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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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



"He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light"

--Matthew 17:2



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Your Transfiguration Makeover

“We also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.” (Philippians 3:20-21)

Some years ago, a popular television show called “Extreme Makeover” featured ordinary-looking men and women who were dramatically transformed. Each subject would be secluded from family for many weeks. Each underwent plastic surgery, physical conditioning, beauty enhancements, and a complete wardrobe change. At the conclusion there would be a “big reveal” to family and friends, to everyone’s astonishment. They could hardly recognize the new and improved version of the person they had known before.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus didn’t need life coaches or doctors to dramatically change His appearance. He allowed His inner glory as God’s Son to show forth suddenly when, as Matthew records, “He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.” (Matthew 17:2) After conversing with the Old Testament prophets Moses and Elijah about His upcoming death to redeem all sinners, suddenly everything was back to normal. Only Jesus and His three disciples remained, and they made their way down the mountain to return to their humble lives of service in God’s kingdom.

What a dramatic contrast Jesus’ disciples experienced in how He appeared to them! He went from their humble human teacher, to brilliant glory on the mountain, back to humble teacher, then to the depths of a shameful death on the cross and to the grave. Then, when they met the risen Christ, He was revealed to them again in divine glory. This remembrance of Jesus’ glory must have sustained them in their own dark and humble days of service as His witnesses while building the early church.

But God gave them more than just the memory of seeing Jesus’ glory in the past. In the crucified and risen Savior they also had the certain promise of glory to come—a transfiguration of

their own bodies when He comes again. You have this promise, too! All who trust in the blood-bought righteousness that Jesus earned have a glorious, transfiguration “makeover” in store. It is certainly coming soon, for God promises that “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (Romans 8:11)



Can you picture this “new you”? Can you imagine sharing in the glory that was revealed in Jesus at His transfiguration? Think of it: instead of weakness, strength; instead of sin, pure holiness; instead of confusion, clarity; instead of sorrow, pure joy; instead of impending death, life everlasting! Certainly, a life like that is beyond our imagination, and well worth waiting for during our life of humble service here, for “it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2)

Now that it’s been about twenty years since the “Extreme Makeover” show aired, it would be interesting to see what’s happened to the participants since then. Have they kept up their new look, or gone back to their frumpy old appearance? One thing is certain—in due time all will grow old and weak, and finally meet the grave. There is only one way to reach beyond that fate, and that is through faith in the Savior Who conquered sin, death, and the grave. And with our eyes fixed on that living Savior, our own “big reveal” is certainly coming and will never end. May God keep us all in His grace until Christ’s glory is revealed in us!



Bruce Naumann is senior pastor at Messiah Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

A Servant of His Lord to the End

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” (Revelation 14:13)

Only a few hundred yards separates the birth and death places of Martin Luther (10 November 1483 - 18 February 1546). For a man who never left home or wandered far, this would not be incredible. But for a man of Luther’s stature who traveled extensively in his medieval world, to be born and die in the tiny village of Eisleben, Germany, is remarkable.

By the end of his life Luther’s writings and hymns had spread abroad and had stood up to the power of the emperor and the pope. One would expect a man of great renown to die in an equally prominent city, but Luther had good reason to be at Eisleben at that time.

A dispute had erupted between brothers regarding finances and the local mining industry. This disruption had a negative effect on the extended family of Luther still living in the area and still in the mining business, as Luther’s father had been. Despite the weather (it was cold and bitter) and Luther’s health (it was failing fast), he felt it important to be present to oversee the negotiations.

Luther scholars have studied letters to, from, and about Luther; and have accumulated quite a list of ailments from which he may have been suffering at the time of his death. These include Meniere’s disease, vertigo, fainting, tinnitus, cataracts, kidney and bladder stones, arthritis, ear infection, ruptured ear drum, angina, and digestive troubles. It is no wonder that at 62 years of age Luther called himself an “old man,” and declared to a fellow pastor, “If I get back to Wittenberg, I will lie down in a coffin and give the maggots a fat doctor to eat.”

Despite the gallows humor, Luther kept busy with correspondence with his wife Katie and friend Philip Melancthon. He attended meetings every two or three days, and he preached several sermons—on January 31, February 2 and 7, and a final one on February 14 or 15. Luther uncharacteristically sat as he preached this last sermon and was unable to finish the service. It was clear to those close to him that the end was nearing.

We have eyewitness accounts of Luther’s last several hours from his friends, Pastors Justus Jonas and Michael Coelius. It was more than a morbid curiosity that prompted these gentlemen to record the events for posterity. They knew that the enemies of Luther would like nothing more than to cast

aspersions on his last moments in order to throw doubt and ridicule on all his work. It was the prevailing thought at the time that if an individual were to die suddenly or unawares it was evidence of a punishment from God, or the mark of a grievous sin. As a result, there was a striking scene in which the pastors shouted loudly at Luther so all the house could hear, “Reverend Father! Are you ready to die trusting in your Lord Jesus Christ and to confess the doctrine which you have taught in his name?” And Luther distinctly answered, “Ja.”



A cast of Luther's face taken shortly after his death.

