

DECEMBER 2024 VOL. 67 NO. 6

# LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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



**WATCH**  
Therefore

—Mark 13:35



CLC Teachers' Conference, October 16-18, 2024, Saint John's Lutheran Church, Okabena, Minnesota

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# Don't Miss It

“Daddy, watch me!” cried the little girl from the backyard. Dad was busy with a project, but he smiled and cast a sideways glance toward his daughter. “No, Daddy, *really* watch me!”

Years later, she was playing in the crucial game of the season. Dad was physically at the game, but he was not present because he was preoccupied with his phone. All of a sudden, there was a huge cheer! He looked up and saw his smiling daughter come running up the stands, “Dad! Did you see it!? Did you see me make the winning score?!”

The daughter’s question, “Did you see it?” cuts like a knife in the unobservant father’s heart; but the Savior’s, “I tell you I do not know you . . . depart from Me” (Luke 13:27), is a crushing blow of unimaginable guilt, grief, regret, and an agony without end.

As we enter Advent and focus on our readiness to celebrate the Savior’s birth and on our watchfulness for His second coming, we can ask two questions: Are we *really* watching? And how distracted are we?

Distraction comes so easily. Peter was walking on water until fear distracted him from Jesus’ promise (Matthew 14:29-30). In Jesus’ parable, it is the weeds of distraction that choke the seeds into ineffectiveness (Luke 8:7).

Because of our weakness and easy distractibility, God exhorts us to a spiritual watchfulness. He says, “Always be on the alert!” “Keep your eyes open!” “Chase sleepiness away!”

God calls us to a wakeful watchfulness because we have enemies who want to take advantage of any distraction and all sleepiness. “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8 ESV) Similarly, the Apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders about the danger of false teaching and

said, “*Therefore watch. . .*” (Acts 20:31) The verb indicates ongoing action: “Keep on watching—don’t stop!”

We are watchful when we are alert against our spiritual enemies and aware of every avenue by which they seek to attack. We are able to strengthen the defenses and increase our watchfulness by energizing ourselves with the Gospel of salvation. The joy of our salvation keeps us actively awake to faithfully serve the Lord by using the gifts He has given us, as faithful stewards, until He returns (Matthew 25:14-30).

The Apostle Paul reminds us that thanksgiving is also part of ongoing watchfulness. “*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.*” (Colossians 4:2 ESV) In other words, don’t let the troubled world around you and the need for defense distract you from also seeing every good and perfect gift that comes down from above (James 1:17). Watchfulness is living with eyes wide open so we don’t miss seeing the reasons for giving thanks and praising our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

Really watching without distraction leads to always being ready for Jesus’ return. “[Continue to] *watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*” (Matthew 25:13)

“[Continue to] *watch, stand fast in the faith!*” (1 Corinthians 16:13) Then, by God’s grace through faith in your coming Savior, you won’t miss a thing.



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

# Why Did Jesus Come at Christmas?

Parents may answer this question for their children while setting up their nativity scene. It's also the primary purpose of our Christmas Eve programs.

A simple but wonderful answer to the question is to say that He came to save us. We can elaborate on that in various ways depending on who's listening. A small child will need to be taught what the word "save" means. A pastoral conference, however, will be interested in something deeper, possibly an in-depth study of Hebrew or Greek texts.

Scripture itself answers "Why did Jesus come into the world at Christmas" in many ways—each with a different emphasis, a specific focus, or a nuance that gives us a special "aha" moment!

Consider the following:

1. *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."* (1 Timothy 1:15)  
This answer is universal. Every honest, penitent sinner can identify with it. Christ Jesus came into the world (Christmas) to rescue everyone from their sins—yes, even the very worst sinners!
2. *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."* (Matthew 5:17).  
Jesus came (Christmas) to fulfill for us what we were required to do but never could. More than that, He fulfilled every Gospel-centered prophecy and promise!
3. *"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')."* (Galatians 3:13)  
He delivered us from the curse we deserved! Notice that the Apostle didn't merely say Christ experienced the curse instead of us, He said Christ actually became a curse. He was so immersed in that curse, He became the curse—personified! What an astonishing reason for Christ coming into the world (Christmas)!
4. *"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood,*



*He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."* (Hebrews 2:14,15)

The infant in the manger was flesh and blood (Christmas), even as we are. He came to die, that through His death He would destroy the devil who, through deception, made death our reality.

Jesus, however, undid what happened to us, making life our reality. Jesus Himself is the resurrection and the life—personified (John 11:25)!

5. *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"* (1 John 3:1)  
How did God bestow His love on us? He gave His only-begotten Son (Christmas)! The Father's love was laser-focused on making us His very own children. Jesus made it happen.
6. *"Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. . ."* (1 John 4:17a)  
The expression "has been perfected" means "has been brought to its goal." Judgement Day is a very unsettling (terrifying) day for sinners! The ultimate goal of Jesus coming into the world (Christmas) was being able to welcome us, on the Last Day, into the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34)!

