

Lutheran Spokesman



Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." Matthew 2:1,2

Good Tidings of Great Joy for ALL PEOPLE

As this is being written, one of the first winter storms is rolling through the Dakotas and Minnesota. Likewise, homes around the nation are beginning the process of pulling out the Christmas decorations and stringing the lights. Soon parking lots will be packed, and lines at the check-out will grow to epic proportions.

From the weather to the department stores, there is no doubt that Christmas is just around the corner.

As you read this, all that is old news. No doubt many more Alberta clippers will have swung through the Midwest, bringing with them blasts of cold air. The long lines will have shifted from the check-out to the return counter. The children will have “survived”—by their perspective—another Christmas Eve program. Family and friends will have gone back to their homes. By now you may even have taken down the Christmas tree and

decorations.

Another Christmas has come and gone. It always seems like it came too soon and went by too fast, and we wish we could hang onto the holiday joy for just a little longer.

But what about those shepherds? Do you think their Christmas went by fast? Luke chapter 2 reads that one minute the shepherds were “keeping watch over their flock by night,” and the next minute the glory of the Lord was shining around them; angels told them that their Savior had been born in Bethlehem and sang their hymn of

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praise to God.

Having heard and seen all this, the shepherds didn't waste a moment. They hurried to see "that which the Lord has made known to us."

And just as the Lord had revealed to them, they "found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger."

Spreading the News!

But their celebration of Christmas didn't end there, did it? Having seen their "Savior who is Christ the Lord," these shepherds could not keep this to themselves. The angels had said that these were good tidings of great joy for all people. The shepherds did mission work—"They made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child"! They spread the news about this Savior.

These good tidings of great joy are for all people—that includes you and me! Lying in that manger was our Savior. He was born to take our sins away. He was born to give us eternal life.

That is the true joy—the lasting joy—of Christmas. The shepherds took those good tidings and made them known.

Let us follow in the footsteps of those early evangelists. Through His



FOR MY HOUSE SHALL BE
CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER
for all peoples
ISAIAH 56:7

Word God has announced the birth of His Son. He has told us why He was born. May we ever join the shepherds in making widely known that which has been told us about this Child. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Those are some good tidings of great joy for all people!

Let us learn the wondrous story
Of our great Redeemer's birth;
Spread the brightness of His glory
Till it cover all the earth. (TLH #83:6)

—Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer



Who made the Wise Men wise?

(See Bible verse on cover)

Why do we call the Wise Men "wise" men? Obviously, we refer to them as such because that's what Scripture calls them.

Where did they get their wisdom? Did it come from years of study at the

Magi University? The magi were men who were wise in the study of astronomy. Apparently when they saw the special star in the eastern sky, they understood its significance. Perhaps this knowledge had been handed down in

tradition since the captivity of the Jews in Babylon and Persia. We are not told.

But one way or another through the communication of God's Word, these men had been made wise to the fact that the Savior was coming and that a special star would announce His coming. Thus when the star appeared, they knew that this special star announced the birth of the "King of the Jews."

We are told in Scripture that "...the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25). From the start it was foolishness to follow the star to find the birthplace of the Savior. Yet, on God's Promise, they had followed it to within ten miles of the birthplace of the King of the Jews. As they drew near His birthplace, they decided that they could go the rest of the way on their own.

After all, where else would one expect the King of the Jews to reside but in the capital city of Jerusalem?

Another wise man points out in Ecclesiastes that wisdom without God is useless. "I communed with my heart, saying, 'Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge.' I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind" (Eccl. 1:16f).

Human Reason Not Reliable!

After considering everything under the sun, he (Solomon) concluded that it was all vanity, except for this: "Fear God and keep His commandments..." (Eccl. 12:13). So, when the Wise Men stopped following God's directions

and instead followed their own wisdom, they weren't so wise anymore. They were going in the wrong direction. When they followed their own reason, they discovered that they could no longer see the star and could not find the Savior.

Their human reason took them to the palace of King Herod. There they were directed away from their own wisdom, and the wisdom of God's Word was revealed to them once again.

The chief priests and the scribes looked in the Old Testament book of Micah; they told the Magi that the Child would be born "in Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet...Then Herod sent them to Bethlehem..." (Mt. 2:5,8). And "when they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him" (Mt. 2:9ff)

During the past Christmas season the "wise" of the world found the meaning of the season in the spirit of giving or in gathering with family and friends. Through God's Word, however, the Christ-believer finds the meaning in God's giving of the Christ Child in the manger on Christmas morning.

But the Wise Men remind us that, even after the Christmas season has passed, the Christ Child remains. The Wise Men arrived late—that is, they weren't there for Jesus' birth. Most likely they showed up at least a year (maybe more) after the fact. But the Savior was there for them. They wor-

shipped Him as their Savior from sin—not only as the King of the Jews, but the Savior of the world!

Who made the Wise Men wise? God did. As long as they followed God's guidance, they knew where to find that Savior.

And so do we. Through His Word God has made each of us a Wise Man as well through faith in Christ, for "...from childhood you have known the Holy

Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Through that Word Christ is also found in our hearts (Jn. 14:23). He is here for us, even weeks and months after Christmas, even 2,000 years after His birth. He has, by that Word, brought us to worship Him as our Savior from sin.

—Pastor Joel Fleischer



A New Year's Meditation —

"The eternal God is your refuge..."

(Deuteronomy 33:27)

"Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD..." (Deut. 33:29).