Thus, the reverend doctor slipped from the coils of this world into the arms of his Savior. When

Melancthon heard of the death of his beloved friend and coworker, he expressed his grief by paraphrasing 2 Kings 2:12, “Alas, the charioteer of Israel has fallen!” News of the good doctor’s death spread quickly, and many mourners accompanied the remains on their journey back to Wittenberg. There the body was interred beneath the pulpit of the Castle Church that Luther had served so well.

Whether our lives are long or short, it is important to remember that it is God who directs them. “*In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*” (Psalm 139:16 ESV) So may we strive to live our lives as Luther did, to the glory of God and the benefit of our fellow man.



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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 Lutheran worship service.

The Collect

Most readers of this magazine are Lutherans, and most have probably been Lutherans for years, decades, or even their entire lives. So, then, are you seasoned Lutherans now ready for the “Lutheran Liturgy” quiz about your worship experience all those years?

This quiz is about the Collect (pronounced “KAHL-ekt”). All of you probably recognize the Collect as a short prayer that comes after the Salutation and before the Epistle lesson in the Morning Service and the Communion Service. Perhaps you’ve even realized that the Collect usually focuses on the thoughts of the Epistle or Gospel lesson appointed for that day (or sometimes for the season in general). That’s good, but now for the quiz: How many parts are there to the Collect, and what are those parts?

Don’t feel bad if you’re stumped. It’s sort of a trick question, anyway, because not all Collects fit the outline as detailed below. Besides that, we sometimes do not do a very good job of teaching the lay members of our churches the nuances of specific aspects of our liturgy. However, it’s interesting and—more importantly—*edifying* to actually understand those “fine points,” because that understanding enhances our appreciation of the blessings God gives us through our liturgy.

Here’s the answer to the quiz. In general, there are five specific parts to a Collect, although part two (the *acknowledgement*) or part four (the *aspiration*) are sometimes not included. Since this is the Epiphany season, let’s use the Collect for the Second Sunday after Epiphany from *TLH* (shown in bold print and a different typestyle below) as examples of the five parts. Please note that the examples below are from that particular Collect, and the comments about each part pertain to this one Collect. Every Collect is unique in its content, even though most of them conform to a specified format.

Part One The *invocation* or *address*: this part indicates the person of the Trinity being addressed: usually God the Father, sometimes God the Son. **“Almighty and everlasting God,”** This Collect is addressed to God the Father. When the Collect is addressed to God the Son, it typically uses the form of “O

Lord.” However, please note: there are frequent exceptions to this convention.

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end, Amen.

Part Two The *acknowledgement*: this is a description of a specific divine attribute or activity that relates to the petition. “. . . who dost govern all things in heaven and earth,” Here we recognize that God is in control of all things.

Part Three The *petition*: This is what we are praying for. It is to be for one thing and should be short and direct. “. . . mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people”

Part Four The *aspiration*: This states the desired result of the petition. Because God controls all things (Part Two), and because we are asking that He would attend to our prayer (Part Three), we now state what result we wish to have as a consequence of our petition. **“and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life;”** The *acknowledgement*, the *petition*, and the *aspiration* form a natural and logical sequence.

Part Five The *ending*: When the Collect is offered to God the Father, the ending is usually **“through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.”** For the rare Collects that are offered to God the Son, the ending usually eliminates “through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord,” and begins with “who livest. . .” Note that in either ending, we are praying to the only true God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The Collect: a “short and sweet” prayer that directs our thoughts to what is to come in the rest of the worship service. God be praised for the blessings of our liturgy!



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Living Stones Built Upon The Living Stone

“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

‘Behold, I lay in Zion

A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,

And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.’” (1 Peter 2:4-6)

When contractors are building a house, they use a wide variety of materials to construct it. Those materials may include concrete, wood, sheet rock, bricks, and on occasion stones. As a building material, stones are unique, because they come in many shapes, sizes, and colors.

In his writing concerning the Holy Christian Church, the apostle Peter uses a metaphor, depicting Christ’s Church of believers as a spiritual house made up of stones. They are not cold and lifeless stones, but rather living stones, being spiritually alive in Christ Jesus.

Just as each stone used in building a house is unique, so also is each Christian. Believers come in different sizes, ages, abilities, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds. As different as we may be, we are all joined together to make up one spiritual house through faith in Christ Jesus.

Faith in Jesus is key to our being included in God’s special house, for He is the one and only Living Stone that God’s house could be built upon. So crucial is the crucified and risen Lord Jesus that Peter speaks of Him as the “*chief cornerstone*” (verse 6). Even as a cornerstone used in a material building is important, determining the different lines extending out from it and making the difference between having a stable building or a rickety one, so also our Chief Cornerstone provides us with a sure and unshakeable foundation with His inspired Word and redemptive work.

Jesus is a very precious Stone to the heavenly Father, for He is the only-begotten Son of God. In eternity, God in His infinite wisdom and unconditional love chose this precious Stone for us to be founded on, because Jesus alone could redeem

Peter uses a metaphor, depicting Christ’s Church of believers as a spiritual house made up of stones.

us sinful, lifeless stones unto God, make us alive unto God, enable us to be righteous in God’s sight, and bless us with the eternal inheritance of heaven.