Embrace as your very own, therefore, what the angel said: *"Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!"* (Luke 2:10)

Ready for more good tidings? Jesus promised *He's coming again!*

*"Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"*  
(Revelation 22:20)



**Delwyn Maas** is pastor of Gift of God Lutheran Church in Mapleton, North Dakota, and St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Ponsford, Minnesota.

## HYMN OF THE WEEK PLAN

The Lutheran church enjoys a long tradition of identifying one “Hymn of the Week” for every Sunday of the church year. Such a hymn should reflect the unifying theme of the service, and is intended to be sung on that Sunday every year. In this series, Pastor Nathanael Mayhew gives us a brief overview of the Hymns of the Week for the coming month

# December (Advent and Christmas)

**T**he Season of Advent When you walk into church on December 1st, you may notice a visual change. The green paraments (the colored tapestries on the altar, pulpit, and lectern) have been replaced by purple ones (or in some churches, blue). You may see a wreath with five candles on it at the front of the church. We have entered the season of Advent, the first season in the church year. The word “advent” means “coming” or “arrival.” The season of Advent is a time of repentant preparation for the coming of the world’s Savior. The four Sundays in Advent focus our thoughts on the coming of our Savior Jesus and prepare us for the celebration of His birth.

- ♦ **December 1** On the First Sunday in Advent we contemplate the truth that Jesus is the Savior whom the Lord foretold through the prophets of the Old Testament. The hymn of the week for this Sunday is “**Savior of the Nations, Come**”. (TLH 95; LSB 332) This ancient Advent hymn by St. Ambrose connects the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Savior to their New Testament fulfillment in the birth of Jesus. This Savior would be true man as well as true God, and He would come in humility, but with salvation from death and hell for lost mankind.
- ♦ **December 8** The Second Sunday in Advent focuses on Christ’s final return in glory and the Savior’s admonition to be ready for that day. We can look forward to that day with eager hearts and with faithful lives. Our hymn for this weekend is “**The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us**”. (TLH 67; LSB 514) The hymn recalls Jesus’ many warnings to be ready for His final return, as well as the rich blessings and joys which He gives on that Day.
- ♦ **December 15** On the Third Sunday in Advent we see how the Lord prepared for the Messiah’s coming through John the Baptizer, the “Forerunner” of the Savior. Just as the Lord prepared for the Savior’s coming, so should we! In the hymn “**Hark, a Thrilling Voice is Sounding**”, (TLH 60; LSB 345) we hear the words of John calling us to repentance and pointing us to the forgiveness that only Jesus brings.

- ♦ **December 22** The Fourth Sunday in Advent reminds us of the nearness of our Savior’s coming and all that He has done for our salvation. This wonderful truth leads us to rejoice in Him and the meaning of His work for us. The familiar words of the Latin hymn “**Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel**” (TLH 62; LSB 357) describe the work of Jesus Who came to “ransom,” “free,” “save,” “cheer,” and “make safe.” For all of this, sinners have good reason to “rejoice” at the coming of our Immanuel!

**The Season of Christmas** The slightly somber and repentant themes of Advent have prepared our hearts for the joyful celebration of God’s promises fulfilled in the Christmas season. White, the color of purity and light, replaces purple in our churches. The darkness of sin is overcome by the Light of the world, Who takes on human flesh to be our Savior.

- ♦ **December 25** On Christmas Day we celebrate the fact of Jesus’ birth. God becomes human in order to carry out our salvation. Paul Gerhardt’s “**Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising**” (TLH 90; LSB 375) is a hymn of joy celebrating the birth of Jesus and the freedom from sin, death, and Satan which He would accomplish for the world.
- ♦ **December 29** On the First Sunday after Christmas we give thanks for the gifts that Jesus has won for us. In our hymn of the week, “**Praise God the Lord, Ye Sons of Men**”, (TLH 105; LSB 389) we respond in praise to our Triune God Who has provided for us this “great exchange,” taking our sin and giving us His righteousness!



Nathanael Mayhew is a pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota.

# "Precious"

*"Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Peter 1:1-4)*

**"P**RECIOUS" definition: "Of high price or great value; very valuable or costly."

There are many things I value highly and consider "precious." Our family and family-time is precious. Great-grandma's fine china is precious to us. In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Gollum highly valued "The One Ring," even calling it "My Precious." For Gollum, the Ring was so precious that he died clinging to it in the fires of Mount Doom.

Peter writes in his second letter of things more precious than a ring. Peter is again writing to Christians who had been dispersed because of persecution (1 Peter 1:1). As Peter writes this second letter, we believe he was in Rome and knew that the end of his life was near.

But before Peter dies, he wants to remind his readers (and us!) of some very important truths. He wants to assure us of the reliability of God's Word (1:16-21). He wants to warn us about false teachers (chapter 2). He wants to remind us to wait patiently for Jesus' return on the Last Day (chapter 3).