Isn't that amazing? There is no one else in all the world that is as privileged as WE—the children of God. By faith in Christ, we are among the chosen ones who are "saved by the LORD." Our Lord Jesus Christ came to save the whole world, but that salvation is received only by faith in Him. By faith in Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to God through the forgiveness of our sins.

That means we believers can enter into the New Year with greater confidence and peace than anyone else. For it is not only eternal Salvation we have—that is our greatest joy!—but the rest of the words of Moses to Asher also apply to us. He says, "The eternal God is your refuge."

Moses had faithfully led the people of Israel for over forty years. Now he

was about to leave them and die. The people would have to go into the promised land without his leadership. They would have to face their mighty enemies without the confident stability Moses provided. The future seemed uncertain.

However, the people were not forsaken. Moses assured them, "The eternal God is your refuge." Leaders may come and go, but the eternal God will never die or leave them.

By faith in Jesus, we have the same God who spoke to Moses over three

From

**AGE
TO AGE**

God's word endures...
God's grace reigns!



thousand years ago. Hundreds of generations have come and gone since Moses, but God remains the same. He is the eternal God. We do not know what the new year will bring. There are many uncertainties; but one thing is certain: God does not change. He is not affected by time.

What a comfort to know that this eternal God is our refuge!

Everlasting Arms!

With the Hebrew parallelism of this verse, Moses gives another picture to show us what it means to have the eternal God as our refuge. He says, “And underneath are the everlasting arms.”

Think of how children are not afraid to jump into water over their head if their father is standing there with outstretched arms to catch them. They trust the strong arms of their father. But the arms of our fathers grow old and weak. In their old age we may have to hold them up. Eventually they pass away.

But our heavenly Father has “everlasting arms.” They never grow old or weak. They are almighty from eternity to eternity. These everlasting arms of

our heavenly Father are always underneath us. They are there to hold us up; to catch us from falling; to protect us and keep us always. We can jump boldly into the future because our Father’s everlasting arms are underneath us. We are truly safe in His arms!

Moses uses yet another great picture to give us even greater confidence. He says, “There is no one like the God of Jeshurun (Israel), Who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds” (v. 26). What a picture of the glory of our God! He rides the heavens to help us. No matter where we are, no matter what else is going on in the world, God rides the heavens to help YOU and ME. He is immediately at our side in every need.

We can go forward into a new year with great joy and confidence, knowing that the eternal God is our refuge. He is the One who “rides the heavens to help you.” Nothing can really harm those who place their faith in Jesus, for they will be in His everlasting arms forever.

—Pastor David Reim



Our CLC president prepares a monthly letter of gospel encouragement for synod pastors. This letter, which appeared in September 2005, is a sample. We think its message is particularly timely, for many of our congregations hold annual church meetings in the month of January. Let members and pastors alike consider prayerfully the godly perspective on Christian ministry here presented. — Editor

“A sower went out to sow his seed”

(Luke 8:5)

“The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). In this parable Jesus describes what happens when the Word of God is proclaimed. The emphasis is not on the sower of the seed, as if the sower makes the seed produce plants

and the harvest. The power of life is in the seed itself. The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace—the gospel and the sacraments.

As children of God we find it difficult to understand that anyone would

not believe the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is so clear and so wonderful to those who believe. This parable stresses that the seed does not always find good ground, and that the natural imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth (Genesis 6).

There is always the prideful inclination for us as pastor-sowers to think that we can do something to help the gospel along and make it palatable to our hearers. We think that the clarity of our sermons or our powerful presentation or our irresistible logic guarantees success to our preaching and ministry.

Our age's fascination with numerical growth may make this worse, tempting us to adopt methods that create outward, superficial numbers. In the South I was struck by evangelists who tended to keep track of the number of converts like scalps on a belt. Yet even among us in the CLC, the tendency is to measure our mission efforts by an emphasis on statistical numbers.

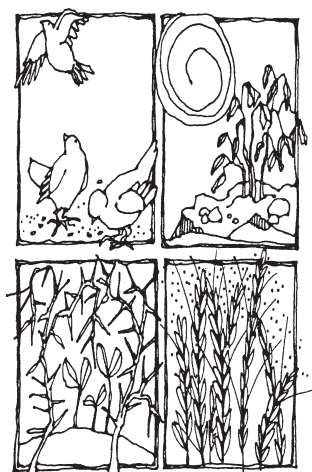
The reality of the reaction to the gospel was captured by Pastor Mayhew (who had just returned from a foreign mission trip—ed.). When he pointed out the failing of idolatrous Hindu religion in India, a large number of adults promptly walked out.

Christian denominations in South America and Africa have struggled with the temptation to incorporate items from pagan animalism and give them a Christian terminology. The largest growing evangelical church in Nairobi, Kenya, preaches a message of "healing, prosperity, and salvation." We tend to evaluate our ministry by the world's standards.

Jesus describes for us the reality of what happens when the Word of God is preached.

Some of the seed falls on the hard pathway that borders the fields. The seed cannot even penetrate the hard ground, and the birds eat it before it even has a chance to take root. "Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). When we preach the Word, we need to realize that for many people there will be no effect or result. There is a hard-hearted resistance to even giving the Word of God a hearing in the world today. Most people that we come into contact with will not even give our message a chance. Some of the seed we sow will not even penetrate the consciousness of society in general.

