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# LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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



Then cleansed be every Christian breast  
And furnished for so great a Guest.  
Yea, let us each our hearts prepare  
For Christ to come and enter there.

-TLH 63:2



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# A Proper Christmas Begins with a Proper Preparation

If you want to have a big, meaningful celebration of anything, it takes careful planning and preparation. So, of course, such careful preparation is necessary to make our Christmas celebration meaningful. But I'm not talking about planning parties and preparing Christmas treats or even decorating the house and church. Those are all fine and enjoyable customs, but those are ways we express our joy in Christ's birth, not how we fill our hearts with that joy.

It is not our customs and observances that elevate Christmas to its appropriate level. It is the other way around. The promise and the meaning of Christmas is what lifts our hearts and makes our celebration meaningful. That is why Advent is so much more than counting down the days, or a time to plan activities and make the needed preparations. It is a time to prepare our hearts to receive and rejoice in God's Gift.

Four thousand years of waiting for the Messiah built a sense of longing and need among God's faithful people. The prophets were sent by God to convict the people of their sins and call them back to the Lord in repentance.

The season of Advent is made up of four Sundays and emphasizes the need for repentance and forgiveness. It may seem to some that talking about repentance is a downer in this "joyful" season. However, the greatest need produces the greatest joy when that need is fulfilled. When we see our great sinfulness and how that separates us from God and brings His wrath, then we will rejoice all the more to celebrate the fact that Jesus came "not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28) What a reason to celebrate: that He willingly "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works"! (Titus 2:14)



Advent also focuses on God's promises. Those promises fill us with confidence and security as we see God's faithfulness in meticulously planning every little detail of our salvation to make sure that nothing could fail. Over three hundred prophecies about our Savior were all fulfilled perfectly. Can you fathom the depth of God's love, that He would put so much thought and planning into something that cost Him so dearly and caused Him such pain and suffering? It was all driven by His love for you and His desire to make you His own. When we know the love behind the gift, that makes the gift so much more precious.

Advent also looks beyond the celebration of Christ's birth to the promise of His return. We are not just celebrating a great event that happened two thousand years ago, but rejoicing that He came to secure our future—the most glorious future! As we see Him in the manger, that builds a sense of anticipation and hope, for that Child in the manger accomplished everything that was necessary to give us eternal life with Him in Paradise. He has promised to return so that we may be with Him where He is—in His presence, seeing His glory, and rejoicing in His love forever.

If you want a truly joyous, heartfelt Christmas, then take the time now to prepare your heart to receive Christ. Dig into the Scriptures. Contemplate your sinfulness and where you would be without Christ. Meditate on God's great love and the sacrifice He made for you. And look ahead with joy and anticipation for the day when Christ will return, and we will have the fulness of joy in His presence, and enjoy pleasures forevermore at His right hand (Psalm 16:11).



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

# Comfortable?

Are you comfortable right now? We are willing to go a long way to feel comfortable. We like to wear “comfy” clothes and sit in comfortable chairs. For car owners living in colder climates this time of year, we like to press a button to start our car so that the heater, the seat, and even the steering wheel are all warmed up for us.

We even like to feel comfortable at church. We like to sit in our usual pews and sing familiar hymns.

But imagine for a moment arriving at church this Sunday to find a guest speaker who looks like he has never had a haircut and wears rough-looking clothes. If that doesn't make you uncomfortable, his sermon certainly will! He begins his sermon by saying to you, “*Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*” (Luke 3:7-9) (Though, perhaps in place of “Abraham” he would substitute “Martin Luther” or “the CLC” as he preached to us.) How comfortable would you feel hearing that sermon?

This was the message of John the Baptist, a Nazarene with uncut hair, who lived in the wilderness and wore clothes made of camel hide. Isaiah calls John, “*the Voice.*” (Isaiah 40:3-8, Matthew 3:3, John 1:23) Unlike the singing competition on television of the same name (*The Voice*), which searches for a soothing singing voice that is pleasant to listen to, the voice of John the Baptist made people uncomfortable. We do not naturally like to hear messages of wrath and the need to repent of the evils we have done.

The man in uncomfortable clothes preaching an uncomfortable



message doesn't just tell us to say “I'm sorry” for our sins; he calls for “fruits of repentance,” that is, to show our sorrow over sin with changes in our lives. For the tax collector, this meant collecting no more than what was required. For the soldier, it meant not intimidating anyone or falsely accusing people, and to be content with their pay. What does it mean for you?