Peter begins his letter by reminding us that we have been given something very precious. You *"have obtained like precious faith with us."* Let that sink in for a minute. The same Father Who had revealed to Peter that Jesus was *"the Christ, the Son of the living God"*, (Matthew 16:16) has given you the same precious faith in Jesus Christ! He has made you His child. You have obtained the same faith that sustained Peter in his imprisonments, Daniel in the lion's den, Joseph as a slave to Potiphar, and Abraham as a childless 99-year-old. Rejoice in this precious faith!

Your precious faith is based on *"exceedingly great and precious promises"* that have been given to us. The Scriptures are full of these precious promises. Stop before reading on and see how many of God's *"exceedingly great and precious promises"* you can think of. (No, really, stop and see how many you can think of!)

Here are some exceedingly great and precious promises that may have come to mind: *"I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."* (Jeremiah 29:11) *"Because I live, you will live also."* (John 14:19) *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28) And of course the precious promise of John 3:16, *"For*

*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

As you join Peter's first readers in eagerly awaiting the return of your Lord in glory, rejoice in the precious faith you have obtained, and rely on the precious promises He has made to you in His Word, clinging to them more tightly than Gollum did to his "precious" ring.

The same Father Who had revealed to Peter that Jesus was *"the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Matthew 16:16), has given you the same precious faith in Jesus Christ!



Nathan Pfeiffer is pastor of Berea Lutheran Church in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota.

# Swords and Spears, Plowshares and Pruning Hooks

**D**o you ever say things which—without consideration of the times and circumstances—would seem to be contradictory? So does the Bible. Consider the following Old Testament examples:

Isaiah 2:4: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.” (Micah 4:3 is identical).

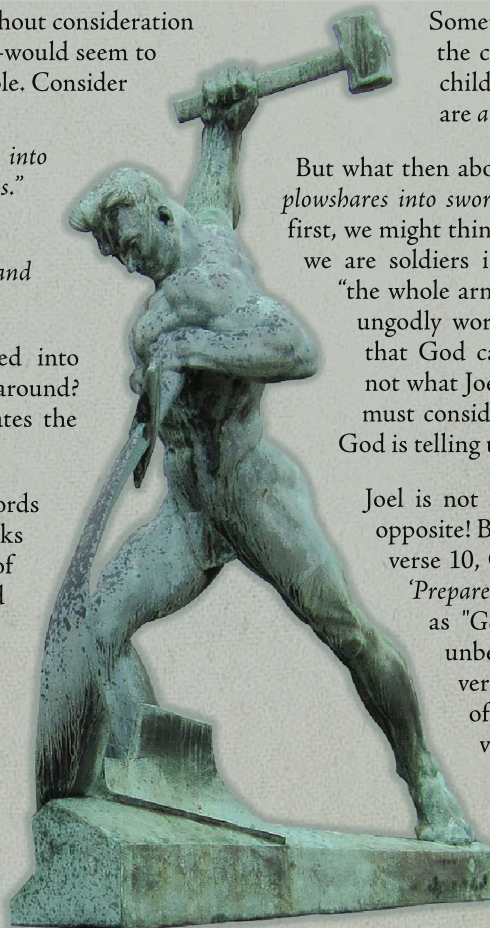
Joel 3:10: “Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears.”

So, which is it? Weapons of war turned into agricultural implements, or the other way around? As is often the case, the context illuminates the meaning.

The Biblical prophecy about beating swords and spears into plowshares and pruning hooks is relatively well known. The significance of the symbolism is that war will be turned to peace. Some Millennialists claim that this imagery pictures the Millennium, a thousand-year period during which believers will enjoy perfect peace and prosperity—a “heaven on earth.” However, the context proves that interpretation to be incorrect.

This Isaiah passage is using prophetic symbolism to picture the Holy Christian Church. It is *that* about which Isaiah prophesied. Seven centuries before the birth of Christ, he was by divine revelation picturing the Messianic age to come. Isaiah was characterizing the entire New Testament era, a period when the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached to all nations and peoples. Look at the context! Verse 2 speaks of the “latter days,” in which the establishment of the Lord’s house will have “all nations” flow to it, and verse 3 then goes on to describe how it is the Word of the Lord, proclaimed by His people, that brings “all nations” (verse 2) into this Kingdom. It is God’s Word, the Gospel in word and sacrament, that the Holy Spirit uses to bring people into God’s kingdom, the Holy Christian Church, through faith in Christ.

Some might argue that Isaiah 2:4 can’t be speaking of the Holy Christian Church because we find conflicts and troubles all around us. Yes, we do; but those adversities are external to our status as God’s children in Christ. Philippians 4:6-7 reminds us that as we commit ourselves and our circumstances to God, our hearts will experience “the peace which surpasses all understanding.”



*Beating Swords into Plowshares,*  
sculpture by Yevgeny Vuchetich, 1959

Sometimes people say that they are “okay, under the circumstances.” Insofar as our being God’s children through faith in Christ, however, we are *above* those troubling circumstances.