Not only are we believers God’s spiritual house, but in Christ we are also regarded as holy priests who are to serve in His temple. We were made priests of God for a very special purpose, and that purpose is to live our lives unto God, serving Him by offering up spiritual sacrifices. Those sacrifices can include many different

things, like giving our time, talents, financial resources, and energy in the service of God’s kingdom. Our acts of service are found to be God-pleasing and acceptable only when they are done out of faith in Christ and in the spirit of Christian love.

When a contractor has completed the construction of a house, he turns the keys over to the owner of that house, and the building is finished. This is not the case with God’s spiritual house of believers. Peter speaks of us “*being built up*” in an ongoing process. As a popular sign reads, “God’s work with me is not done.” Through our continued use of God’s Word and sacrament, the Lord enables us to be built up in ever-increasing measure in religious knowledge, spiritual faith, and Christian love.

Praise be to God for including us in His spiritual house!



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The Lord's Sending

“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah . . . saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city.’” (Jonah 1:1-2)

Shortly before His ascension into heaven, Jesus told His followers that, as they are going through their lives in this world, they are to make disciples of all nations, employing the Gospel via Baptism and what they teach (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus calls all who follow Him to do this. Every believer is to share the Gospel of Christ as opportunities present themselves, and to live his life as a witness unto the Lord. Communities of Christians have also sent missionaries forth with the Gospel to proclaim in places far away.

While we consider this the norm in the New Testament, it was not so in the Old Testament. Most of the focus back then was on the maintenance and protection of the nation that rose from the family of Abraham. Some did emigrate to other places, taking their faith and Scriptures with them. Most, however, remained in the land of their ancestors with their eyes set on Jerusalem and its temple. If people from other nations wanted to learn about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that is where they would go.

We can only imagine how surprised Jonah was when he was called to go to another nation to preach, especially to a city as pagan and warlike as Nineveh. He didn't concur at all with the Lord that it was fitting to go there and preach. His response to the Lord's call was to go in exactly the opposite direction! He wanted no part of the challenges he imagined awaited him in Nineveh. There was no desire on his part to endure being around people he detested.

Even though we now live in an era where mission outreach is the calling of every believer, that doesn't necessarily make it easier. Venturing away from what feels safe and secure to share the Good News with others can be unsettling. While we may not be in a situation where we fear for our lives, it will almost always mean risk and vulnerability.

When we take the time to count our blessings from God, we may wonder why He showers so many on us. Our first thought may be that God blesses us because He loves us as His children. That is correct! There is, however, more to it than that. Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 remind us that God gives specific gifts to each of His children for the profit of all. Christians, in turn, as individuals and communities, are called to use those gifts to impart the Gospel to those who do not yet know Christ as their Savior.

*Will I stumble over my words?
Will I say the wrong thing?
What if they get angry?*

As alluded to previously, that will probably not be an easy or comfortable thing for Christians to do. Will I stumble over my words? Will I say the wrong thing? What if they get angry? What if they don't like me anymore? Sharing our faith may feel like a very risky thing to do!

In Genesis 12 we read that the Lord told Abram to leave his country and go to a land that God would show him. Abram did what God told him without questioning. God promised to be with him and bless him but didn't tell him where he was going. Abram simply trusted God with what lay in the future. Jesus beckons us to go through life in the power of the Gospel, while proclaiming that same Gospel. We trust Him to go with us and bless us, and we leave what the future holds in His hands. It won't always be comfortable, but Jesus will work all things together for good.



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Introduction to the Parables

Charles Dickens called it “the finest short story ever told.” Whether he was referring to its literary quality or its theological message, it is true of both. The Prodigal Son is a masterpiece that is as compelling today as it was two thousand years ago. With an economy of words, the parable convicts, pardons, and warns in a more captivating way than simply saying those things directly. That’s the power of parables. They are designed to make us think, smile, be enraged, find courage, weep over sin, be surprised by God’s grace, or do a pulse-check on our faith.

Lutherans define *parable* as an earthly narrative with a heavenly meaning. Each parable makes a point in a way that direct discourse cannot. Would David have repented if the prophet Nathan had simply called him out for his sins? We don’t know. We do know that the king was totally absorbed in the parable of the rich man stealing his neighbor’s pet lamb. With his blood pressure rising and neck veins bulging, David never saw it coming. “*You are the man,*” Nathan explained (2 Samuel 12:7). Nothing more had to be said, other than to assure David that the Lord had also put away his sin.

As with other rhetorical devices, there are rules to follow when dealing with parables. The most important? There is one, single, main point. Incidental points are important for setting the stage, but to press a parable’s details beyond what they’re designed to do does an injustice to the speaker or writer’s intent.

The Parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8), for example, does not teach that God is reluctant to answer our prayers or that we have to wear Him down to get a response. God is the opposite of the Unjust Judge. He loves to hear and answer the prayers of His people. But He does want us to have the tenacity and determination of the widow seeking justice. Why doesn’t He answer our prayers immediately? He explains in verse 8, “*When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*” If God answered our every prayer as we want, when

we want, what would happen to our faith?

In many cases, the main point is found where the parable turns. The point of the Rich Fool is not his bumper crop or bigger grain bins. The parable’s hinge is that, even when he was all set for a comfortable retirement, he wasn’t set at all when death tapped him on the shoulder.