These are uncomfortable things to talk about—sin, wrath, and repentance. But by openly exposing the reality of sin, John was preparing their hearts for the ultimate comfort—the comfort that the Savior was bringing. This too, Isaiah writes about: “*Comfort, yes, comfort My people!*” Says your God. *‘Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has*

*received from the LORD's hand Double for all her sins.*” (Isaiah 40:1-2)

There is the comfort we long for. It is the comfort that John was preparing the people to hear and rejoice over after his “uncomfortable” message of repentance. This comfort is not found in a soft chair or climate-controlled settings. It is found in the Babe of Bethlehem that has been born “*unto you.*” It is found in the One Who would have to endure the soul-wrenching dis-comfort of the cross in order to forgive all our sins and win the eternal comforts of heaven for us. Therefore, dear repentant sinner, be comforted in Christ, for He is, as John said, “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” (John 1:29) Hallelujah! Amen.



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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.*

# Service of the Sacrament: The Sanctus

**A**t Christmastime we pause to remember with awe and wonder the miracle of the incarnation of Christ. When He was born that night in Bethlehem, an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds and announced that the child that had been born of Mary is Christ the Lord. In Him God came down to our world; He even took on our own human nature so that as a man He could take our place and redeem us. He could live a perfect life and in our place offer to God the perfect obedience that we could never give Him. Then He could offer up His body joined with His divine nature as a sacrifice to God sufficient to atone for all human sin.

It is for this act of divine grace that we join our hearts and voices to praise God in the Sanctus. This part of the liturgy prepares our hearts to receive Christ's body and blood with the bread and wine in Holy Communion. For it brings to our minds how God came down to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and that He did this not to condemn us but to save us.

The Sanctus (Latin for *holy*, from which we get our English word *sanctify*) has two parts. The first recalls the vision of God that He granted to Isaiah:

**Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth;  
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory**

In Isaiah 6:1-8 the prophet records this extraordinary experience. He beheld the Lord in visible form sitting on an exalted throne, clothed in a great robe with a train so vast that it filled the temple. Angels called seraphim stood above the throne, each one with six wings: two to cover their faces, two to veil their feet, and two to fly. As they flew, the prophet heard them crying out to one another the words that we sing in the Sanctus.

At this vision of the holy God accompanied by His holy angels, the prophet was terrified. How could he, "*a man of unclean lips,*"



**Sanctus**

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord God of Sab - a - oth:  
heav'n and earth are full of Thy glo - ry. Ho - san - na,  
ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is He,  
bless - ed is He, bless - ed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.  
Ho - san - na, ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est.

(verse 5) stand in the presence of the King, the Lord of hosts? But the vision was not one of condemnation, but of divine grace. One of the seraphim flew to the prophet with a live coal from the altar and with it touched Isaiah's mouth and assured him, "*Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.*" (verse 7)

The second part of the Sanctus (also called the *Benedictus*, Latin for blessed, from which we get the word *benediction*) recalls the events of Palm Sunday and what the crowds called out to Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem:

**Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna the highest.**

These words from Psalm 118 are a plea to God to save, to send down salvation from the highest heaven. They were rightly addressed to Jesus, for they hailed Him as the One Whom God had sent for salvation. On that very day He was on His way to the cross to lay down His life to save the world from sin. It was for that purpose that He had come into the world; it was on this mission of rescue that the Father had sent Him.

These words of the Sanctus are appropriate for us to sing as part of the service of Holy Communion, for in the Sacrament Christ comes to us in the bread that we eat and the wine that we drink. He is the holy Christ exalted to the right hand of God, but He comes to us as the Lord came to Isaiah, not with words of terror, but with the assurance of forgiveness and salvation. He comes to us as the Lamb of God Who laid down His life for us to save us.



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# Semper Paratus—“Always Ready”

*“And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”*

(1 Peter 3:13-17)

**S**inners suffer much in this sin-cursed world and, if we’re honest, we must admit that many sufferings come as a result of our own poor life choices and sins. For the Christian, however, there may come times when we may even suffer for doing and choosing the *right* things. Peter says that it is a blessing for the believer to suffer for good, and for righteousness’ sake. Christians must be prepared for such suffering and be encouraged to endure it, because our natural reaction is to do anything and everything to avoid it. Sadly, many would rather refuse suffering even if it means giving up the faith.

Ironically, it is when we attempt to avoid suffering that we end up causing ourselves the most harm. When we seek to avoid the sufferings that come from our own wrongdoing, we inevitably commit more wrongs and harm our faith and souls. When we seek to avoid the sufferings (that is, persecution) that come from doing good, we end up denying the faith and advancing the cause of wickedness. Martin Luther once said, “To suffer wrong destroys no one’s soul, nay, it improves the soul, although it does inflict loss on the body and on property. But what does destroy the soul is wrongdoing, even though the wrongdoing were to gain the wealth of all the world.”