But what then about the Joel passage that says to “Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears”? At first, we might think that this is a reminder that in this world we are soldiers in the Church Militant, exhorted to use “the whole armor of God” against the wickedness of the ungodly world. (Ephesians 6:10-17) It’s certainly true that God calls us to war against evil, but that’s just not what Joel is prophesying in this passage. Again, we must consider the context to rightly understand what God is telling us.

Joel is not here addressing believers at all—just the opposite! Before the “Beat your plowshares . . .” part of verse 10, God says, “Proclaim this among the nations: ‘Prepare for war!’” In the KJV, *nations* is translated as “Gentiles.” Joel’s prophetic admonition is to unbelievers. *The Lutheran Study Bible* says of verse 9, “The Lord summons all the enemies of His people to prepare for battle” and of verse 10, “God incites His people’s enemies to rise and arm themselves with whatever is available.” The context of the rest of the chapter shows clearly that this pertains to the Day of Judgment. Verse 12 says, “Let the nations [the Gentiles; unbelievers] be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations,” and Verse 13 follows with

“Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Context, context, context! In the Bible, Judgment Day is often pictured as a harvest, with a sickle being used for the reaping. Consider, as just two examples, Revelation 14:15 -18 and Matthew 13:30 & 39.

These “contradictory” Bible prophecies proclaim that as God’s child, you have “the peace which surpasses all understanding,” and you also have the assurance of the final victory, a victory won for you by the Savior Jesus Christ. Praise be to God!



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

## KNOW YOUR BIBLE BOOKS – The Letters of Saint Paul

In this new series we offer brief introductions to the books of the Bible, including background, authorship, content, and application to the lives of today's Christians.

# Romans

## The Importance of Righteousness

The congregation in Rome was not founded by any apostle. Paul therefore had desired for many years to visit this congregation, but so far had been prevented, so Paul wrote this letter near the end of his third missionary journey, before traveling to Jerusalem for the last time, around A.D. 55 or 56.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to present a systematic treatise on the central doctrine of Scripture—justification by grace alone through faith alone. It has served to refute every corruption of the Gospel throughout the centuries. At the same time, it clarifies many other doctrines, including Baptism, eternal election and sanctification. Martin Luther considered Romans so important that he urged every Christian to memorize it and “occupy himself with it every day as the daily bread of the soul.”

The entire Epistle revolves around the important concept of *righteousness*, in three main parts.

**Part 1.** In chapters 1:18-3:20, Paul shows that no mere human lives up to the perfect righteousness which God requires. He convicts open unbelievers and self-righteous saints, then concludes, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” (3:10) “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (3:20)

**Part 2.** In chapters 3:21-5:21 Paul explains how God gives sinners the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. That’s our justification. The rest of chapter 3 drives home two important facts about our justification. Universal justification says that, although “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” still all have been “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (3:23-24) Personal Justification says, “A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” (3:28) In chapter 4 Paul demonstrates that with the example of Abraham.

Chapter 5 shows the glorious results of being justified by grace through faith. “We have peace with God,” (5:1) and the most incredible love “has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” (5:5) Adam brought sin, death, and condemnation to all people; Jesus Christ brought forgiveness, justification, and life to

all people. (5:12-21)

**Part 3.** The rest of Romans shows that the heart that receives Christ’s righteousness is changed to live in righteousness. Justification is not a license to sin. Through Baptism we were buried and raised with Christ. We are now “dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (chapter 6) We still struggle with sin (chapter 7), but nothing can condemn us when we are in Christ (8:1). There will still be suffering in this world, but God makes everything work out for our good as He keeps us in His hands from eternity to eternity; therefore nothing in all creation can “separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (chapter 8)

Don’t become complacent in the faith, however, as if you can’t fall (chapters 9-11). Many of God’s chosen people of Israel were lost through unbelief. We need to hear and proclaim the Law and Gospel, for “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” (10:17) You were grafted into God’s olive tree by faith, but you can be broken off again if you do not continue in the faith. Ultimately all the true Israel (Jews and Gentiles) will be saved. (chapter 11)

Therefore, let’s give ourselves as living sacrifices to serve God. (12:1) Use your God-given gifts to serve Him (12:3-8). Love one another without hypocrisy, even your enemies. (12:9-21) Submit to the government for it is ordained by God. (13:1-7). Love even trumps our freedom in the Gospel, so we bear with the weak. (13:8-15:13)

We are united in Christ in blessed fellowship, sharing in the work and support of the Gospel ministry and genuine love for fellow believers. Preserve all this by holding on to the Word of God and avoid all who teach anything contrary to God’s Word. All glory be to God through Jesus Christ, Amen! (15:14-16:27)

Luther considered Romans so important that he urged every Christian to memorize it



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





Professor David Lau  
1936-2024

*In this series we are reprinting Spokesman articles by early leaders in the CLC. Pastor James Albrecht is the curator of the series. Professor David Lau (1936-2024) was a leader in the formation of the CLC. He served as pastor at various congregations of the CLC, was a Board of Doctrine member, and a professor at Immanuel Lutheran College. This article is from the Lutheran Spokesman of December 1968. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.*

## The Meaning of Christmas In the Words of TLH Hymn 77

**A**ll my heart this night rejoices  
As I hear Far and near Sweetest angel voices.  
“Christ is born,” their choirs are singing  
Till the air Everywhere Now with joy is ringing.