Another rule: pay attention to context. The parable might be in response to a question, such as, “How many times should I forgive someone?” Or, “Who is my neighbor?” At times, parables are placed back-to-back, making the same point from different perspectives. This happens with the Treasure Buried in a Field and the Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:44-45). A man stumbled upon the treasure by accident, when he wasn’t

looking for it. The merchant was looking for something, and once he saw the Pearl, he immediately recognized what that something was. Most of us entered the kingdom of God without seeking it, much like the man stumbling upon the treasure. Others entered it when they were searching for something, and the Gospel suddenly found and enlightened them. In both cases, everything else in life becomes less important.

The keys to interpreting parables: Look for the single, main point. Pay attention to details that set the stage. Determine context or any lead-in questions. Identify the characters. Watch for the hinge where the parable turns. Test the interpretation against the clear words of Scripture.



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This series offers an overview of the chief teachings of the Christian church.

The Holy Spirit

Jesus, just hours away from His suffering and death, promised to send to His disciples what He described as “the Comforter,” namely, the Holy Spirit. “He will glorify Me,” Jesus said, “for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:14) The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Godhead, and is an intimate Partner in our relationship with God.



But Who is the Holy Spirit? How is it that God, who “is spirit” (John 4:24) can somehow have a Spirit? We admit right off that we have no way of knowing or understanding the nature of the Holy Spirit apart from what Scripture reveals to us. So, we may not get all our questions answered, but we can learn from God’s Word all that we really need to know about Him.

For the present, we’ll emphasize just two great truths about Him. The first is that the Holy Spirit is God, since qualities are applied to Him that are also applied to the Father and to the Son. The Holy Spirit, for instance, is omnipresent (present everywhere), as we learn from Psalm 139:7: “Where can I go from Your Spirit?” Likewise, the Spirit is omniscient (all knowing), as Paul says in I Corinthians 2:10: “The Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” Christ, Hebrews 9:14 says, offered Himself through the “eternal Spirit” of God. Nothing is eternal but God.

The Holy Spirit is said to participate in divine works: Genesis 1:2 says the Spirit was there at the beginning of creation, and in Titus 3:5 we hear that “according to His mercy [God] saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” These are tasks that only God can do, and they are ascribed to the Holy Spirit.

The other great truth we’ll focus on here is that, as with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is a person of the Godhead. The Bible does not speak of the Spirit merely as some sort of energy or activity of God. The Spirit has a personality and a will all His own. When we are baptized, we are baptized in the name of “the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), thus He is intimately present in the saving effect of Baptism. In the section of John mentioned above,

John 16, Jesus repeatedly speaks of the Comforter as “He,” not “it.”

That the Holy Spirit is a divine person, acting in concert with the Father and Son for our salvation, leads the believer to appeal to Him in prayer. There is a whole series of Pentecost hymns that do just that. Thus we pray to the Holy Spirit:

“Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord!
Be all Thy graces now out poured
On each believer’s mind and heart;
Thy fervent love to them impart.”
(TLH 224:1)

“Come, oh, come, Thou quickening Spirit
God from all eternity!
May Thy power never fail us
Dwell within us constantly.” (TLH 226.1)

And the lovely

“We now implore God the Holy Ghost
for the true faith which we need the most
that in our last moments He may befriend us
and as homeward we journey attend us.
Lord, have mercy!” (TLH 231:1)

It might occur to the reader that we’ve made the case that the Holy Spirit is truly God, but we haven’t said much about what He does. The work of the Spirit, and how He operates, will come in future articles. But these hymn stanzas should give us a good idea of that work: He “quickens” (makes alive) those who are dead in sin; He works “the true faith” within us; He comes to “dwell” in us as a very personal extension of the living God and “attends” us in our heavenward journey. What a Comfort He is in this present life!



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WHAT'S NEW WITH YOU?

Updates from congregations around the Church of the Lutheran Confession

Saint Stephen Lutheran Church and School of the San Francisco Peninsula, and Saint Stephen Lutheran Church of the East Bay

It's been a little more than five years since the "Slice of Life" articles about our California congregations appeared in the *Lutheran Spokesman*. Since then, quite a bit has happened. Here's a small slice of "What's New" with your brothers and sisters in Christ in the San Francisco Bay Area and throughout California.

Saint Stephen Lutheran Church and School of the San Francisco Peninsula (Mountain View, California)

Our congregation certainly has had its share of challenges over the past five years. However, along with these challenges, not only has the Lord faithfully gotten us through them, He has also provided numerous blessings as a result—many of them unexpected!

The COVID restrictions led us to put our entire worship services online, complete with hymns and readings on the screen. We have gotten good and regular viewership, especially during the first year of the pandemic, and even have regular non-CLC viewers each week (one from as far away as Arkansas!)

We also began an online Wednesday Night Bible Study during the pandemic. This had the added blessing of allowing many of our scattered California CLC members from Sacramento down to San Diego to get to meet each other virtually for online fellowship and Bible Study.

The Lord has provided us with several in-person visitors from the nearby retirement communities who attend our services and Bible Classes regularly.