Peter encourages the Christian to embrace those sufferings that come from doing good. Not to find some sort of enjoyment in the pain the sufferings bring, but to know that the Lord God Who died and rose again for us, Whom we sanctify in our hearts, is



Always be ready to give a defense

so much greater than the worst of man’s terrors. Therefore, we say with the psalmist, “*The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*” (Psalm 118:6)

*Semper paratus* is a Latin expression that means “always ready.” It is both the motto and the official song of the U.S. Coast Guard. A portion of the lyrics from verse 3 reads, “We’ve been ‘Always Ready’ to do, to fight, to die” (emphasis added). The members of the Coast Guard are taught to push past their fears, even the fear of death, to be always ready to do the right thing by their high calling and office as protectors of America’s waterways.

In our text, the Christian is encouraged to “*always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.*” (verse 15) Suffering for Jesus’ sake gives us opportunity to praise Jesus’ name. In Christ Jesus our Savior, and with His comforting Word of truth, we become well equipped to push past fear and to be always ready to do the Lord’s will, to fight the good fight of faith, and to die to sin and this world, knowing that Jesus has secured for us that life that never ends. And so, in Jesus, with Jesus, and for Jesus we suffer and are blessed.



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# GLORY IN THE CLOUDS

A grassy hillside, puffy clouds drifting across a blue sky, a lad watching for interesting shapes therein; and he spots a sheep, a butterfly, even Uncle Jake’s profile. All delightful and reasonable.

But there are some cloud formations that are hard to explain—except for experts on the Weather Channel. A few examples are feather clouds, roll clouds, spherical clouds (UFO shape), fluctus clouds (wave shape), wormhole clouds and mammatus clouds (udder shape clouds). They are not only interesting, but mysterious and glorious.



**Fluctus or wave clouds over New South Wales**

Even more beneficial is how God uses clouds to sustain life on earth. The whole cycle involves evaporation, condensation, and then precipitation to water the earth. No wonder the psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.” (Psalm 19:1) Clouds in the first heaven declare the glory of God through beauty, life-preservation, and even chastisement and judgment via storm clouds.

Even more, the Old Testament Israelites saw God’s glory close up in the pillar of cloud which led them out of Egypt and also shaded them from the hot desert sun (Exodus 13:21-23).

Then, after the tabernacle was constructed, “the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” (Exodus 40:34) Thereafter, this cloud of glory led Israel throughout all their journeys. What a comfort and incentive to worship, knowing the Lord Himself was present and dwelt among the people. No wonder the psalmist wrote, “Lord, I have loved the habitation of your house, and the place where your glory dwells.” (Psalm 26:8)

A visible cloud of glory may not fill our churches today, but we do have Jesus’ glorious promise: “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)

We are also told of a cloud sighting at Jesus’ transfiguration. Not only did Jesus’ face shine as the sun, but “a bright cloud overshadowed

them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear Him!’” (Matthew 17:5) God used a cloud in testifying to Jesus’ divine identity.

That beloved Son of the Father would go on to face dark days indeed. He was reviled and rejected, beaten, scourged, and crucified. The bright cloud became a cloud of utter darkness over the land, as Jesus was forsaken by His own Father. But so it had to be. The now-rejected One suffered to pay for the sins of the world. But on the third day He rose again, as promised. Forty days later another cloud

played its part in the verification that Jesus’ earthly mission had been accomplished. For in His ascension back to heaven, “a cloud received Him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:9) How the angels must have rejoiced to have the victorious Lord of Glory back in their midst!

Thereafter Saint John became a cloud-watcher. And what a sight he was given of heaven itself. “Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man.” (Revelation 14: 14)

Finally, at the end of days, all the tribes of the earth “will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24:30) After the dead in Christ have arisen first, “then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

An old prospector might have said, “There’s gold in them thar hills.” We say, “God’s glory is revealed in the clouds.” It is a good reason to believe, rejoice, and watch.



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# The Rich Fool

Luke 12:13-21

“Whoever has the most toys, wins.” Perhaps you too have heard this expression. Unfortunately, its sentiment is too often the prevailing worldview of our society. The acquisition of temporal wealth is the most prominent false god of our day, leading many away from the lasting treasure of the Gospel.

Covetousness and greed, however, are not new afflictions. Jesus addressed these same dangers with the people of His day. While Jesus was speaking to a crowd, a young man interrupted and asked Jesus to “tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” (verse 13) This was likely a younger brother who wanted a larger portion than the law provided. Knowing his underlying problem, Jesus warned him and the crowd of covetousness, “for one’s life does not consist of the abundance of the things he possesses.” (verse 15) To illustrate His point, Jesus told perhaps His most straightforward parable, “The Rich Fool.”