Some of the seed falls on the rock and because of the warmth, quickly springs up; but it withers and dies just as quickly because there is no moisture. "But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of



A SOWER WENT OUT TO SOW...

temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13). All of us have had the experience of people responding with joy to the message we preach. In fact, they are almost overly enthusiastic in their new-found faith. But just as quickly they are gone. Jesus describes people who receive the word with joy but don’t put down roots. They believe for a while but because they have no solid roots they fall away in time of temptation. Much of our ministry consists of the slow process of building a root system in our people by grounding them firmly in the Word of God. Much of the religious enthusiasm of today dies as quickly as it sprang up.

Some of the seed falls among the thorns, and over time the thorns and thistles crowd out the growing plants. Have you ever wondered why if you give your plants a good start and then just let the weeds go, the weeds always win?

“Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:14). Again, we are talking about people who hear the Word and participate in the sacraments. There are those members who gradually begin to miss church and Bible Class. There are the young people

who go away to college and put their study of the Word on hold. There are pastors who become distracted with many things. Faith is choked with the cares (anxieties), riches, and pleasures of life. Take your pick. Each one of these will kill faith over time. We often do not warn people about this three-pronged danger to faith. These dangers can gradually choke out faith and are dangerous because everything seems to be all right.

We should not become disheartened when we experience in our ministry the very things pictured by Jesus in this parable. Our calling is to sow the seed which is the Word of God. The Word will not return to the Lord empty. It will accomplish God’s purposes.

Pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers into His field. Pray for our professors at ILC, who have been entrusted with the task of preparing young people for the public ministry. Pray for our teachers, who have been given responsibility for the tender young. Pray for one another for we are co-laborers in the Kingdom of God.

Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.

—Pastor John Schierenbeck



A VISION TO SHARE

How would you like to live in a community in which there never had been a Christian Church?

Or where one-time active Christian congregations no longer existed?

Or where the Bible is nowhere preached and explained in worship services and Bible classes?

Or where people’s hearts no longer have the image or picture of our gracious God, who gave His only Son so that whoever believes in that Son would not perish?

All of the above would be very sad. It would illustrate the words of Proverbs 29:18: “Where there is no

vision, the people perish.” In plain English this means that “where the Bible is never taught, people will suffer eternal destruction.”

There are places like that in the world.

“Where there is no vision” does not refer mainly to the inability to see. “Vision” refers to the thing seen, such as a view or picture. One Bible translation says it well with the rendition “prophetic revelation”—a reference to the inspired Scriptures, which give a clear illustration of God’s plan of salvation. Over and over again.

That translation goes on to describe “perish” as the idea of “cast off restraint.”

Where the doctrine of God is faithfully taught and proclaimed, many people will get the picture. The picture is Christ, the gospel, the forgiveness of sins.

With that gospel come hope and peace and love, and in the end eternal life. And all along the way the believers receive the power to restrain sin and control their lives and serve their Savior.

“Perish” is a frightening word, indi-

cating a beginning here in time and extending beyond the grave.

The beginning is this, that “in sin did my mother conceive me.” That’s me, as in ME! From conception and birth onward, the unregenerate person proceeds from babyish selfishness to irresponsibility to ungodly living, and then very possibly on to loose and lawless activity, casting off all restraint—all the way along to living like wild, untamed animals, all because of unbelief.

The end is disaster. Forever.

Sometimes even the regenerate have to admit to some of the above. Thank Christ we have the picture, the vision, of the Cross! Of Christ on the Cross—as portrayed in hymns like “Jesus, I Will Ponder Now” or “When I Survey The Wondrous Cross”!

The end of verse 18 in Proverbs 29 shows that whoever has the doctrine of God is blessed. They have the picture, the vision, the image of a merciful Redeemer.

You have that picture! Treasure it highly, and share it with others in this perishing world.

—W. H. Fanning, *Pastor Emeritus*



Participants in the Lower Michigan Youth Camp, August 8-11, 2005 near Holland, Michigan

NUNC DIMITTIS

*Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
according to Your word;*

*For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have pre-
pared before the face of all peoples,*

*A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of
Your people Israel.*

The *Nunc Dimittis*—so called from the first line of Simeon’s song in the Latin language—is one of the Christmas songs, though we may not recognize it as such. It is generally sung as part of the Service of Holy Communion.

This wonderful song of faith is found on pages 29 and 43 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Hymns 132, 127, and 585 are based on this song which was spoken by Simeon upon the presentation of the new-born Savior in the temple. Jesus had been circumcised according to the Law at eight days (Luke 2:21). Also according to the Law (Leviticus 12), a woman who had borne a male child was considered unclean for seven days, and had to remain isolated 33 more days. At forty days she offered a sacrifice of purification. (Thus at 40 days, Mary and Joseph, her husband, brought Jesus to the temple.) Also according to the Law (Exodus 13) the first-born son was holy unto God.

SONGS OF CHRISTMAS

In series:

The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

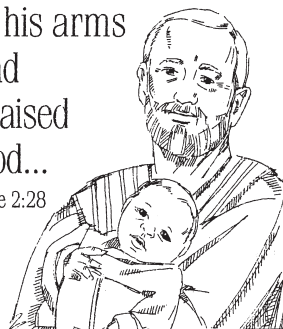
The Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79)

The Gloria In Excelsis (Luke 2:14)

**The Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29-32)*

Simeon took him
in his arms
and
praised
God...

Luke 2:28



To the accomplishment of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ submitted to the Law. According to Galatians chapter 4, Jesus was put under the Law “to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

It was on this occasion that Simeon, who with Anna had waited patiently for the coming of the Lord, spoke the words of this song.