Christmas means **JOY**. “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10)

Forth today the Conqueror goeth,  
Who the foe, Sin and woe, Death and hell, o’erthroweth.  
God is man, man to deliver;  
His dear Son Now is one With our blood forever.

Christmas means **VICTORY**. “Jesus also Himself took part of flesh and blood; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” (Hebrews 2:14)

Shall we still dread God’s displeasure,  
Who, to save, Freely gave His most cherished Treasure?  
To redeem us, He hath given  
His own Son From the throne Of His might in heaven.

Christmas means a **GIFT** and the assurance of more gifts. “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

Hark! a voice from yonder manger,  
Soft and sweet, Doth entreat: “Flee from woe and danger.  
Brethren, from all ills that grieve you  
You are freed; All you need I will surely give you.”

Christmas means **SECURITY**, the only kind that really counts. “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” (Matthew 8:26)

Hither come, ye heavy-hearted,  
Who for sin, Deep within, Long and sore have smarted;

For the poisoned wounds you’re feeling  
Help is near, One is here Mighty for their healing.

Christmas means **HELP** and **HEALING**. And we sinners are greatly in need of both. “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Matthew 9:13)

Hither come, ye poor and wretched;  
Know His will Is to fill Every hand outstretched.  
Here are riches without measure;  
Here forget All regret, Fill your hearts with treasure.

Christmas means **COMFORT**. “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4)

Guilt no longer can distress me;  
Son of God, Thou my load Bearest to release me.  
Stain in me Thou findest never;  
I am clean, All my sin Is removed forever.

Christmas means **FORGIVENESS**. As Christ was the perfect Lamb of God without spot or blemish, so are we spotless in God’s eyes by faith in Him. “Your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.” (1 John 2:12)

Dearest Lord, Thee will I cherish.  
Though my breath Fail in death, Yet I shall not perish.  
But with Thee abide forever  
There on high, In that joy Which can vanish never.

Christmas means **LIFE**, and that forevermore. Jesus rose again from the dead after His sacrifice, and He will die no more. “I am the Resurrection and the Life. . . . Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.” (John 11:25-26)

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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

# News From the CLCI Mission Field

[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.]

*“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14 NIV)*

**G**reetings to you all in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are humbled to write these few words on how God has been using the CLCI and its various churches here in India to reach the unreached. Your prayers and support are of utmost importance for the Evangelical movement through the CLCI here in India.

**Joint India Pastoral Conference:** We praise the Lord for the two-day Joint India Pastoral conference at Chennai. We express our sincere thanks to the honorable Mission Board for granting this wonderful opportunity to conduct two days Joint India Pastoral Conference at Chennai after four years. What a great joy and blessings we the CLCI and BELC

pastors had through this conference. We praise God for the valuable input that we have received from the essays and devotions from our beloved CLC missionary Rev. Matthew Ude.

**Church planting:** During the year 2023-24, we have added seventeen new congregations, whose pastors were trained through our Immanuel Bible College. Also, we started twenty-five temporary preaching stations in Ongole, Prakasam, Guntur and Krishna districts.

**Current Challenges:** It is really a great challenge to do Gospel work here in India. Despite having a number of



2024 graduation procession at the CLCI Theological Seminary



Praying for a seminary graduate

police cases filed against us, God opened new doors. By His grace we continued functioning and carried out our CLCI activities. Nine CLCI pastors and their family members have been arrested on false charges. In addition, five cases have been brought against our CLCI evangelists in various villages. We are often accused of violating the law against converting Hindus.

The persecution here has often included physical assaults. So far this year, there have been dozens of attacks against CLCI pastors and members. If this trend continues, 2024 may be one of the most violent and difficult years that the Christian community in Andhra and Telangana States have ever seen. Hindu anti-Christian groups, which enjoy the protection and patronage of the ruling BJP Hindu alliance

Government, have targeted Christians, our places of worship, and even our livelihood.

Yes, it is a great challenge to do mission work here in India, but even under these challenging conditions, we are moving forward successfully with faith in the Lord.

**Baptisms:** In the past year we have performed a total of 128 Baptisms in Andhra and Telangana States. We are glad to report that many tribal people have heard our CLCI Gospel messages and have been receiving Jesus as their savior and got baptized. We keep moving ahead for more results with the gracious hand of our Lord. We firmly believe that the Good News of Jesus changes the lives of people. All the Glory to God for His wonder-working power in the CLCI! Thank you very much for upholding us in your prayers.



Young convert receiving Baptism

**2024 Seminary Graduation:** The CLCI Theological Seminary celebrated its graduation on June 15th, 2024, at Nidubrolu. We're very pleased to inform you that God has led seventeen students to complete the three-year seminary course successfully.