Our school staff was reduced to one full-time teacher, Mikkela Hammond, after our previous principal, Rebecca Lillo, and her family moved back to Wisconsin, where she now serves in our



CLC school in Markesan. Our enrollment for this year was too low to provide funding for two full-time teachers, but we were able to hire Julia "Jewels" Bernthal as our part-time school administrator. This has proved to be a tremendous blessing to our school, as Julia's skills in photography, marketing, and web-design have helped increase our school's exposure in our area and, by the grace of God, helped bring in two new students at the end of October. Our current enrollment for this school year is up to eleven students, whose families are from five different countries, including the U.S., and from various religious backgrounds. One of our students, a member of our East Bay congregation, was able to join our school last year because we have been offering "hybrid" classes (online and in-person) since the start of the pandemic. Her family lives two hours away, and her school attendance would not



Sanctuary, Saint Stephen of the San Francisco Peninsula.

have been possible if not for the online classes. This is yet another reminder that the Lord works out all things for good!

We've had several building projects and property improvements in the past few years as well. A much-needed new church sign and landscaping project was completed at the end of 2018. In 2020 we were able to refurbish the parsonage garage apartment into a new teacher's apartment thanks to the untiring labor of a number of our members and generous donations from Saint Stephen members, past and present. As a result of the sale of our former teacherage, we were able to hire out the replacement of the flooring in our entryway, fellowship hall, and church and school office. This project will be completed, Lord willing, near the end of February. Other property improvement projects are in the discussion phase.

Our preaching station in Southern California (Saint Stephen-South) continues to meet every other month. While the group's numbers have gone down over the past few years, this small group is very faithful and appreciative of their time together around the Word.

Saint Stephen Lutheran Church of the East Bay (Hayward, California)

Our East Bay congregation had the blessing of a youth confirmation for the first time in quite a few years in June of 2021. This congregation's numbers have declined slightly over the past few years as the Lord has taken a number of our older members to their heavenly home. However, our East Bay members are very faithful in their church and Bible Class attendance each week.

The East Bay congregation also has a preaching station in Stockton, California (Saint Stephen-Central Valley) that meets monthly at Oakmont Senior Living Center. We minister to a number of residents there who attend regularly and gather for the Lord's Supper afterwards with those who are members of our congregation.

We also are grateful for the home ministry of the Forever Easter House in Sacramento, California, which is the work of two of our



Some members of Saint Stephen of the San Francisco Peninsula.

East Bay members, Warren Malach and Joy Saint John. This couple houses and ministers to a number of people who are dealing with homelessness issues, as well as a variety of other challenges. This group is very appreciative of their time together around the Word, whether it is by watching and participating in the worship services from Saint Stephen online, or at our quarterly gatherings in person for worship, visiting, and counseling. We had the privilege of welcoming one of the Forever Easter House residents into our fellowship at a special confirmation worship service in August. Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!

Please continue to pray for our California congregations and our school. We trust that God will see us through the various challenges that lie ahead with even more of His "unexpected" blessings. And if your travels bring you out to the Golden State, please come and visit us at one of our congregations or preaching stations for worship and fellowship!



Students of Saint Stephen Lutheran School.



Luke Bernthal is the pastor of Saint Stephen Lutheran Church of the East Bay in Hayward, California, and Saint Stephen Lutheran Church of the San Francisco Peninsula in Mountain View, California.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

In this series, those involved with CLC foreign missions profile one aspect of our overseas endeavors.

The Open Door

“**A**nd when they arrived, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” (Acts 14:27 ESV) Such is Luke’s report at the conclusion of Paul and Barnabas’s evangelism trek.

What is an open door?

In Revelation 3:8 we learn that the Lord set before the church at Philadelphia an open door which no one could shut. But on Paul’s second missionary journey there was definitely a closed door in Asia Minor (Acts 16:6-7).

We today receive no direct messages from God as to a specific open or closed door. We have to go back to the Great Commission, given by our resurrected Lord to His church and repeated by the Gospel writers. It references “*all the world*” and “*the whole creation*” (Mark 16:15).

As ambassadors for Him we seek an audience for His Word. If they will not allow us to speak, or if upon hearing, they reject it, then the door would appear to be closed. But notice that we make the attempt to present the Gospel message as His emissaries.

Sometimes the door may *appear* to be closed, when upon closer investigation it is not. When Paul suffered persecution at Antioch in Pisidia and Iconium, culminating in his being stoned at Lystra, one would be inclined to say “Door Closed.” But it was not, and shortly thereafter Paul went right back through those same cities preaching the Word.

We do see the “door closed” demonstrated after the attempt to give the Good News by the seventy: “*But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe*



off against you; nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.” (Luke 10:10-11 ESV) But remember that at Antioch in Pisidia Paul and Barnabas were driven out and persecution was stirred against them. Yet even though they had shaken the dust from their feet against them, they later returned. The door had been closed, but only for a time.

Today

How can we determine if a door is open or closed to the Word? There will be no vision of a man of Macedonia beckoning to a certain place, nor will there be a direct revelation of the Spirit to stay clear of another place. We should assume that all the world is the open door until we see, through the exercise of God-given wisdom, that the place, town, district, or nation is closed to the Word.