The only mention of Simeon in the Bible is this reference in the Gospel of Luke. It is assumed that he was an elderly man. He was a just and pious man who knew the prophecies and waited for them to come to pass. What a singular privilege and blessing that Simeon could hold the newborn Savior in his arms!

In other words, the fact that Simeon was in the temple was not chance or

luck. Scripture tells us that the “Holy Spirit was upon Him.” Furthermore, “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.” “So he came by the Spirit into the temple.”

Simeon had been endowed with prophetic wisdom as he prophesied to Mary of the anguish she would know when Jesus was crucified—a crucifixion which would reveal the thoughts of many hearts. As we follow the passion of Jesus, we see the attitudes of people over against the Savior.

For Simeon nothing in this world transcended the joy and peace of seeing and holding his Savior. He was now ready to depart this world.

The Lord desires all to be saved. Simeon had now seen the Savior of the world, “prepared before all the people.” Christ is the light of the Gentiles

who had sat in darkness. Christ is also the glory of Israel. The greatest distinction of Israel was that from it came the Savior of the world, God’s Son in the flesh.

We too can hold the Savior in our arms through faith, even as we await the time that He will receive us into His arms in heaven. Blessed are all who—as Simeon and Anna did—await the revelation of the Savior when He comes again. Our Lord comes to us in Word and Sacrament and gives peace to all who believe.

How blessed Christ-believers are to say (and sing) confidently with Simeon, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation...!”

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer



The Discourses of Christ

The Way, the Truth, the Life—John 14:1-6

We ought to listen to our “Champion over death”!

“I’m sorry; I wasn’t listening; what was the question?”

The question, dear reader, is whether you have a problem about the afterlife. Not dying—for we all dread the process of fading away in failing health—but after dying has produced death, what then? Is there anything beyond this life? Anything other than

evaporation of the life-force, disintegration of the corpse and annihilation? Well, is there?

That was the question—and what is your answer?

The child of God goes to God Himself for the answer—which means searching His Word, the Bible, about the afterlife. We will make no mistake if we

take God at His Word, whereas Satan will lead us into misbelief and despair if we try to figure it out on our own.

Today we are interviewing the One who has the keys to eternity, the One who Himself endured separation of the soul from the body and yet survived! What does our Savior have to say about the afterlife?

Let us follow Jesus' line of thought step by step in this discourse with His disciples. He begins with the exhortation: "Let not your heart be troubled..." with obsessing over your mortality, for God has taken that out of your hands with His own entirely satisfactory solution in Jesus, who embodies God's answer to death and afterlife.

"...You believe in God, believe also in Me." In other words, entrust yourself to Jesus both in this world and in the next. Why? Because when everything else falls away, He remains standing, validated and authoritative, as the Spirit testifies, "He is the head of the body...that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell" (Col. 1:18-19).

As the preeminent authority on life, death, resurrection, and the afterlife, Jesus assures us that Father-God indeed provides an eternal shelter for His children: "In My Father's house are many mansions (dwellings)." This beloved Scripture tells us that our Father has made full provision for housing us with Him in heaven. This is not a flimsy supposition but utterly reliable information; Jesus would never lie to us about eternity or anything else—"if it were not so, I would have told you."

But what did He mean when He said (just a few minutes earlier, v. 36)

that He was going where they could not follow Him? Was this His way of giving advance notice that He was about to abandon them? Hardly! Jesus faced them squarely, looked them in the eye and with a smile laid such a groundless fear to rest: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Hallelujah!

So, on the one hand it was sadly true that Jesus was leaving them; but on the other hand He promised that His leaving them behind served a higher purpose—to prepare a place for them in heaven! Though they could not follow Him to the cross and hell, they would indeed follow Him to heaven.

A Quick Review...

Now let's take a quick review of what we have learned from God's Word on the subject of the afterlife—since the entire thing is in God's hands:

a) Jesus died but came through OK and then ascended to heaven, alive and well—as has been competently verified by many eyewitnesses.

b) Jesus does not deceive us about these realities.

c) Jesus went on ahead to finalize preparations for our arrival (as He testified in this passage, as well as on other occasions).

d) He vowed to come back to Earth to take us after our death to His/our home in heaven.

Deductions: There IS an afterlife for us after our bodily death, and Jesus plans on having us with Him in heaven, to live with Him and our Father as long as eternity lasts.

Was anything left unresolved about God's marvelous, miraculous doings



**do
not
let
your
hearts
be troubled**

JOHN 14:1 NIV

and plans for us? Jesus thought not, for He had laid it out point by point: "...And where I go, you know, and the way you know." Indeed, we do know our Father's Word on it: Jesus has solved our sin problem with His righteousness—"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23-24).

Yes, we know that Jesus provides the cure for death, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn. 11:25-26).

So what's the problem? One problem is our human unwillingness to believe something that seems too good to be true. Apparently out of such human backwardness (one of the products of being sin-infected) came the puzzled anguish of Thomas, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way?"

Poor Thomas!

The problem afflicting Thomas is familiar enough to us, too—at least in our moments of weakness, when we slip back to square #1 all too readily. Even when life is going on swimming-

ly, our flesh anticipates that good times will not last; and when we are in the dumps, our heart knows we have deserved worse. Even a Spirit-prompted feeding on God's Word can turn sour in our sinful digestion, and we sweat out the fear that we do not really have a good grip on what God has given us in His Testimony.