Please pray that the Lord may use the CLCI to bring many Indians into His kingdom. Your prayer support will build the CLCI greatly here in India to do His mighty work.

May the Lord bless you all. Thank you.



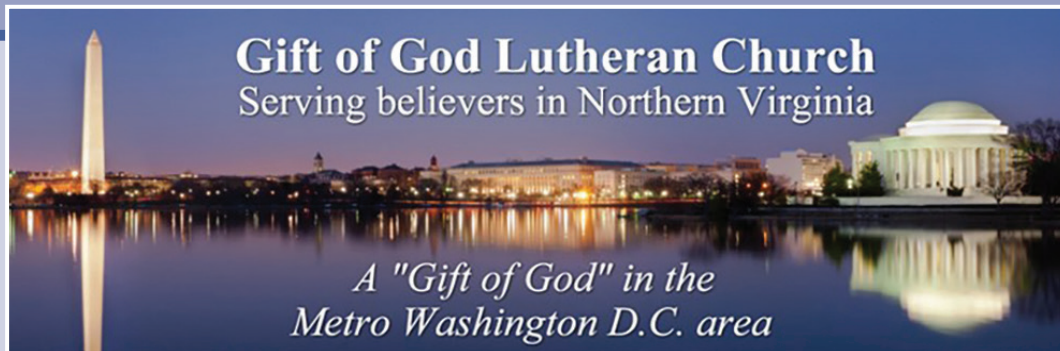
Pastor Jyothi Benjamin is the Chairman of the CLCI. His home is in Nidubrolu, Andhra Pradesh State, India.

## WHAT'S NEW WITH YOU?

Updates from congregations around the Church of the Lutheran Confession

# Gift of God Lutheran Church

## Fairfax, Virginia



Located just outside the bustling beltline of our nation's capital, our Lord has placed *Gift of God Lutheran Church*—not only as a place for local members to worship and enjoy the fellowship of one faith—but also to be a blessing (a “Gift of God”) to CLC members temporarily stationed in the Washington D.C. metro area for work or military service.

### The Lord in Action

As reported in a December 2019 *Spokesman* article, a small group of confessional Lutherans living in the metro Washington D.C. area started worshipping together in 1982, and organized in 1983 with the name *Gift of God Lutheran Church*. Having moved to the area from California, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, this group had two things in common—they all had previously been members of CLC congregations, and they were frustrated by the lack of confessional Lutheranism in the Washington D.C. area.

In September 2023, Gift of God celebrated its fortieth

anniversary. Former pastor Michael Wilke delivered the message from God's Word, and the congregation enjoyed reminiscing with him and his wife Gloria over a potluck meal.

Although the love of God and desire to remain faithful to His pure Word has remained constant over the past forty-plus years, much else has changed. The size of the congregation grew and ebbed as people moved into and out of the area. The children of the founding members have started their own families, the majority of them moving away from the area. Current attendance now averages eight people.

Because of the restrictions imposed during the COVID pandemic, we were not able to meet in our regular rented facility and started meeting in member homes. This worked out very well and continues to this day, with the occasional special service held in a rented facility. Pastor Glenn Oster continues serving our group the majority of the year on a monthly basis either in person or via online “Zoom” calls.

### Planning a Visit?

We welcome visitors! If you are planning to visit the Northern Virginia/metro D.C. area, we encourage you to contact Pastor Oster (803-361-2739) for service time and location. We may even be able to schedule our service times during your visit! It is always an uplifting experience for us to share the news of God's mercy and grace with others through God's Word and song.



**Glenn Oster** serves Gift of God Lutheran Church in Fairfax, Virginia. He is also the CLC Webmaster. His home is in West Columbia, South Carolina.

