
Dec 3	68 (TLH)	Matthew 21:1-9	Christ is welcomed with joy into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Give us grace, Holy Spirit, to joyfully welcome our Savior and King into our hearts.
Dec 4	73 (TLH)	Psalms 24	Our Psalm reading echoes yesterday's reading. "Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in."
Dec 6	285 (TLH)	Romans 15:4-13	What we read in Scripture is for our learning. May the Spirit give us patience, comfort, and hope through our reading of God's Holy Word.
Dec 7	387 (TLH)	Hebrews 10:26-39	"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." But we need not fear. In love, God justifies sinners by faith in His Son.
Dec 8	609 (TLH)	James 5:1-12	"The haves" often abuse "the have nots." In such an unloving world, our faith needs the patience of the farmer as we await the Judge of all.
Dec 9	64 (TLH)	Luke 12:13-40	Seek the kingdom of God and leave your worries behind. Life is not about what we eat and drink, but being ready for the coming of the Son of Man.
Dec 10	70 (TLH)	Luke 21:25-36	For some, the return of Jesus will be frightening beyond description. But for His believers, there will be no fear, only a joyful lifting of the head as our redemption draws near.
Dec 11	705 (WS)	Luke 17:20-37	Where is God's Kingdom? Not here or there. Not where you can see it. God's kingdom is Christ ruling in our hearts with His precious Gospel!
Dec 13	779 (WS)	1 Corinthians 4:1-13	God's servants reveal the great mysteries of God's love for a fallen world, mysteries which God wants all to know and believe. The mysteries are all centered in God's Son, our Savior.
Dec 14	371 (TLH)	1 Peter 1:1-21	With our confidence in the risen Jesus, Who redeemed us, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood, our hope for glory is secure.
Dec 15	706 (WS)	Matthew 11:1-19	John was sent to prepare the way for the Savior. Dear God, help us to be messengers like John, speaking sin and grace to any and all.
Dec 16	63 (TLH)	Luke 3:1-14	In every age God's true messengers call people to repent! Confess your sins! Trust Jesus to forgive you! Change the way you are living!
Dec 17	358 (TLH)	John 1:19-31	Who is Jesus? He is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. He is the Son of God upon Whom John saw the Spirit remain.
Dec 18	341 (TLH)	2 Samuel 7:1-17	The establishing of David's kingdom finds its ultimate fulfillment in King Jesus. What other kingdom lasts forever? Blessed is the one to whom His kingdom comes!
Dec 20	703 (WS)	Philippians 4:1-13	The Lord is ever near with His presence. He is also near in His coming to receive us to Himself in Heaven. It is no wonder that Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord!"
Dec 21	427 (TLH)	Mark 6:17-29	This evil world has no love for loyal confessors of the truth. But the Lord will not abandon His faithful servants, not even in death.
Dec 22	61 (TLH)	Isaiah 40:1-11	The Word of our God stands forever! In its blessed pages God gives comfort on top of comfort to His believing people.
Dec 23	55 (TLH)	Isaiah 51:1-11	Can you imagine everlasting joy? The LORD promises such to all His ransomed ones. All praise to Jesus, Who gave His life a ransom for all!
Dec 24	90 (TLH)	Titus 2:1-14	"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men!"
Dec 25	94 (TLH)	Luke 2:1-20	"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."
Dec 27	76 (TLH)	John 1:1-14	"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!"
Dec 28	85 (TLH)	Matthew 1:18-25	"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
Dec 29	712 (WS)	Isaiah 9:1-7	"His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."
Dec 30	99 (TLH)	Galatians 4:1-7	"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law."
Dec 31	53 (TLH)	Psalms 90	A serious and needed reflection for the ending of another year: Lord, "teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

“Ponder” the Gift

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus. . . . You know the rest. After a lifetime of Christmas Eve services, you may be able to recite Luke 2 from memory. It’s the precious record of God’s eternal plan of salvation coming together in the fullness of time. Who could forget the journey to Bethlehem, the Baby laid in a manger, the choir of angels, and the shepherds rushing to see the Savior?”