We all know how it goes: one moment we enjoy the surety of our faith, but in the next moment it all turns upside-down and inside-out. Oh, Thomas, we know how you felt!

What is to be done with our weakness, our fears, our sick fantasies?

Grace To Persevere

The answer is right before us. As long as Jesus is available, we must give Him His turn to speak, and we must open our ears to Him! This is our Lord and Savior, none other than the Son of God incarnate, the Champion over death and hell, who is speaking to us! He has the inside track; He knows! He came back from death and the grave in order to give us the straight goods! He stands when all else falls, and He holds out His hands and heart to rescue us! Our weaknesses do not rob Him of His strength!

Listen up, and rejoice, for He is speaking to me—and to you too!—"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

There you have it, dear reader—if you know Jesus, you know the way to heaven; if you want the truth on it, just take Jesus at His word; if you seek an afterlife that really IS living, take the salvation Jesus provides, ready and waiting for you!

We regret that Satan has peddled his sick fantasies wherever he finds an open door in souls ignorant of the

Truth; we sorrow for the souls that buy into Satan's errors, which will morph into the ultimate nightmare of hell.

Therefore, hold fast to God's Truth! When your soul departs for the far shore, Jesus will be standing to receive you. When the heavens roll up like a scroll and the elements melt with terri-

ble heat, Jesus' blood and righteousness makes you fire-proof.

God grant us the grace to persevere through hell and high water—as we come to the Father and the eternal home awaiting us—through Jesus, only Jesus! Amen!

—Paul R. Koch



INTRODUCING the Books of the Prophets

Amos

“... Fast-forward 700 years to other shepherds living in the same area, who were given the privilege of sharing the good news of the Savior’s birth. May God grant us the faithfulness of these shepherds in proclaiming His Word to a people not unlike those of Amos’s day. May He never judge us with a famine of His Word.”

I'd like you to meet Amos. Amos, whose name means burden-bearer, was a shepherd from Tekoa, a small town just south of Bethlehem. Although he was from Judah, the southern kingdom, he was called by the Lord to “go prophesy to My people Israel,” the kingdom to the north.

Unlike Jonah, who desperately tried to avoid doing God's will in speaking to an enemy people, Amos readily obeyed. Nearly all of the book of Amos is prophecy of judgment and destruction for Israel and her neighbors.

The book begins with Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab—Israel's neighbors—all facing judgment for their ongoing transgressions against the Lord. Each kingdom had committed specific acts for which

they would face a specific judgment.

Judah, Amos's land, would also face judgment. One would have expected that God's chosen people would have treasured His Word, but they too “have despised the law of the Lord.”

Although Judah's present king, Uzziah, “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD” (2 Kgs. 15:3), the “high places” of false worship—where heathen sacrifices were offered and incense was burned—were not removed.

The majority of the book, however, contains prophecies against Israel, the northern kingdom that had first rebelled under Jeroboam I and was now being ruled by Jeroboam II. Every single king of Israel, however (nineteen in all), is described with these

Outline of AMOS

I. Judgments on Heathen Nations Bordering on Israel and also on Judah and Israel (Ch. 1 & 2).

II. Three Discourses against Israel (Ch. 3-6).

III. Visions descriptive of Israel's punishment (Ch. 7:1-9:10).

IV. Calling of the Gentiles (Ch. 9:11-15).

(Outline adapted from Introduction to the Books of the Bible, Drewes, Concordia Pub. House, St. Louis, MO., 1965)

words, "and he did evil in the sight of the LORD."

Certain sins of Israel are highlighted as reasons for the impending judgment. Their justice system was full of corruption, with government officials accepting bribes. Also mentioned are the mistreatment of the poor, pride, sexual immorality, drunkenness, and an unwillingness to listen to God's prophets.

Outwardly, the kingdom of Israel was flourishing in the days of Jeroboam II. Their political power was extended; they faced no immediate threats from foreign powers; the economy was prospering. Outwardly, many were even offering up sacrifices of thanksgiving. But their worship was hollow—form over substance!

Judgment Looms

What form would the judgment of the Lord take?

In the past the Lord had tried to open their eyes by bringing devastations: famine, drought, blight, mildew, locusts, plagues, and warfare. "Yet," says the LORD, "you have not returned to Me" (Amos 4:10).

Amos now announces that the Lord's patience has run out. All of their prosperity would lie in ruin at the hands of invading forces. They would suffer great casualties in warfare. Survivors would be carried away captive and scattered throughout the Earth.

Perhaps the most devastating judgment, however, is recorded in Amos 8:11-12: "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord God, "that I will send a famine on the land. Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it."

Could a judgment be any worse than to have the Word itself removed from a land—or to have the Means of Grace by which we are saved taken away?

Are there any words of hope or comfort in Amos? There are a few. A desperate call to repentance is uttered in chapter 5. "Seek Me and live... Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the Lord God of hosts will be with you... It may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph."

And in the closing verses of the book, the LORD speaks of a restoration of things fallen, of a remnant of captives that will return. These verses are cited by the apostle James (see Acts 15:16-17), as he shows how the gospel's spread to the Gentiles was predicted by the Old Testament prophets.

These new "chosen people" will be planted in a land never to be uprooted, a perfect land that He would give them. This land can only refer to the

mansions of heaven prepared for His followers, a remnant of the faithful.

Amos, a shepherd, had a difficult task given to him by the Lord. He was to proclaim judgment to people that had forsaken God.