# “BREAD OF LIFE” READINGS DECEMBER 2024

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

Date	Hymns	Reading	Comments
December 2	TLH 611 / LSB 508	Luke 21	A widow gives a most generous offering. Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple, wars, persecution, the destruction of Jerusalem, and His own second coming. Jesus warns us to be prepared.
December 3	TLH 59 / LSB 398	Obadiah	Obadiah condemns the abuses of Edom against fugitive Judeans; Edom will be humbled. He also announces that the people of the Lord will be restored.
December 4	TLH 564	Malachi 1	The Lord has shown love to His people and has provided for them as a Father, but the people have been unfaithful. Malachi condemns the priests for having offered unfaithful sacrifices.
December 5	TLH 626	Malachi 2	Malachi condemns the priests for having failed to instruct the people in truth. The people are guilty of having married foreign women, guilty of marital unfaithfulness, and guilty of divorce.
December 6	TLH 338 / LSB 687	Malachi 3	The Lord calls His people to repentance for their unfaithfulness to the required tithes and contributions. The Lord challenges His people to live faithfully and promises to bless them.
December 7	TLH 75 / LSB 354	Luke 3	John the Baptist prepares the way, <i>“proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”</i> (Luke 3:3)
December 9	TLH 58 / LSB 334	Malachi 4	Malachi prophesies the coming of the Messiah and the coming of John the Baptist. John baptizes Jesus. Luke records the genealogy of Jesus.
December 10	TLH 493	1 Timothy 5	Paul gives instructions to guide Christians as they strive to interact with one another in a godly manner.
December 11	TLH 447 / LSB 664	1 Timothy 6	Paul comments on the importance of sound teaching, commands Christian contentment, encourages Timothy personally, and gives instructions for the wealthy.
December 12	TLH 463 / LSB 677	Philemon	Onesimus is a runaway slave. Paul writes to Philemon, the master of Onesimus, to encourage him to forgive Onesimus and to receive him back as a brother.
December 13	TLH 473 / LSB 644	2 Timothy 2	Paul compares the perseverance of a faithful Christian teacher to that of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. Paul warns against quarrels over words and useless controversies, and encourages Timothy to be a worker approved by God.
December 14	TLH 285	2 Timothy 3	Paul predicts increasing godlessness in the last days, despite which the Word of God will continue to be profitable and powerful.
December 16	TLH 599	2 Timothy 4	Paul charges Timothy to preach the Word of God boldly, patiently, and faithfully. Paul closes his letter with personal instructions and final greetings.
December 17	TLH 608	Micah 1	Micah warns of coming destruction from the Lord. Israel and Judah are to be judged. Micah mourns the sad situation. Assyria will invade.
December 18	TLH 654	Micah 2	Micah pronounces woe to those who oppress others, but the remnant will receive mercy from the Lord.
December 19	WS 765 / LSB 840	Micah 3	Micah denounces false prophets.
December 20	TLH 462 / LSB 651	Micah 4	Micah prophesies that the mountain of the Lord will be exalted and that the Lord will rescue Zion.
December 21	TLH 647 / LSB 361	Micah 5	A ruler over Israel will be born in Bethlehem. The Lord will deliver a remnant of His people.
December 23	TLH 439 / LSB 852	Micah 6	The Lord indicts His people. The Lord explains simply what He requires of His people. The Lord threatens the wicked with destruction.
December 24	TLH 428 / LSB 729	Micah 7	Micah laments. Micah expresses confidence in the salvation of the Lord. The Lord demonstrates forgiveness and mercy.
December 25	TLH 54 / LSB 918	Exodus 40	By the command of the Lord and under the leadership of Moses, the Israelites erect and anoint the tabernacle. The glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle, indicating the presence of the Lord among His people.
December 26	TLH 224 / LSB 497	Isaiah 10	The Lord pronounces woes to Israel. The Lord pronounces judgment on arrogant Assyria. The Lord promises that the remnant of Israel will return.
December 27	TLH 62 / LSB 357	Isaiah 11	In this messianic prophecy, Isaiah refers to Jesus as <i>“a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch.”</i> (Isaiah 11:1) Jesus will reign and all will be well.
December 28	TLH 92 / LSB 386	Isaiah 12	Isaiah records a brief song of praise to the Lord in response to the salvation that is to be accomplished by Jesus Christ.
December 30	TLH 472	2 John	John encourages <i>“the elect lady and her children”</i> (2 John 1) to walk in truth and in love.
December 31	TLH 640	3 John	John writes to Gaius. Some people support the ministry of the church while others oppose it.

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

# Immanuel Winter Haven "Learning with Littles" Program

The goal of our domestic mission program is to assist in spreading the Gospel by offering direction, encouragement, and financial support to preaching stations and congregations that are not able to support a full-time ministry on their own, and that show the potential to eventually become self-sustaining. Currently, we support one subsidized congregation, but we also work in other ways to support mission work across the CLC.

In recent years, the Committee on Domestic Fields has developed resources and seminars to help congregations with local outreach efforts. For many years, the Traveling Vacation Bible School program has helped congregations promote and run VBS programs in their communities. Each year, the Board of Missions also allocates funds through the Mission Development Fund (MDF) to support local mission outreach when congregations need extra assistance. Immanuel Lutheran in Winter Haven, FL, where I serve, recently received an MDF grant to help launch *Learning with Littles*, a program designed to reach families with young children in our community.

*Learning with Littles* is a free educational playgroup for caregivers and children ages birth to six, offering them a chance to learn and play together. The group meets at Immanuel on the second and fourth Fridays of each month for an hour filled



Participants in the *Learning with Littles* program at Immanuel Winter Haven

with Bible stories, educational activities, and free playtime. This program also allows families to see our school and get to know church members who volunteer.

While our school has a spacious outdoor area and playground, most equipment is suited for older children. With the help of the MDF grant, Immanuel was able to purchase equipment for younger children, such as a portable playhouse, mini trampoline, toddler slide, and baby swings. We also purchased outdoor blankets and a portable speaker to make the sessions more comfortable. Funds are also used to advertise for the playgroup.