The sole character of this parable is a rich man who was blessed with an abundant harvest. So plentiful was his produce that his current barns would not hold it. He decided to pull those barns down and replace them with bigger barns. With this newfound financial security, the man surmised that he could relax and prepare to “eat, drink, and be merry.” (verse 19) God rebuked him, however, and called him a fool, for that very night his earthly life would end—and then what would become of his fortune? The lesson to be learned from this parable is shared in the final verse: “So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” (verse 21)

Was it the man’s successful harvest that made him a fool? How about his building project and preparation for the future? No, what made him foolish was focusing his life on pleasing only himself, and his trust that his riches would provide him security and happiness. Greed and the “easy life”

had become his treasure, squeezing out God and a sanctified life of generosity towards others. “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” (1 Timothy 6:10) Have you heard of “sudden wealth syndrome”? It is a phenomenon that strikes many lottery winners. Ironically, instead of providing the lasting happiness they had hoped for, their sudden wealth only brings a variety of problems, including ruined relationships, greediness, and debt. Being wealthy in itself is not sinful, but earthly wealth often brings problems.

Lest we think only wealthy people can have mixed-up priorities, the propensity to trust in wealth can be seen at every socioeconomic level. There are sinfully stingy poor people, and people lacking daily necessities who wrongly believe that money will solve their problems. It is the condition of the heart wherein the problem lies. “If riches increase, do not set your heart on them.” (Psalm 62:10) Notice what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matthew 6:24)

Let us rather focus on serving Christ and our neighbors (Colossians 3:22-23), being cheerful givers (2 Corinthians 9:7) of our “firstfruits” (Proverbs 3:9). Our greatest treasure has been won for us by our Savior, and “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12:34)



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*This is the first installment of a new series in which we are reprinting Spokesman articles by early leaders in the CLC. Pastor James Albrecht is the curator of the series. Pastor Winfred B. Schaller, Jr. (1922-1983), the author of this month's article, was a leader in the formation of the CLC, and was the first editor of the Lutheran Spokesman. This article appeared in the December 1959 issue, at a time when many pastors and congregations had left their former fellowships for conscience's sake and, in some cases, were facing severe hardship because of it.*

# A Wonderful Christmas and a Wonderful New Year!



Pastor Winfred B. Schaller, Jr.  
(1922-1983)

That is our wish for you. It is for all who are in trouble. It is for all who suffer for His Name's sake. For congregations who have lost their houses of worship which were so dear to them, for pastors and teachers and their families who have lost their means of support and must labor at secular work while they try to find energy to serve their sheep and lambs, for families worshiping in private homes without a pastor to minister to their needs. Yes, to all who have problems so great that they defy solution, we are bold to wish you a wonderful Christmas and a wonderful New Year! We know it will come true because of something Isaiah said of the Little Child, Who is again coming into your homes with all His gifts: *"His name shall be called WONDERFUL."*

You have a Wonder Child. So wonderful is He that we cannot begin to comprehend Him. How can this Child be Son of Mary and yet be the everlasting God in heaven? How can He be our Child and yet we are His children? The Creator and yet a creature? Born of a woman, yet having no earthly father? God's Gift to us, yet the Giver of gifts to us? He is a Child of infinite Wonder.

How wonderful are His works! See the wonders He performed on the sick, the blind, the lame, yes, even on the dead! But far greater are the wonders He performed which we cannot see. To banish sickness was a little wonder compared to His crushing victory over the Devil. Our wonder Child broke the

power of our sin by taking it to Himself. This Little Child of wonders dared even to invade the stronghold of Death—"now 'tis a pow'rless form." (TLH 162, v.4) And wonder of wonders, He removed the sword from the hand of the angel who guards the gate of Paradise; opened wide that gate; slammed tight the gates of hell.

And the wonders never cease. The Wonderful One snatched you and your children from the kingdom of Satan and placed you into the blessed Kingdom of God, in your Baptism. Daily He drives Satan from your hearts through His Word and Sacrament and keeps you by His power in faith.

Take this Wonder-full One into your arms this Christmas! He is yours and He is so mighty. Then face the new year with its difficult problems and heavy burdens. They cannot overpower you. For you are armed with the Wonder-Child, whose great delight is to do wonders for you. Is the future quite impossible to face? It matters not, for your Wonder-Child was born of a virgin and He delights in doing the impossible.

Fear not, be not afraid, you have a future full of wonders. We wish you all, dear brothers and sisters, a WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS AND WONDER-FULL NEW YEAR WITH THE WONDERFUL CHILD OF BETHLEHEM!

# Much Blessing Followed in The Children’s Lives

## The CLCI Annual VBS—2023

[Editor: The following is a report from Pastor Jyothi Benjamin, in his own words, about current activities in the Church of the Lutheran Confession in India (CLCI). The report is lightly edited for clarity.]

**“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22: 6)**

As per Census 2022, the population of children (under eighteen years of age) in India is 480 million. During the hot summer here in India, most of these children spend their time on the streets. The CLCI had a deep concern for the children who spend time on streets, so we started this five-day CLCI annual Vacation Bible School in the year 2001. It has brought many thousands of the children to the Lord. Since that time, the CLCI annual VBS program has been growing steadily and has become very popular among our CLCI Churches here in India.