But there is one small verse which is easily passed over. It might almost seem like an afterthought. Verse 19 reads, *“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”* (ESV) How often do you “ponder”? In the original Greek, the word means “to throw together in one’s mind” or we might say, “to toss things around, mull them over.”

Who has time for that, especially in this busy season? Is it all you can do to give emails a quick glance? Do you find your attention drifting if a phone text is more than two sentences? In our long lists of self-imposed Christmas preparations, does pondering find a place?

Mary must have had all kinds of practical matters on her mind too. She had a newborn to care for while living miles from home in temporary quarters. Where would Joseph find food and shelter in coming days? How would they let family know about the birth? Yet with all that, Mary took time to “treasure up all these things and ponder them in her heart.”

She recalled the angel’s unexpected visit and the shocking news that she would conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit and give birth to the Son of God. There was so much to ponder: her own unworthiness and God’s incredible grace, not only toward her but all humankind. As she cared

for the infant Jesus, she could see and ponder God’s promise fulfilled. The eternal God Himself had humbly entered His creation as true Man to save not just the powerful and influential, but even ordinary shepherds. How sad it would be to miss the peace and joy of God’s Gift under the clutter of all the things going on in the world and the hectic busyness of the season.

Ponder the Gift. You won’t regret it. In January none of us says, “I wish I had watched TV instead of attending Wednesday Advent services. I wish I had spent Sunday mornings shopping.” Read Luke 2 again and ponder each verse. Marvel at how the Lord used a heathen emperor and current events of the time for His purposes. Think how small and insignificant we are among the billions in the world. Why should God even notice us sinful mortals? Turn over in your mind and heart the wonder of God’s love in the person of the Word-made-flesh. He did not come just to see our desperate

situation. He came to be our righteousness by fulfilling all our obligations. He came to take upon Himself the death we deserve. From Luke 2 go to John 1 for even more divine truths to ponder.

Ponder the Gift. Then go to the manger and worship with the shepherds. May our “pondering” lead to joyfully “proclaiming” all the wonders God has done!



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

SEEN IN PASSING

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

Christian Schools Shine During COVID. “In a recent survey of public school and Christian school parents, the Herzog Foundation found that parents of children who attended a Christian school were vastly more satisfied with their school experience. Christian parents reported their schools remained open even as nearby public options closed. While only 8 percent of public school parents could report that their schools never closed, a quarter of Christian school parents did. The survey found that during the pandemic, Christian school parents found it easier to manage their child’s time, communicate with teachers, manage their child’s assignments, and were better able to keep up their child’s morale than the parents of children in public schools. As a result, while just over half of public school parents reported being satisfied with their child’s education in 2020, fully 80 percent of Christian school parents were.” Graves, Todd. “Christian Schools Vastly Outperforming Public Schools During COVID-19, According to New Survey of Parents.” *News*. RealClearEducation.com, 27 Aug. 2021. Web. 22 Sep. 2021.

Among the Most Faithful Churchgoers Are . . . Nonmembers? Most are aware of the rapid decline in church membership in the U.S. in recent years, and this trend was confirmed by a Gallup report earlier this year. From the mid-30’s through 1990, a steady 70% of Americans were members of a church or synagogue, but the years since have seen a rapid downward trend. By 2020 church members had declined to 47%. However, among the other findings of the Gallup survey were

some surprising nuggets of information. For example, among those respondents who are members of a church, nearly 20% don’t actually attend (once a year or less). Even more surprising, perhaps, are the 10% of nonmembers who faithfully attend worship services once a week or oftener! Burge, Ryan. “1 in 10 Non-Church Members Still Show Up Every Sunday.” *News & Reporting*. ChristianityToday.com, 24 Aug. 2021. Web. 23 Sep. 2021.



Vacation Bible School at Valley Bible Academy in Clarkston, Washington



CLC Teachers' Conference, held at Messiah Lutheran Church, Hales Corners, Wisconsin, October 20-22.