Not all doors are wide open. Sometimes the door is open but a bit. It is our task to see how we might go through that opening to speak His Word. Go to one side and look at the door; perhaps from that vantage point you think the door is closed. Yet from another vantage point you may see the door is open. Some may be too quick to assume that a door is closed. There is more than one way to see things. There are a variety of ways to go into all the world with His Good News. First, we must remember to look into the heart of God from Scripture: “*God . . . desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” (1 Timothy 2:4) Secondly, we pray.



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.

IN THE PIPELINE

Want to meet the person who may be your next pastor or Christian day school teacher? This series profiles the men and women who are in their final year of preparation for the public teaching or preaching ministry at our Immanuel Lutheran College and Seminary in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Danielle Gamble



Age: 22

Program: Education

Year in School: Senior

Where were you born?

Farmington, Minnesota.

Where did you grow up?

Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota.

Married? Unmarried? Tell us about your family.

I am engaged to Pastor Zachary Sippert and will be married in May 2023. My parents are Nick and Joanna Gamble. They, as well as my brother and his wife, live in the Twin Cities area.

What hobbies, sports or extracurriculars interest you?

I enjoy painting and other forms of art, puzzles, and both watching and playing a variety of sports.

Tell us one thing about yourself that most people don't know.

I spent a lot of time in the garage with my dad as a kid and although I didn't retain much of it, I still do prefer to change my own oil.

Which academic subjects especially interest you?

I have always enjoyed math and art. Some of my favorite college courses at ILC were Dogmatics and Science Methods.

How did you first come to consider the public teaching or preaching ministry as a career?

If anyone had asked me in my first two-and-a-half years of high school what I was going to do, I would have confidently said "I'm going to be an engineer." Midway through my junior year, I realized that wasn't the path for me. I wanted a career that combined both my logical and artistic sides, and I really came to recognize the importance of the Christian education I had received and the positive influence my grade school teachers had on me. As I considered each of these things, the Lord led me to begin the education program at Immanuel.

What have you appreciated most about your time at ILC?

Being surrounded by many who shared my beliefs, I found ILC to be a comfortable and nourishing place to grow as a young adult and as a Christian. Throughout my time at Immanuel, my Christian education never stopped. I have always enjoyed learning, and the professors at ILC encouraged me by both word and example to keep God's Word as the object of my education. What greater gift could a school have given me?

What qualities do you think will most be needed by the future leaders of the church?

Faithfulness and love. Faithfulness to God, to all the teachings of His Word, to the students we teach, the congregations we serve, to family, and to friends. Love for God, His true Word, and each of His children. We trust and pray that faithfulness and love pour out of the gift of faith which we have received.

“BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS FEBRUARY 2023

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

Date	Hymns	Reading	Comments
February 1	Proverbs 1:1-19	TLH 427	The fear of the Lord is the starting point and foundation of all true knowledge. However, as we go through life, we do not leave behind the starting point. Rather, we take it with us all through life. For <i>"a wise man will hear and increase learning."</i> (1:5)
February 2	Proverbs 1:20-33	TLH 366	We are to <i>"search for [wisdom] as for hidden treasures."</i> (2:4) We are to <i>"apply our hearts to understanding."</i> (2:2) Wisdom is a gift from God which leads us down every good path, and which is pleasant to the soul. The wisdom of God's Word delivers from the way of evil, but those who turn from it will experience a miserable end.
February 3	Proverbs 2:1-22	WS 772	Wisdom calls out to all. We are called to go into all the world with the message of Christ and the cross, the very wisdom of God. This wisdom is not attained by one's intellect. It is the Spirit which makes God's wisdom known to us so that we trust in it.
February 4	Proverbs 3:1-20	TLH 428	Man has a sinful propensity to trust in himself, to be wise in his own heart. But wisdom tells us <i>"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths."</i> (3:5)
February 6	Proverbs 4:10-27	TLH 285	The longer one walks the path of wisdom in Christ, the brighter that path becomes. One day believers will walk in the brightness of that perfect day, in the very presence of Him Who is light itself. So always <i>"let your eyes look straight ahead"</i> (4:25) to Christ and life to come.
February 7	Proverbs 6:1-19	TLH 400	Laziness is something to guard against, especially in doing the Lord's work. Solomon points to the ant as an example of industriousness. Ants have initiative, not needing someone to prod them to keep working. Let's learn the lesson of the ant, and thank Jesus for taking the initiative in coming to save us.
February 8	Proverbs 6:20-35	TLH 398	The consequences of sexual immorality are devastating. Godly parents will faithfully teach their children the blessings of chastity. Our bodies were bought at a high price and are also the temples of the Holy Spirit. Let us, therefore, honor God with our bodies.
February 9	Proverbs 8:1-21	TLH 416	Unlike evil lurking in the shadows, wisdom shouts its message in public for all to hear. Where the paths meet (at the crossroads of life), we are often faced with difficult decisions. Wisdom is there to guide us. This is not any kind of wisdom, but the wisdom of Christ and His perfect Word.
February 10	Proverbs 8:22-36	TLH 294	Wisdom speaks of herself as <i>"from the beginning, before there was ever an earth."</i> (8:23) This is referring to Jesus Christ, Who, at creation, stood by God the Father as a master craftsman. Jesus is the everlasting God, and our Savior. In Him <i>"are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."</i> (Colossians 2:3)
February 11	Proverbs 9:1-18	TLH 284	We come back to the core message of Proverbs. <i>"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."</i> (9:10) True wisdom is found only in the Lord. (Again, the pinnacle of all wisdom is Christ crucified.) Sadly, most choose folly over wisdom. Only by God's grace can we cling in faith to wisdom.
February 13	Proverbs 11:1-20	TLH 287	Many blessings flow from a godly life. Some examples: <i>"When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom."</i> (11:2) <i>"A gracious woman retains honor, But ruthless men retain riches."</i> (11:16) Yes, blessings flow from a godly life. Yet we remember sinners are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus alone.
February 14	Proverbs 12:1-28	WS 491	There is a sharp contrast between how the godly (the believer in Christ) and the wicked (the unbeliever) communicate. <i>"There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword. But the tongue of the wise promotes health."</i> (12:18) The Gospel of Christ, above all else, gives health to our sin-stricken souls.
February 15	Proverbs 13:1-25	TLH 282	Proverbs offers more than guidance for daily life. In several places it teaches that the Word of God gives eternal life. <i>"The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death."</i> (13:14 ESV) As Peter once said of Jesus: <i>"You have the words of eternal life."</i> (John 6:68)
February 16	Proverbs 16:1-20	TLH 408	<i>"Pride goes before destruction."</i> (16:18) Unchecked sinful pride leads to eternal destruction. Pray for humble hearts so that we place God's wisdom above our proud, sin-tainted reason. <i>"God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus."</i> (Galatians 6:14)
February 17	Proverbs 18:1-24	WS 774	Proverbs speaks of two different types of safety. One leads to true and lasting security, while the other only offers a false security. <i>"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe. The rich man's wealth is his strong city, And like a high wall in his own esteem."</i> (18:11-12)
February 18	Proverbs 22:1-29	TLH 416	<i>"There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!"</i> (22:13) Lazy people will dream up the most outrageous reasons to get out of work. Redeemed by the blood of Christ and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we have every reason to work hard and to do our best to the glory of God.
February 20	Proverbs 24:1-16	TLH 626	<i>"Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; By knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches."</i> (24:3-4) When wisdom from above builds the house, that house is filled with the <i>"pleasant riches"</i> of the love, forgiveness, and patience of Jesus.
February 21	Proverbs 24:17-34	TLH 439	<i>"Do not say, 'I will do to him just as he has done to me.'"</i> (24:29) In clear contrast to the prevailing attitude of the world, God's people are called to do good to their enemies. Our aim is to <i>"walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us."</i> (Ephesians 5:2)
February 22	Proverbs 26:1-28	TLH 226	<i>"Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down."</i> (26:20 NIV '84) If no wood is put on the fire, it dies out. If one refrains from gossip, it's hard to keep a quarrel burning hot. The Spirit and Word will help us speak words of kindness and love.
February 23	Proverbs 27:1-28	WS 767	<i>"Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another."</i> (27:17 ESV) This verse can remind us of the value of attending Bible class. When we study together we sharpen one another's understanding of God's Word. God puts us into a family of believers. How blessed we are when we take advantage of our fellow Christians' scriptural insights.
February 24	Proverbs 28:1-18	TLH 279	<i>"He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."</i> (28:13) Here we have an expression of the sweet, forgiving grace of God. We are all sinners. Let's admit it, and then turn to our Savior, Who will never drive us away.
February 25	Proverbs 29:1-27	TLH 625	<i>"Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart."</i> (27:17 ESV) Loving discipline is absolutely necessary in raising godly children. Children who are corrected, while continually assured of both the parents' and Jesus' love, will bring delight to their parents. <i>"Oh, blest the house, whate'er befall, Where Jesus Christ is all in all!"</i> (TLH 625)
February 27	Proverbs 30:1-33	TLH 283	<i>"Every word of God is pure . . . Do not add to His words."</i> (30:5-6) Blessed are those who attend a church where every word of the Bible is regarded as pure truth. Treasure the Bible. It points to Jesus, and has everything we need for this life and the life to come.
February 28	Proverbs 31:10-31	TLH 624	<i>"A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies."</i> (31:10 NIV '84) Having a wife who fears the Lord and is of a noble character is better than the most priceless jewelry. Such a woman is industrious, wise, and caring. Her children call her blessed, and her husband praises her.

MISSION NEWSLETTER

Every other month our CLC Board of Missions updates us with recent news from various mission fields.

A NEW FULL-TIME MISSIONARY

We give thanks to the Lord that He has led Pastor Bruce Naumann to accept the call to serve as the CLC's third full-time foreign missionary. He will be working primarily among our fellow Christians in the CLC-Tanzania. His main work will be to serve at the Wartburg Lutheran Theological Seminary as an instructor to men preparing for the pastoral ministry. He will also be training the next generation of seminary instructors.

Pastor Naumann is well acquainted with



Missionary Bruce Naumann and wife Paula.

CLC-Tanzania, Pastor Naumann will also have opportunity to visit our sister church bodies in Kenya, Zambia, and Uganda as circumstances allow.