The CLCI VBS ministry celebrated another successful year. Every year, the CLCI annual VBS touches thousands of lives of children both in urban and rural areas here in South India. Our CLCI annual VBS-2023 was held from June 6-10. Our efforts have been well received by 1,550 children who participated in this five-day VBS. The children present various programs and participate in all the major events of the VBS. During this VBS, the youth choir continued to play an active role in providing inspiring songs and music for the children.



The music is one of everyone’s favorite parts of VBS. Children and elders also love to listen and watch the kids sing praises to our Lord.

Our vision is to lead our Indian children to Jesus, to live as His disciples and to cooperate with God by participating in His action in the world. We conduct this CLCI annual VBS for the purpose of providing a systematic and intensive Bible study through fun-filled learning activities for five days. Every year, new biblical themes and songs are written to meet the contemporary needs of the children. Mainly the VBS program functions as an outreach of the CLCI Church to reach out to any child in need of Jesus.

Watching the impact of VBS on children, we made a special VBS syllabus, from beginners to the seniors, and trained our VBS volunteers and teachers accordingly. As usual, our VBS-2023 has activities like a Bible education





Teachers, organizers and helpers at CLCI VBS 2023

program, Bible quiz programs, Bible written tests, Bible storytelling competitions, coloring of Biblical pictures, coloring of plaques made by plaster of Paris, and song competitions. The children present all these programs and participate in all the major events of the VBS. Much blessing has followed in the lives of our CLCI children through this annual VBS-2023.

All the kids who participated in the program received VBS certificates along with nice gifts. This type of annual VBS creates opportunities for children between four to eighteen years to receive Jesus as their Savior in a definite and in a personal way. Singing songs, learning English hymns and proverbs, coloring pictures, plays and dramas, acting, music—with all these, children enjoyed it very much. Thus, there was great rejoicing in the CLCI Mission House. VBS finished up with a great cookout, a big meal on the last day.

No VBS is complete without some great games, and our Seminary students created some fun games to play. On the last day children enjoyed playing different sports and some great and fun games. All these VBS programs establish a healthy environment for children to grow mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. It provides a memorable and fruitful time for them during summer, a much-needed beneficial time for children which their parents desperately look for.

Through these children, many new members were also influenced and inspired to rest on the One Who is “Mighty to save.” The Lord’s name was glorified. VBS material like books, charts, coloring pencils like crayons, sketch pens, and picture books were supplied by the beloved members of the respected CLC - USA. *“Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For this is all my salvation and all my desire; will He not make it increase?”* (2 Samuel 23:5)

All glory, laud, and honor to Him alone! We pray that His

blessings may rest upon all the children that have been contacted through our humble and earnest endeavor. God’s grace has been sufficient. We thank Him for enabling us all this while. Please pray that the Lord will use this VBS ministry to bring many Indian children into His kingdom and to call some into full-time Christian service. Your prayer support will build the CLCI children into tomorrow’s leaders, as they will be prepared as God’s witnesses in influencing their families and communities. Glory be to God! May the Lord bless you all. Thank you.



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

## WHAT'S NEW WITH YOU?

Updates from congregations around the Church of the Lutheran Confession

# Faith Lutheran Church Manchester, Missouri

We are blessed to have some tremendous activity going on at Faith Lutheran Church in Manchester, Missouri (Saint Louis area). Within this past calendar year, two new members have joined our congregation after completing thorough investigations of what Scripture teaches. By the time this article is published, an additional two young men will have confessed their faith in front of the congregation on their confirmation day, the first confirmations here in over four years. This summer, we rejoiced to send three members of Faith to Nepal for the 2023 CLC Mission Helper Trip. And this fall, we tearfully sent off one young member to Eau Claire, Wisconsin to enroll in the teaching program at ILC, yet we give prayers of thanksgiving to the Lord for leading her in her desire to serve in God's Kingdom.

Here at Faith, Sunday morning worship will usually see twenty to twenty-five members gathered in fellowship. Before the worship service, Sunday school and Bible class are held, with around fifteen in the combined attendance. Wednesday mornings present another opportunity for Bible class, which four to seven members regularly attend. We also have a preaching station in the Kansas City area—eight souls gather monthly in a rented hotel conference room in Independence, Missouri, to receive the means of grace. And on Thursday mornings, I lead a worship service at a memory care facility down the street, with a typical attendance hovering around twenty-five individuals.