Fast-forward 700 years to other shepherds living in the same area, who were given the privilege of sharing the good news of the Savior's birth. May God grant us the faithfulness of these shepherds in proclaiming His Word to

a people not unlike those of Amos's day! May He never judge us with a famine of His Word!

Preserve Thy Word, O Savior,
To us this latter day
And let Thy kingdom flourish,
Enlarge Thy Church, we pray.
Oh, keep our faith from failing,
Keep hope's bright star aglow.
Let naught from Thy Word turn us
While wand'ring here below.
(TLH #264:1)

—Prof. Joseph Lau



THE PSALMS

THE CHRISTIAN'S PRAYER BOOK

Working Introduction

(Our thanks to Pastor Wayne Eichstadt for this “working introduction” to this new series on the psalms which is to run during coming months in the *Lutheran Spokesman*.—Editor)

The ongoing sanctification which the Holy Spirit accomplishes in the hearts of believers can't help but spill out into the words and life of the Christian. Jesus said: “He who believes in Me...out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 3:38).

Throughout the history of God's people, the rivers of living water have poured out of their hearts and into the words and expressions of their hymns. Such is the case in the Old Testament Hymnal—the book of Psalms.

The psalms are expressions of faith from daily life. The book of Psalms is, in many ways, a compilation of daily prayers from the life of a Christian. Old Testament believers recognized their sins and confessed them just as we do. So, among the psalms there are prayers

of confession. Old Testament believers were filled with awe at God's grace and power and they praised Him just as we do. So, in the psalms we find prayers of praise and thanksgiving. Old Testament believers looked forward to the coming Savior, just as we look back to His life and ministry. The psalms speak of Jesus. The psalms are God's Holy Word in poetic setting, spoken from the context of the daily life of His children.

Martin Luther wrote:

“The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly—and pictures his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom—that it might well be called a little Bible...I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble to compile a short Bible and example book of all Christendom, or of all saints. Thus, whoever could not read the whole Bible would here have almost an entire

summary of it, comprised in one little book..." [*Luther's Works*, Philadelphia Edition, volume 6, p. 385].

"A human heart is like a ship on a wild sea, driven by the storm winds from the four quarters of the world. Here it is struck with fear and worry about coming disaster; there comes grief and sadness because of present evil. Here breathes a breeze of hope and of expectation of happiness to come; there blows security and joy in present blessings...what is the greatest

thing in the Psalter but this earnest speaking amid these storms and winds of every kind?..." [*Luther's Works*, Philadelphia Edition, volume 6, p. 386f].

As we spend time together in the Christian's Prayer book, we will see ourselves in the application of the gospel to sinners' lives; and we will surely be edified by the powerful Word of our Lord.

"O come, let us sing to the LORD!"

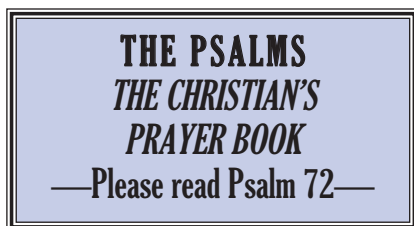


O Subjects of the King —Praise Him!

The inauguration of a president is a glorious affair. Preparations abound. Expectations run high. The day itself is filled with ceremony, celebrations, grand balls, and feasts of great proportion. It is a day when the challenges and responsibilities of the presidency seem to disappear, and criticism falls silent. After the inauguration the real work begins and in the daily grind of governing, that glorious day is all but forgotten.

We have recently completed the annual birthday celebration of our King—Jesus. Like an inauguration or king's coronation, Christmas is celebrated with much preparation and expectation. It is a day filled with joy as we give "glory to the new-born King!"

Now that we're settled into the post-Christmas life of January, we're back to the real work of living our lives and facing their challenges. Call it post-holiday depression, third-quarter blues, or a yearning for spring; this



time of year can really bring us down.

Do we need a pick-me-up? Remember that our King reigns...and praise Him!

Solomon understood that if he was to be a faithful, effective king he would need wisdom. Solomon prayed for that blessing and received it (1 Kings 3). In the Spirit-breathed words of Psalm 72, Solomon spoke of qualities that would be found in a kingdom that is ruled well—including justice, peace to the people, help for the needy, and prosperity for the citizens of the kingdom.

Though these would be qualities any faithful ruler would like for his kingdom, Solomon's thoughts went beyond this life and the kingdoms of

this world. Solomon's words looked ahead to the glories and majesty of the coming King—Jesus, the Messiah and Savior of the world.

Solomon described a kingdom that would endure throughout all generations. Even the longest reigning monarch one day dies and relinquishes the throne. Solomon spoke of a dominion that extends to the ends of the Earth. Israel had expanded its borders in Solomon's time, but not to encompass the Earth. The King of whom Solomon speaks has a name that "...shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun" (v.17)—a quality which only the Son of God could possess.

King Jesus!

There is no doubt that Solomon is speaking of our King, Jesus.

The glory of Solomon's song is what it tells us about our King. Jesus "will judge [God's] people with righteousness...the mountains will bring peace to the people" (vv. 2,3).

Peace and justice are the essence of Christ's Kingdom—namely, His rule in our hearts and lives. Jesus will judge all sinners when He comes in glory on the Last Day; but because He has died to remove our sins, we will be judged pure and righteous. God executed His justice for our sins upon Jesus and thereby declares us righteous. We are at peace with our Creator. This is the righteousness which Jesus, our King, imparts to us.