Pastor Naumann is excited for this new opportunity to serve the Lord and His people in East Africa. He writes, "I am enthusiastic about helping to equip men who are studying for a lifetime of service to the Lord in the public ministry of the Tanzanian Church of the Lutheran Confession, as well as students who may come to us from the CLC-Kenya. There are also many doors that appear to be



A graduation ceremony of Tanzanian seminary students.

our foreign mission work. He served on the Board of Missions from 1994-2010 serving as chairman from 1998-2010. He traveled to India in 2000, to East and West Africa in 2005, to East Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2008, and he most recently participated in the Mission Helper trip to Nepal in 2021.

Pastor Naumann will continue to serve at Messiah Lutheran in Eau Claire through the end of February. In March he will begin packing and preparing for his trip. Plans are underway for a commissioning service to be held at Messiah in the middle of March. Pastor Naumann will then travel to Arusha, Tanzania, and will begin his work in the seminary with the beginning of their second semester on April 10. Plans are to have his wife Paula join him in August. In addition to his work with the

ready to open, God willing, for Gospel outreach in outlying areas."

We pray that the Lord would watch over Pastor Naumann and his wife during this time of transition. May He enable them to adjust to living overseas, keep them safe from all danger, and give success to their labors.



Robert Sauers is pastor of Luther Memorial Church in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and a member of the CLC Board of Missions

SEEN IN PASSING

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

New AI Apps Attempt to Summon Up the Dead. In an article for *MIT Technology Review*, Charlotte Jee reviewed several new apps that utilize artificial intelligence to let you “talk” to dead relatives. Apps such as HereAfterAI, StoryFile, and YouOnlyVirtual allow you to input data about deceased loved ones—such as audio and video files, emails, and text messages. From these, the apps construct virtual “people” with whom you can talk, or even video conference. Rapid advances in artificial intelligence have made these applications uncannily accurate, to the point that some users forget that they’re not talking to the real people. In many cases the technology seems to be outrunning the ethics, however, making many people uncomfortable. YouOnlyVirtual uses the tagline “Never Have to Say Goodbye”—but it’s not actually clear how many people want or are ready for a world like that. Grieving for those who have passed away is, for most people, one of the few aspects of life still largely untouched by modern technology. “People are extremely scared of death,” said entrepreneur Eugenia Kuyda, creator of *Replika*. “They don’t want to talk about it or touch it. When you take a stick and start poking, it freaks them out. They’d rather pretend it doesn’t exist.” Jee, Charlotte. “Technology that lets us ‘speak’ to our dead relatives has arrived. Are we ready?” *Humans and Technology*. TechnologyReview.com, 18 Oct. 2022. Web. 17 Dec. 2022.

Biden Administration Declines to Take Transgender Fight to Supreme Court. The test case *Franciscan Alliance v. Becerra* was brought by a Catholic hospital system and the Christian Medical and Dental Associations, who view medical interventions designed to “change” a person’s gender to be harmful—contrary both to the best medical data about how to treat individuals struggling with gender dysphoria and to their religious understanding of sexuality and the human person. They therefore decline to perform such procedures, or to cover them in their insurance plans. In 2016, however, the federal government attempted to force them to do both. That year the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a rule that healthcare professionals and insurance plans must perform and insure gender transitions, or else face crippling penalties. Fortunately, religious-freedom law protects the ability of religious doctors and hospitals to take a different path. In 2021, a federal court in Texas struck down the transgender mandate as unlawful and permanently blocked the federal government from forcing the plaintiffs to perform or insure gender transitions. The Biden Administration—joined by the ACLU—appealed, but a unanimous Fifth Circuit affirmed—

becoming the first federal appellate court to block the transgender mandate. And in December the Biden Administration let its deadline for appealing to the Supreme Court expire—meaning that healthcare professionals nationwide can now get back to their work without fear that the mandate will be applied to them. Davis, Joe. “Biden Admin Waives Supreme Court Review in Key Transgender Fight.” *Articles*. RealClearPolicy.com, 2 Dec. 2022. Web. 17 Dec. 2022.

Earth’s Magnetic Shift Used to Confirm Biblical Account of the Destruction of Gath. Gath was an important city of the Philistines in Bible times. The home of the giant, Goliath, Gath is estimated by some scholars to have had a population of over 10,000. Now a new scientific technique appears to confirm the biblical account (2 Kings 12:17) of the Syrian king Hazael’s destruction of Gath. The earth’s magnetic field shifts measurably from year to year, and when stones (or in this case, mud bricks) are heated to over 600 degrees Fahrenheit, that year’s magnetic “signature” is imprinted on them. Certain sites, whose destruction dates are known, provide “anchors” that can be used to reliably date other sites. Using such chronological anchors, archaeologists create a timeline. In this case they recorded the intensity and direction shown in mud bricks from 21 archaeological layers at 17 sites to discover exactly when each of these cities was destroyed. The team showed that several cities were destroyed around the same time — Tel Rehov, Horvat Tevet, Tel Zayit, and Gath. They suggest that all of these cities were destroyed by Hazael, fulfilling the prophecy of Elisha in 2 Kings 8:11-12, “I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel: Their strongholds you will set on fire . . .” Fernandez, Elizabeth. “Earth’s magnetic field supports biblical stories of destruction of ancient cities.” *The Past*. BigThink.com, 2 Dec. 2022. Web. 17 Dec. 2022.