I've intentionally thrown a lot of numbers at you so far, which might



lead you to think I was speaking with my tongue planted firmly in my cheek when I mentioned "tremendous activity." But that activity which we are privileged to host is not our own, nor is it based on any sort of numbers. Rather, we take immense comfort in Jesus' promise: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20) In spite of our modest size, especially when compared to our nearest church-neighbors, we know that the Holy Spirit is at work among us on Sunday and Wednesday mornings, in a rented hotel conference room, and in the dining room of a memory care facility.

So, what's new with us? I was installed as the pastor of Faith at the end of January 2022. That was new. Since then, there have been a few minor changes—we updated the church website and upgraded some hardware to improve our worship live-streams. That's new too. Then there have been the more major changes. Last spring, we gathered and witnessed as a child was adopted into God's family through the waters of Baptism. Last fall, we gathered again and found comfort at the funeral service of another member. As a child, he too had been buried with Christ through Baptism and now enjoys newness of life. Both events brought new changes for many of us.

What isn't so new is the One working behind it all. Both at the beginning of life and at its end, our loving Savior is involved. He also promises to be active among us every day in between, and that has not changed, nor will it change. So, whatever may come next for Faith, we continue to rely on God's unchanging grace.



A Sunday school class at Faith Lutheran Church



Samuel Rodebaugh is pastor of Faith Lutheran Church of Manchester, Missouri.

# “ BREAD OF LIFE ” READINGS DECEMBER 2023

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

Date	Hymns	Reading	Comments
December 1	TLH 81/LSB 372	1 Corinthians 1	Paul and Sosthenes greet the believers in Corinth. After expressing his thankfulness to God for the faith of the Corinthians, Paul urges them not to be divided, but to be united by their common faith in Jesus Christ. God has revealed His wisdom and power in the “folly” of the cross.
December 2	TLH 68/LSB 331	Mark 11	Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph on Palm Sunday. Jesus curses an unfruitful fig tree. Jesus drives the buyers, sellers, and money-changers out of the temple. The priests and elders demand to know by what authority Jesus is teaching and performing miracles. Since they cannot answer whether the baptism of John was from heaven or from man, Jesus declines to answer their question.
December 4	TLH 58/LSB 334	Jeremiah 9	Jeremiah continues to lament the ruin of Judah. We join Jeremiah in weeping over our own sins and their sad results. The steadfast love of the Lord, demonstrated chiefly in the cross of Christ, is the solution to all sin.
December 5	TLH 76/LSB 383	Jeremiah 10	The Lord reviles the folly of idol worship. Idols are lifeless and impotent, but the Lord is the only true and living God, the Maker of heaven and earth.
December 6	TLH 73/LSB 340	Revelation 8	Jesus opens the seventh seal. The first four angels blow their trumpets. Terrible plagues follow each trumpet blast.
December 7	TLH 55/LSB 350	Revelation 9	The fifth and sixth angels blow their trumpets. The first of three woes follows the fifth trumpet blast. The second woe begins following the sixth trumpet blast. Even so, the wicked continue to refuse to repent.
December 8	TLH 61/LSB 347	Isaiah 40	Through Isaiah, the Lord proclaims comfort for His people. Isaiah prophesies the coming of John the Baptist. The Word of the Lord stands forever, while the powers of this world crumble into nothing. The Lord revives His faithful people.
December 9	TLH 272/LSB 346	Mark 1	Mark records the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 40: the coming of John the Baptist. John baptizes, proclaims repentance, and points ahead to the Christ. John baptizes Jesus. Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus calls His first four disciples. Jesus performs many miraculous healings and preaches throughout Galilee.
December 11	TLH 74/LSB 333	Revelation 10	An angel holding a little scroll announces the coming of the seventh trumpet blast. Jesus commands John to eat the little scroll. He eats it.
December 12	TLH 136/LSB 367	Revelation 11	The second woe continues. John is directed to measure the temple with a measuring rod. The Lord sends two witnesses to prophesy to the inhabitants of the earth. The Lord sends a great earthquake, concluding the second woe. The seventh angel blows his trumpet. The twenty-four elders worship God. The heavenly temple of God is opened.
December 13	TLH 91/LSB 352	Revelation 12	John sees a vision of a woman giving birth and a dragon waiting to devour the child. The Christian church is the mother of all believers. Satan would devour us, but the Lord takes us to Himself and continues to protect His church. War breaks out between Michael and the dragon, Satan. Satan and his angels are thrown to earth, where Satan wages war against believers in Christ.
December 14	TLH 69/LSB 354	Revelation 13	John sees two visions of beasts. The first beast comes out of the sea and has ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns. Satan gives this beast authority on earth. The unbelievers of the world worship the beast. The second beast comes out of the earth and has two horns. It performs miracles and compels people to create and to worship an image of the first beast.
December 15	TLH 66/LSB 349	Isaiah 61	The Messiah comes to heal us, to free us, to comfort us. He proclaims the good news of sins forgiven!
December 16	TLH 98/LSB 384	John 1	Jesus Christ is true God, coeternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus, God created all things. John the Baptist testifies to the Christ Who is about to arrive. Jesus calls Andrew and Simon to follow Him. Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael to follow Him.
December 18	TLH 168/LSB 455	2 Samuel 7	King David desires to build a house for the Lord. The Lord promises that He will build a house for David. The Lord will fulfill His promise partially through Solomon and the temple of Jerusalem. The Lord will fulfill His promise completely through the person and work of Jesus Christ.
December 19	TLH 95/LSB 332	Isaiah 7	Israel and Syria conspire to attack Judah. The Lord sends Isaiah to Ahaz, King of Judah, to comfort him with the assurance that the attack will not succeed. Through Isaiah the Lord promises that a virgin will bear a son and name Him Immanuel. Fully God and fully man, Jesus truly is “God with us.”
December 20	LSB 366	Isaiah 8	As a result of the unfaithfulness of the people, Assyria will invade Judah. The people of God are not to rely on worldly wisdom or might or to consult false prophets or mediums. The Lord speaks to His people always and only through His Word.
December 21	TLH 647/LSB 361	Matthew 1	Matthew traces the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus. Matthew provides a brief account of the birth of Christ.
December 22	TLH 90/LSB 375	Luke 1	Gabriel foretells the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah. Gabriel foretells the birth of Jesus to Mary. Mary visits Elizabeth. Mary praises the Lord. John is born. Zechariah prophesies.
December 23	TLH 85/LSB 358	Luke 2	Christ is born in Bethlehem. An angel of the Lord announces the birth to a group of shepherds, who travel to Bethlehem to see the Christ. Jesus is circumcised and named on the eighth day. The family travels to Jerusalem for the purification of Mary and the presentation of Jesus. Simeon and Anna encounter their Savior. Joseph and Mary bring twelve-year-old Jesus to the temple for the Passover observance.
December 25	TLH 106/LSB 412	Isaiah 9	Isaiah prophesies a great light for those who have walked in darkness; Jesus Christ is the light of the world! Isaiah prophesies the judgment of the Lord against arrogance and oppression.
December 26	LSB 834	Titus 1	Paul greets Titus and tasks him with appointing an elder (pastor) in every town on the island of Crete. Paul lists qualifications for such overseers. Paul warns Titus about enemies of the faith.
December 27	WS 707/LSB 377	Titus 2	Paul exhorts Titus to teach sound doctrine. Paul gives instructions for believers as they fulfill various vocations in life, motivated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Titus is to repeat these instructions to the believers on Crete.
December 28	TLH 77/LSB 360	Titus 3	Paul continues to exhort Titus and the people under his care to good works. We are a new creation in Christ, washed clean in Baptism to be the holy children of God. Therefore we desire to live as holy children of God. Paul closes his letter with final greetings and a closing blessing.
December 29	WS 712/LSB 370	Isaiah 52	Isaiah prophesies the coming salvation of the Lord. What joyful news! This salvation will be accomplished through the suffering of the Messiah.
December 30	TLH 96/LSB 897	Isaiah 62	The Lord has not forsaken His people. On the contrary, He has accomplished our salvation at the appointed time. By faith in Christ we are the holy people of God. Praise the Lord for His glad tidings!