The reach of Jesus' kingdom is limitless. From sea to sea His kingdom grows as the word of Jesus' salvation spreads through the proclamation by God's people. The Word spreads and takes root in sinners' hearts. People of every station and status bow in faith to their Lord and

Your
WORD
is a
LAMP
to my
feet
and a
LIGHT
to my path.



serve Him with their lives!

Such honor and praise is heaped upon the King because of what He has done for them. Jesus, the King, sets sin's prisoners free. These are sinners who were formerly shackled with the bonds of worry, fear, uncertainty, and dread of God, but have been set free by the King and rest comfortably in His keeping.

Our King reigns! His Word goes forth to spread that kingdom. Subjects of the King, praise Him!

His glory is not the momentary glimmer of all things earthly. His glory is as eternal as His name. The celebration of our King continues each day because Jesus reigns! He is the King of our hearts. He protects, He provides, He defends, He guides, He blesses us and calls us His own.

"Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen" (Psalm 72:18-19).

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run,
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

Blessings abound where'er He reigns;
The pris'ner leaps, unloosed his chains,
The weary find eternal rest,
And all the sons of want are blest.
[TLH #511:1,4]

—Pastor Wayne Eichstadt

NOTING A 300 YEAR ANNIVERSARY...
"INDIA'S CORAL STRAND"
1706-2006

Introduction

Twenty years ago in the *Lutheran Spokesman* we had a series of articles on foreign mission work entitled, "Be Doers of the Word and not Hearers Only."

The first article in that series of a generation ago highlighted the first Protestant missionaries to India, Bartholomew Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Pluetschau. Bartholomew and Heinrich arrived at Tranquebar on July 9, 1706.

In a 300th anniversary celebration of outreach to India, we will be considering: 1) Apostolic influence—Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, and post-Apostolic work by Syrians, Jacobites and Nestorians; 2) The Roman Catholic effort of Xavier and de Nobili; 3) Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau breaking the trail for other Protestants to follow; 4) The continued Lutheran work with Christian Frederick Schwartz, and then 19th century great expansion of effort to reach the Indian; finally, 5) our own beginning and continued efforts in India.

Our interest in the India work should be a rather exuberant item with what we have been privileged to see God do. From initial doctrinal discussions with the Church of the Lutheran Confession in India (CLCI) in January 1983 and discussions with the Bharath Evangelical Lutheran Church (BELC) in January 1984, we have witnessed the

bringing of the gospel to many souls.

In July 1986 the CLCI had twenty-two pastors and thirty-five congregations with 2800 souls being served with the gospel. Now there are well over 7000 souls. In July of 1986 the BELC consisted of two pastors serving some 300 souls in six congregations. Now they have 135 pastors who are privileged to bring the gospel to over 5800 souls. All this has taken place despite a serious rupture in the BELC in January 2002. But God is in charge and sees that His Word speeds on and triumphs.

In military terminology, you pour your forces in at the decisive point where you find a breakthrough in the enemy's lines. The CLC Board of Missions is prayerfully pouring our spiritual and material resources into this field. Seventy-four percent of our overseas confessional brethren are in India. Three times as many men serve congregations in India as are serving in the USA.

Considering India in its vastness and diversity with over a billion people, it can be a daunting thing to contemplate work there. Hindu and Muslim opposition to the gospel is present sometimes in a violent stridency. It can be daunting, unless we neglect to focus on our dear, all-powerful God—the God who brings light out of darkness.

While in this series we will be reading about the work of men like Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau, it is really the work of our loving God. Names, dates, and places will be but reminders

of the wonder-working power of the name, Jesus; the date, Good Friday AD 30; the place, Mt. Calvary.

—Missionary David Koenig



Fourteen Bible-centered devotions for the person who wants to know more about God and life with God.

#12: It's all in who you know!

Did you hear about the runaway lad who was looking for a new home? After a lot of wandering, he walked up to the most impressive mansion on Lake Shore Drive, rang the bell, and said to the gentleman who answered, "Here I am, your long-lost son!"

Of course, he was lying and got thrown out.

The next day another stranger came to the door, but his companion in uniform did all the talking: "Father, here I am, on leave with my friend here."

This time the answer came, "Welcome home, son! Come in; and what can we do for your friend?"

It's all in who you know. When your Savior and dear Friend Jesus introduces you to His Father in heaven, His Father becomes gentle and generous to you—and that's simply for Jesus' sake.

Now, what can God do for you? He can (and will) do whatever is good (not sinful) for you and whatever is good for the blessing of others.

These are His primary conditions. And, of course, you understand how the Father feels about strangers—unless His Son vouches for them. The Father in heaven has no truck with bogus friends of His Son, those who are imposters or hypocrites.

So Jesus put it this way in order to

encourage His friends to come with Him to the throne of grace: "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."

This is to say: a genuine friend of Jesus keeps close to Him, depends on Him for salvation and safety, is bonded to Him heart and soul, and really values what Jesus has to tell him.

You will want to learn everything Jesus has to tell you, so that you will know in advance what's allowable—and what's off limits in your prayers.

So what do you want to ask of God? Get started with prayers you already know are okay with Him:

- +some thanks for His goodness in Jesus

- +some praise for His patience with you

- +some appeal to His promises
- +and then refer to the Lord's Prayer, of course, for guidance and as a pattern for your own prayers.

You will probably also want to ask Him to help you to bear up under the problems that have come upon you due to age and illness:

- +and that He will bring your friends and family members to see Jesus as their Savior from sin, death, and hell,

- +that He will never leave you nor

forsake you,

+that you will depend on Him to
use His best judgment in everything,
+and whatever else is on your

heart.