Our hope is that *Learning with Littles* will provide opportunities to connect with young families in our community and share God's Word with them. As we build these relationships, we pray

that these families might be led to consider our school and, in time, to join our congregation. We are thankful for the MDF grant that made it possible for us to get this program up and running.



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

# THE ANSWER TO EVERYTHING

**“F**or unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder.” (Isaiah 9:6)

Have you heard of “the theory of everything”? The theory of everything is a hypothesis that tries to explain and link together all physical aspects of the universe. Einstein was the first one who attempted to develop such a theory, and scientists, without any success whatsoever, have been working on it ever since.

If you think about it, you and I can explain better than anyone what links all things together in the universe. It’s the Bethlehem Child, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us, “*And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*” (Colossians 1:17) Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, through Whom all things were brought into existence, and by Whom the universe continues to operate.

Isaiah proclaims the glorious news that the “Answer to Everything” has been born. We call this mystery of our faith *the incarnation*, meaning that God, Who is bigger than all things, received a real human body when He was conceived and born of the virgin Mary. The absolute fullness of God, Who fills heaven and earth, was contained in the tiny infant body of Mary’s Son.

Jesus is the answer. He’s the missing piece of the puzzle to life that scientists, with all their knowledge, can never discover. Only God can provide the answer, and He did that when He came into the world that night long ago as the true Son of God, and the true Son of Mary.

In Isaiah’s birth announcement, we see that Jesus is the answer, when he tells us, “*And the government will be upon His shoulder.*” To understand what this means we go to the last chapter of Matthew, where the risen Christ says: “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*” (Matthew 28:18)

Talk about a unifying principle which governs the universe—



Jesus Christ has power and authority over all things! In Ephesians Chapter 1 we are told that Christ is “*far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.*” (verse 21)

But when Isaiah says that “*the government will be upon His shoulder,*” we’re being told that not only does the Child have all authority, but that He shoulders the burden of everything. The little Child in Mary’s arms has big enough shoulders to take upon Himself the sin of the world, as well as the strength to deal with all the burdens that result from sin.

No matter what day the calendar says it is, we all have burdens, and our shoulders are simply not big enough to carry them. And that is our problem. We put pressure on ourselves to try and carry them. Christmas Day is a day, like every other day, to confess our sins and weaknesses, and to rejoice that in this newborn Child we find big-enough shoulders to carry everything.

The guilt that’s been eating you up? Give it to Him. He already carried it to His cross and washed it away with His blood. The impending death that frightens you? His shoulders are big enough to handle even that. That problem you can’t solve? Let Him carry it. He wants to, and He can.

God came into our world so that one day we could live in His world. That is finally the ultimate answer to everything—life forever in fullness of joy where all things are restored to the way God intended them to be all along.

Unto us a Child is born! Jesus absolutely is *the Answer to Everything!* How wonderful it is!



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

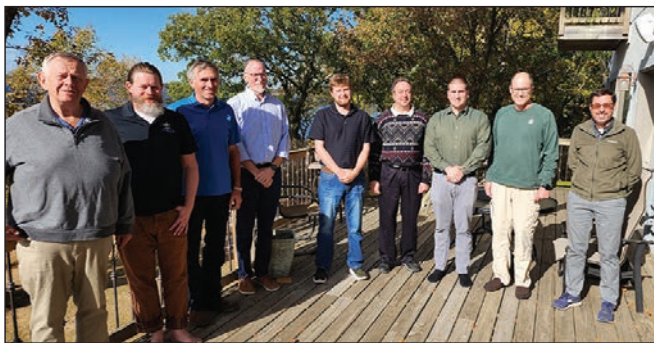
# Lutheran Spokesman

501 Grover Road, Eau Claire, WI, 54701

## ANNOUNCEMENTS



**Installation.** In accord with our usage and order, **Luke Bernthal** (photo, center left), who was called by Messiah Lutheran Church of Hales Corners, Wisconsin, to be their pastor was installed on October 20, 2024.  
—Pastor Mark Bernthal.



2024 Minnesota Pastoral Conference, October 6-8,  
West Battle Lake, Minnesota

**Lutheran Spokesman Subscription Rate Increase.** Beginning next July in the CLC's fiscal new year, there will be a \$5 subscription increase. Individual subscriptions for one year will be \$23. Bulk subscriptions to congregations will be \$20. Please send address changes or payment questions to: [lutheranspokesman@ilc.edu](mailto:lutheranspokesman@ilc.edu)  
—Seth Schaller, Secretary, CLC Board of Education and Publications



**Installation.** In accord with our usage and order, **Samuel Rodebaugh**, who was called by Saint John's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Okabena, Minnesota, to be their pastor was installed on November 10, 2024. Participating in the service (photo, l. to r.) were Pastors Nathan Pfeiffer, Luke Willitz, Norman Greve, James Albrecht, Joseph Naumann, Johnathan Schnose, Samuel Rodebaugh, Cory Drehle, John Hein, and Zachary Sippert.  
—Pastor John Hein.