# Update on the Iglesia Luterana Confesional (Mexico)

In October, Missionary Todd Ohlmann and Board of Missions member Jeff Radichel visited Pastor Juan Olvera of the Confessional Lutheran Church (Iglesia Luterana Confesional, or ILC) in Juarez, Mexico. This was the first face-to-face visit to Mexico since 2018, due to various circumstances.

The CLC's relationship with Pastor Olvera began in October 2012. He had left the WELS-sponsored Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church (Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Confesional) earlier that year for doctrinal reasons. He established contact with Pastor Michael Roehl to learn more about the CLC's doctrine and practice.

In January 2013, President Michael Eichstadt, Board of Doctrine Chairman Daniel Fleischer, and Pastor Roehl met with Pastor Olvera in Nuevo Progreso, Mexico. The Board of Doctrine recommended fellowship between Pastor Olvera's church and the CLC. The Coordinating Council approved the recommendation in April of that year. Since then, the CLC has provided a small subsidy to the ILC to help Pastor Olvera train a few pre-seminary students in Juarez and Torreon, and to support the work in the congregation and four preaching stations he serves.

Pastor Olvera has faced many challenges in the past few years. The three seminary students he had been training are no longer in the program for various reasons. He also has to work more than fifty hours per week to support his family, which limits his



(L to R) Missionary Todd Ohlmann, Pastor Juan Olvera, Board of Missions member Jeff Radichel

time for ministry.