As always, in Jesus' name. Amen!

—Paul R. Koch

—The Bread of Life—

Daily Bible readings for home devotions

February, 2006

Isaiah's message is familiar: God does not abandon sinners to their deserved punishment but provides pardon and atonement through the Messiah, God's suffering Servant. In this Epiphany/pre-Lent month we select portions of God's Word via Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Date	Reading	A thought from the reading	Hymn
1	Isaiah 43:14-21	Your Redeemer will do a new thing	427
2	Isa. 45:18-25	Look to Me and be saved, all the Earth!	498
3	49:1-9	(A consultation between Jesus and His Father)	142,1-3
4	52:7-15	Advent, Epiphany, Lent sandwiched together	487
5	53:1-12	Read it and weep at such sorrows	153
6	54:7-15	His kindness supports us in our afflictions	337
7	55:6-11	As the rain and the snow come down	39
8	60:1-11	From our darkness into God's Light	126
9	63:1-9	Who is this? Why is Your apparel red?	209
10	64:1-9	We are the clay, and You our potter	40
11	66:1-2;18-24	Hear the Word of the Lord—and tremble	289

*Jerusalem went through forty years of bloody decline, and **Jeremiah** was God's messenger to the city that had become fanatically attached to idolatry. Could they be spared Babylon? Only by repenting.*

12	Jeremiah 29:13	Beware when God prefers charges	295
13	Jer.3:6-18	A bad example leads others astray	296
14	6:13-21	Even clergy deserted the old, good paths	489
15	7:22-27	God rises early to work for His children	537
16	11:1-8	Obedience to God soon goes out of style	323
17	17:5-18	God's curse or blessing: which shall it be?	325
18	23:1-6	The Lord our Righteousness is coming	627
19	29:4-14	Will seventy years of chastisement be enough?	566
20	31:31-34;33:15-16	By God's grace a new covenant	374
21	Lamentations 3:22-33	The Lord will not cast off forever	159

***Ezekiel** lived among the captives in Babylon, preaching the same things that **Jeremiah** was preaching in Jerusalem. It was a hard job!*

22	Ezekiel ch.1	This vision of God makes our head spin	28
23	3:16-27	So much depends on giving/receiving warning	609
24	18:19-33	Get yourself a new heart and a new spirit	226
25	33:7-11	Always back to the basics (or else)!	331
26	34:23-31	Always back to God—for blessings	278
27	36:16-28	The preview has become reality for us too	227
28	37:1-14	O dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord!	382

CLC Youth Conference 2005



A stop for “refueling” at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Cheyenne

During the week of August 9-14, 2005, seventy-eight students and seventeen staff members from various congregations of the CLC traveled to Camp Como, Colorado, for the semi-annual CLC Youth Conference.

Participants came from all parts of the United States, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

Nestled in the majestic beauty of the Rocky Mountains, the students immersed themselves in an intensive

study of the Holy Spirit’s description of the fruit of the Spirit (as found in Galatians 5:22-23). The sessions emphasized how Jesus Christ, the One who sacrificed Himself for us, enables us to “Live Strong and Lift High” the cross of Jesus in our lives by showing forth the Spirit’s fruits.

In addition to opportunities for spiritual growth, students enjoyed various leisure activities, such as mountain biking, hiking, Frisbee golf, wall climbing, basketball, volleyball, and roller hockey.

As the week progressed, the love



Ladies of Redeemer served a delicious lunch



Singing the praises of the Lord!

and joy of the simple truth of Jesus' amazing love radiated more and more from the joyful hearts, praising voices, and clapping hands of all participants.

Several campers and staff members expressed their conviction that this was a life-changing experience. Pastor Luke Bernthal of Spring, Texas, said that "this was probably the greatest spiritual experience I have had in my life, and I'm just one of the presenters. There was a lot of growth this week, and it was wonderful to see. It shows that our church body is in good hands, because it is in the hands of the Lord."

Yusef Haddad, one of the college campers, commented on his experi-

ence, "All the building up in the Lord between Christian friends was amazing. It really makes you want to be zealous for the Lord, stay built up on your spiritual mountain, and share it with others."

The conference concluded on Sunday morning with a worship service at St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church, CLC, Lakewood (Denver), Colorado. During the service, the students lifted their voices to praise the Lord with several songs learned during the week.

Subsequent to the Conference, many students have continued to put their faith into action by starting various Bible study and prayer groups at



Ready for the rapids—or whatever else life throws their way!

Immanuel Lutheran College (Eau Claire, Wis.). Another group of students is planning to organize a spiritual publication geared towards young people in the synod. And a group of college and high school seniors is making plans to lead a youth group at their church in order to help other young Christians grow in faith.

May the Holy Spirit continue to bless all who took part in this conference so that they may “Live Strong and Lift High” the cross of Jesus Christ in their lives.

May the same Lord move more young people to attend the next conference in 2007. It is truly a life-changing experience!

—Joel Gullerud



Announcement

In accord with our usage and order, Roland H. Gurgel, who was called by Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, Weslaco, Texas to be its pastor, was installed on December 4, 2005. Assisting were Pastor Luke Bernthal, Eugene Rutz, Daniel Hanel, and chairman of the congregation, Hans Hovda.

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer

**Blessed new year
in the Lord!**

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Holy Cross, Phoenix, Sunday School at Christmastime