The Board of Missions is looking for ways to provide better support for Pastor Olvera and the ILC. Notably, the Board has recently approved money to provide chairs, a laptop, and a printer for the congregation in Juarez. Additionally, financial assistance has been approved to aid Pastor Olvera in obtaining a passport and visa, which would potentially enable him to participate in one of our local pastoral conferences in the United States.

Furthermore, the Board is considering sponsoring leadership seminars, the objective of which would be to identify and equip key leaders who can play a role in supporting the ministry. There is also an ongoing discussion of the possibility of raising the regular subsidy amount given to the ILC to enable Pastor Olvera to dedicate more of his time to the ministry.

In an area that is about 85% Roman Catholic, there is a great need for a confessional Lutheran presence. We pray that the Lord would strengthen and encourage our brothers and sisters in Mexico and bless their proclamation of the Gospel.



Pastor Olvera and family



**Robert Sauers** is pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Winter Haven, Florida, and a member of the CLC Board of Missions



# The Christmas Road

**“A**re you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3 ESV)

Life is a road. We can be confident that we are on the right road when our faith is in Jesus. With Him as our Savior we have no doubt of one day reaching that better country.

Yet even Christians can have doubts. A case in point is John the Baptist when he was a prisoner: “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”

We can't say for sure why John had doubts, or even *that* he had doubts (it may have been John's *disciples* whose faith needed shoring up). Perhaps they wondered why Jesus continued to allow the religious leaders to spew out their damning work-righteous doctrines. If He really was the Messiah, He should do something about that. Or perhaps they questioned why Jesus wasn't doing anything to get His faithful messenger out of prison. Had they been traveling the wrong road all along? Was their life without purpose and direction?

Sometimes as Christians we are flying down life's highway, secure in our faith, and certain of our salvation. However, at other times we find ourselves in a spiritual or emotional traffic jam, where it seems like our life is going nowhere fast. We wonder why God isn't coming to our rescue. Or we hit a jarring bump in the road. It could be a financial setback, a serious illness, or the painful loss of a loved one. Whatever the bump, it causes us to cry out, “God, where are You? I feel like I'm stranded by the side of the road, lost and alone, and You're nowhere in sight.”

The road of faith is not an easy one to travel. It involves keeping a close eye on our spiritual gauges, inspecting the condition of our hearts, testing to see that the engine of faith is hitting on all cylinders. It means refusing to take that enticing exit which Satan falsely promises will lead to happiness and fulfillment. But mostly it involves checking and rechecking the perfect road map—the Word of God. For only God's Word can make us secure in our Christian faith.

Recall how Jesus directed John and his disciples to the Word. “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” (Matthew 11:4-5 NIV84)

**Had they been traveling the wrong road all along? Was their life without purpose and direction?**

From the book of Isaiah Jesus showed that He was doing exactly what was prophesied of the Messiah. The lesson was, “Don't judge by your reason. Don't evaluate things by your present circumstances. Go back to the Word for certainty, and you will see you are absolutely on the right road.”

God's Word takes us down a road that leaves no doubt as to the direction we are taking. We might call it the Christmas Road. It's a road that leads to the fields of Bethlehem, where an angel announces that a Savior has been born for all people. It guides us to a manger where we see that God has come into our world to share our sorrows, to carry our burdens, and to live for all a sinless

life. Yet the Christmas Road doesn't stop there. It continues on, directing us up a road of deep sorrow to a cross. It is there where God demonstrates His love in the most powerful way, by offering His only Son in sacrifice for the world's sin. But not even death can put a stop to the journey. For, finally, the Christmas Road brings us to an empty tomb and a risen Savior! This guarantees that the road to life eternal is now open and clear for one and all so that whoever believes in Jesus the Savior shall be saved!

Jesus patiently reassures us in our moments of doubt. As we journey down that blessed Christmas Road, let us have no doubt that we are on the way to life everlasting! AMEN!



**Michael Wilke** is pastor of Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Saginaw, Michigan, and president of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**2024 CLC Mission Helper Trip.** Applications are now being accepted for the 2024 CLC Mission Helper Trip to Africa. Apply now so you can be part of this opportunity to spread the Gospel to children in either Kenya/Uganda, Tanzania, or Zambia for about three weeks. The application deadline is January 16, 2024. Find more information and apply online at [www.mht.lutheranmissions.org](http://www.mht.lutheranmissions.org).



Attendees at the Fall 2023 Pacific Coast Pastoral Conference, held October 3-5 at Saint Paul Lutheran Church, Vernon, British Columbia.



Pastors of the SE Pastoral Conference, along with members of the hosting congregation, Trinity Lutheran Church of West Columbia, South Carolina. The conference was held September 26-28, 2023.



Attendees at the CLC Teachers' Conference, held October 18-20, 2023 at Berea Lutheran Church in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota.