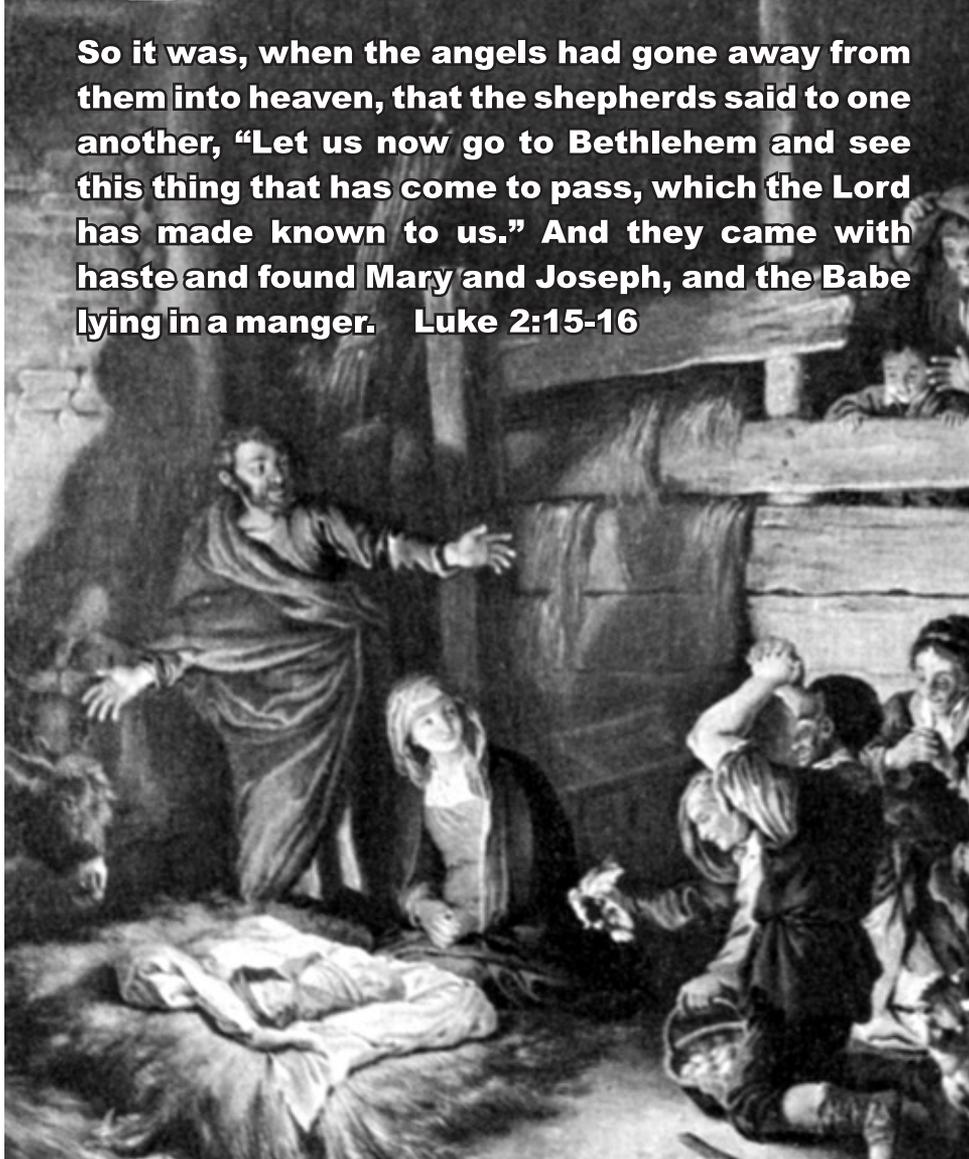


Lutheran Spokesman

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Luke 2:15-16



Congratulations—It's Your Savior!

I'm sure most of us are familiar with the words of the doctor or nurse after the birth of a child. He or she says to the parents, "Congratulations, it's a ____ !"

After the pain and suffering of childbirth, the mother is suddenly overcome with joy at the presence of this new life. The father hugs and kisses his wife. As the mother rests, the father makes the calls to family and friends. He wants them to share in the joy at this new birth. Soon family members and friends arrive at the hospital with smiles, excited about this new precious life. They hug and congratulate the new mother and father. They make their way to the nursery to look at the newborn baby. They cannot help but smile with joy as they see the baby wrapped up and lying in the crib.

As we enter this season of Christmas, we notice there are some similarities between that hospital maternity ward and the events in Bethlehem some 2000 years ago. Sad to say, the mother did not have many of the com-

forts that our modern day maternity wards have. Having traveled some fifty miles from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem, the very pregnant Mary and her husband Joseph were not even able to get a room at a local inn. Mary was ready to give birth to no ordinary child. Still a virgin, Mary was bearing in her womb the Son of the Most High God. She was carrying the Word made flesh. The Word that was active in the creation of all things was now about to be born.

But for the birth of the King of kings and Lord of lords, there was no army of nurses to assist in the delivery. There was no highly regarded doctor from John Hopkins University. There was no soothing music playing in the background. The audience present for the birth of the Word made flesh was His mother Mary, Joseph, and some farm animals.

Similar to the maternity ward, the Father who gave His only begotten Son to save the world sent His messengers.

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Editor: Paul Fleischer, 1741 E. 22nd Street, Cheyenne, WY 82001-4138, E-Mail to paulgf@qwest.net; Assistant Editor: Paul R. Koch; Artists: John Fox, Matthew Schaser; Staff: Theodore Barthels, David Bernthal, Wayne Eichstadt, Warren Fanning, Daniel Fleischer, Joel Fleischer, David Fuerstenau, Mark Gullerud, Roland H. Gurgel, John Klatt, Paul Krause, Joseph Lau, Bertram Naumann, Paul D. Nolting, Nathan Pfeiffer, David Reim, Peter Reim, Andrew Schaller, Michael Schierenbeck.

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This birth was announced to some shepherds watching sheep in nearby fields. The announcement was glorious both in form and in message. "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk. 2:10-12). Just as our friends and family come together for the birth of a child, this most special birth had shepherds hurrying to that manger to see what the angels had just told them.

This birth was not just for those shepherds, though. This birth of the Son of the Most High God was for each one of us! Later on in His life, Jesus would make clear why He had been born: "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10). Jesus made clear why He was sent into the world: "that the world through Him might be saved" (Jn. 3:17). The apostle Paul reassures sinners like

Christ

OUR SAVIOR

IS BORN!



Behold the
Lamb of God
which taketh
away the sin of
the world.

John 1:29

himself that Jesus was born to save us: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15).

Let us then rejoice this Christmas and every day, for the Son of God was born—born to save us from our sins!

CONGRATULATIONS!—IT'S YOUR SAVIOR!

—Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer



Our Advent Lion

Animals have often been used in similes to help describe a person. These pictures may or may not be complimentary.

Genesis chapter 49 records Jacob nearing the end of his earthly days. He gathered his sons about him and gave each one a word of wisdom and prophecy. Issachar he called a strong donkey; Dan was a serpent by the roadside; Benjamin a ravenous wolf; Naphtali was a deer.

But when the old patriarch came to Judah, his heart leaped for joy. For Judah was a lion's whelp, whose hand would be heavy on the neck of his enemies, before whom people would bow. "His eyes are darker than wine and his teeth whiter than milk."

Was Judah alone so described here—with power, majesty, and innocence? Actually, neither Judah nor his two famous descendants are being so described. Judah was neither a king, nor was he blameless concerning Joseph or his own son Perez (Gen. 38). David was a king, but not a Shiloh, not a peace-bringer. His grandson Solomon was not as a lion overcoming its prey. Both David and Solomon were types of this Lion of Judah, but types only.

While the tribe of Judah under the family of David gained and retained ascendancy over the other tribes of Israel, yet the Old Testament will not be understood aright unless one sees in it Jesus, the Christ—that God/Man from Judah who is our Shiloh, our

Immanuel, our Advent Lion!

Of the Divine Word made flesh, the Father spoke, "This is my beloved Son ... " (Mt. 3:17). Of Jesus, John declared, "This is the true God and eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:20). Of Jesus, Peter testified, "Nor is there salvation in any other..." (Acts 4:12).

Jesus is our Lion King! In preparing to celebrate the anniversary of His incarnation, we do well in singing our hosannas!

A Fearless Champion

But a lion is king also because of its fearlessness. Nothing scares him. So is Jesus our fearless Champion.

David was a comparatively fearless warrior, as Goliath learned, but David's greater Son was absolutely fearless. It is His very nature. He went into battle, not out of ignorance, but well knowing what was in man—our wicked, sinful natures. Jesus' enemies plotted against Him, but He walked freely and calmly among them.

Indeed, Jesus was not afraid of the devil (who is also compared to a roaring lion, cf. 1 Peter 5:8). Against him Jesus fought—Lion against lion, Head-crusher against heel-bruiser. For forty days and nights (and again at Gethsemane) Satan assaulted Jesus' nature, His will, His zeal for His mission, but the Lion of the tribe of Judah was more than Satan's match.

What gave Jesus such courage and even ferociousness in battle? It was His love for all sinners—His compassion for each of us being held in Satan's maw. Jesus would not let us be devoured. He came to fight for us, save us, protect us. As a Lamb this Lion sacrificed Himself for us, and neither hellish suffering nor death scared Him

away from His goal.

Surely we have cause to rejoice in our Champion and to use the sacred weapons He has bequeathed us in our battles against Satan, the mortally wounded beast of this world.

A Victorious King

For the Lion is our victorious King! Jesus arose, gaining an empire for Himself and His own, ruling over it in peace. That peace is not a temporal, miserable armistice of a few months or hours while the hate burns on. No, it is a spiritual peace, yes, an eternal peace—peace with God through the forgiveness of sins. The victorious Lion of Judah has 'divided the spoil'; He graciously invites all to share in it: pardon, peace, righteousness, life, protection, guidance, and strength.

Advent means 'coming.' We trust that as our Lion once came as prophesied, so He will come again as promised. We know not when—hopefully soon. But our Lion knows. St. John saw Him in his vision of heaven (Rev. 5:5). In that scene the apostle wept, for he feared for the safety of the Church on Earth and thought no one able to open the scroll. But an elder assured him, "Do not weep. Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed to open the scroll..." And so he saw the Lion/Lamb open the scroll that revealed the future, a future determined by His own blood and resurrection.

The Lamb had brought salvation; the Lion would bring it to eternal completion. The Lamb redeemed His people; the Lion would protect the saints on their homeward journey. The gates of hell would not prevail.

Be emboldened by this vision of our majestic, fearless, victorious Lion of

Judah, who bestows life and will keep us to eternal life. Be fearless as you

joyfully celebrate His birth and safely prepare for His coming.

—Pastor David Fuerstenau



"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel'" (Isaiah 7:14).

King Ahaz—Remember the Lessons You Learned in Confirmation!

We hear these familiar words of prophecy each year at Christmas. They speak of the wonderful miracle of the virgin birth of Jesus. They proclaim a truth that seems unbelievable, yet which we can believe, for our God specializes in doing the unbelievable! Under what circumstances, however, were these words first spoken? Let us examine their history.

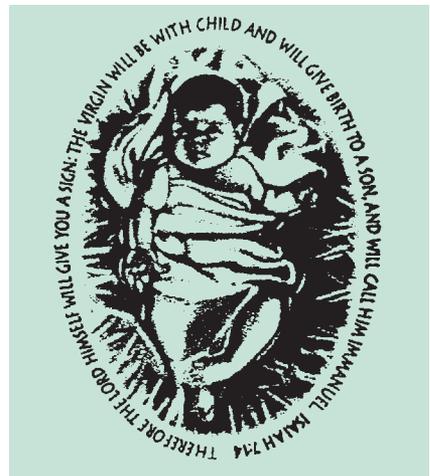
Isaiah spoke these words to his cousin, the unbelieving King Ahaz. Ahaz was facing a predicament. The kings of Israel and Syria had invaded his country and were determined to remove him from power. Ahaz, a descendant of King David, had abandoned David's faith. Instead of turning to God for help, he allied himself instead with the king of Assyria.

God sent Isaiah to meet Ahaz and to encourage him to trust in the LORD rather than in foreign princes. Isaiah told Ahaz he had nothing to fear from these two kings. They were nothing other than "two stubs of smoking fire-brands"—two little sparks floating up into the air above a campfire to disappear in the night (cf. Isaiah 7:4). God was not about to let those kings defeat His people, but Isaiah warned, "If you

will not believe, surely you shall not be established" (cf. Isaiah 7:9). Ahaz's greatest worry should not be two enemy kings, but rather God who could easily save the kingdom while removing him as king!

What A Sign!

Ahaz, however, was not prepared to listen to God. In response, Isaiah urged Ahaz to ask for a sign to prove that what he was saying was true. Would he like fire from heaven, as God once provided on Mount Carmel in response to Elijah's prayer? (cf. 1 Kings 18) Would he like the ground to open up and swal-



low something, as God had once done during a power dispute between Moses and Korah? (cf. Numbers 16)

Ahaz, however, refused to ask and rather mocked God's offer. It was then that Isaiah spoke these words of prophecy. God's response to Ahaz' unbelief was the announcement of a miracle—a virgin would conceive and bring forth a Son, who would be "God with us"!

But how would a miracle that occurred seven hundred years later be a sign for Ahaz?

Isaiah was calling upon his cousin to remember his "confirmation" instruction of so many years before. Ahaz had been trained as a child in God's teachings. He had read the books of Moses and memorized the psalms of his ancestor David. He had been taught about a coming Savior. He was aware of all of God's promises in spite of his

unbelief. Isaiah, therefore, used the memory of those promises to argue from the greater to the lesser. If God indeed planned to send His promised Savior to redeem the whole world of sinners from mankind's worst and mightiest enemy Satan, could not Ahaz trust God to rescue his small nation from two insignificant opponents? Of course he could!

Isaiah did what we at times must do—when we are faced with challenges to our faith or when seeking to help others overcome unbelief. We must remember and help others to remember the lessons we learned in confirmation about the power and grace of God in connection with Jesus. He came as our Savior, the Son of a virgin to redeem us from sin, Satan, and hell. Let us only believe, for then we will surely be established!

—Pastor Paul D. Nolting



A Christmas message from our CLC President—

" ... And on Earth Peace ... "

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14)

People long for and crave "peace." A nation fighting terrorism across the globe grows tired of conflict and becomes almost desperate for peace. A family torn apart by continual dissension and hatred almost forgets what a blessing family peace is. A state battered by four major hurricanes doesn't yet remember what a blessing peace and normal life are. All of us long for that peace which brings rest to those who die in the Lord.

God's Old Testament believers also longed for the peace that the promised Messiah would bring to them. One of the early promises of the coming Messiah revealed that the Savior would be born of the royal tribe descended from Jacob's fourth son, Judah. The kings of Israel would come from the descendants of Judah until the "King of kings" would come. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people" (Gen. 49:10).

The Hebrew word *Shiloh* means

The theme of the CLC Convention last June was "The Blessed Ministry of Reconciliation." Reconciliation is a big word meaning to make peace between parties which had been alienated from each other. Christmas is all about reconciliation.

peace or rest-giver. The familiar benediction of Numbers chapter six asks that the Lord turn His face toward you and "give you peace." The familiar promise of Isaiah points God's people to the coming "Prince of Peace. "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6).

Unfortunately, God's Old Testament people longed for a political peace established by an earthly king. They began to turn from the Lord and to see the promises of God's salvation in terms of the nation of Israel. This was in spite of the Levitical sacrifices demanded by the Mosaic Law for the atonement for sins. Thirty times the "peace offering" is mentioned in the first nine chapters of Leviticus. Leviticus chapter three describes the offering through which peace is reestablished between a holy God and a sinful people.

A "Peace Offering"!

The true spiritual longing for peace with God was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus in the small Judean town of Bethlehem. That first Christmas night the angels sang, "And on earth peace, goodwill toward men." God sent His Son Jesus as a peace offering. Peace was established with God through this holy Child. We now have peace with God. "Therefore, having been justified

by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Simeon recognized this peace which passes all human understanding, as he held the baby Jesus in his arms and prayed, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word" (Lk. 2:29).

The theme of the CLC Convention last June was "The Blessed Ministry of Reconciliation." *Reconciliation* is a big word meaning to make peace between parties which had been alienated from each other. Christmas is all about reconciliation. The miracle of Christmas is that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself by not imputing their trespasses to them. Through this Baby, born in Bethlehem, God reconciled the entire world to Himself. This is what the Bible refers to as the "gospel of peace."

God has committed this word or proclamation of reconciliation to us. Christmas is a chance to tell lost and alienated sinners about God's act of reconciliation. "And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things" (Rom. 10:15)!

It is too bad that our materialistic celebration of Christmas often negates the true peace of Christmas. For many people our modern Christmas has become a cause of stress, anxiety, and alienation.

What a blessed privilege to hear

again God's message of reconciliation from our pulpits and publications and professors.

May the God of reconciliation bring peace into your human situation and the hopelessness of the shadow of death. "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen" (Rom. 15:33).

For Christ is born of Mary,
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, The angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.

O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing To God, the King,
And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous Gift is giv'n!
So God imparts To human hearts
The blessings of His heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will Receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.
(TLH #647:2-3)

—Pastor John Schierenbeck



CROSS PURPOSES

WHOSE BIRTHDAY ARE WE CELEBRATING?

In a recent internet poll the question was asked, "Do Christians, Jews and Muslims worship the 'same god'?" The second largest agreement in the poll expressed the opinion that all three faiths worship the same god. The majority, by far, said that Christians and Jews do, but Muslims don't. A very small number said that Christians and Muslims worship the same god, but Jews don't.

Then in a syndicated editorial in the local newspaper, the writer (in an aside) said that God or Allah or Jehovah "are the same" (by using the word "Jehovah" we assume that the writer is referring to the Jewish religion).

As to whether everyone worships the same God, Christ-believers will of course say, "No, all three faiths do not worship the same God." There is only one God, and His name is Triune—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

But because of the perverseness of the flesh and the gross darkness of

unbelief, this is a debate that the Christ-believer will not win in society! Idolatry is so firmly rooted in the human heart that only the Spirit of God through the gospel can root it out.

The reality is that the very substance of the living, powerful gospel is the Lord Jesus Christ, revealed in Sacred Scripture as God. Jesus is the eternal Word Who took our flesh and blood and dwelt among men (John 1). This is a mystery too deep for human reason—a mystery rejected by Jew and Muslim.

Scripture says that no one can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost. By the power of the Spirit we believe: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6).

The Jews do not believe that Jesus is God. At His crucifixion they said that

He was worthy of death, because "He made Himself the Son of God" (Lk. 19:7). They reject Immanuel ("God with us"). They do not worship the same God as Christ-believers worship! Jesus is the manifest expression of the Father. Jesus is one with the Father (Jn. 10:30), the One without whom none can come to the Father (Jn. 14: 6).

If one would ask a devout Jew or devout Muslim whether he worships the same god as the other, each would say, "No, we do not worship the same god." If you ask an unconverted Jew whether he worships the divine Christ whom Christ-believers worship, he will say, "No." Likewise, the Muslim who understands that worshipping Christ excludes Allah would answer, "No."

So if the Jews do not confess the Lord Jesus Christ but declare Him an impostor, they do not worship the God of the Christians. If they do not equate their god with Allah of the Muslims, and Muslims will not accept the god of the Jews, just exactly who is it that promotes the idea that everyone worships the same god?

There is only one answer. It is compromisers—Christians, Jews, or

Muslims who do not know whom or what they worship! These compromisers worship, they know not whom (John 4:22). In one sense we would agree that all who reject Christ or promote the same god (sophistry!), worship the same god—they worship an idol!

So the question is for Christians, "Whose birthday are you celebrating at Christmas?" Paul—the apostle and former Jew of Jews—knew. He said, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

Other than an individual heart being convinced by the Spirit, we cannot win the battle with society in this regard. Regardless, we will with St. Paul remain steadfast in our confident faith as we believe the word of God which tells us of Jesus, "This is the true God and eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:20).

At Christmas Christ-believers kneel before the manger of God manifest in the flesh. "Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever" (Rom. 9:5). That's it!

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer



Members of Redeemer, Cheyenne, and Prince of Peace, Loveland, on their annual "Christmas Tree Outing" in the Wyoming forest. In 2003 up to fifteen trees were cut and hauled home!

LET HEAVEN AND NATURE SING



How closely heaven and
earth are drawn,
When God sends forth His
Son,
And gives the world the
grandest Gift—
Forgiveness, everyone.
Our life begins when Jesus
comes
And draws us to Himself,
And causes us to kneel
before
That rustic cattle shelf.
*LET HEAVEN AND NATURE
SING, MY FRIENDS,
LET HEAVEN AND NATURE
SING.*



The angels could not be con-
tained,
But on that holy night
They burst the gates of heav-
en and
Appeared in glorious light.
"All glory be to God on high
And peace on earth to men."
The shepherds were the first
to hear
On plains of Bethlehem.
*LET HEAVEN AND NATURE
SING, MY FRIENDS,
LET HEAVEN AND NATURE
SING.*



As snowflakes gently fall and
make
The hills and valleys white,
A squirrel scampers up a tree
A walnut in its bite.
A bluejay darts from branch to
branch,
A whitetail takes its flight,
A rabbit scurries cross the
snow,
God's nature — what a sight!
*LET HEAVEN AND NATURE
SING, MY FRIENDS,
LET HEAVEN AND NATURE
SING.*



It's Christmas in the country
and
It's Christmas everywhere—
Where'er the Christ Child
enters in
And makes the hearts
aware. . .
That in Him we have life
indeed,
And it shall never end;
We thus shall join the chorus
as
A prayer we upward send.
*LET HEAVEN AND NATURE
SING, MY FRIENDS,
LET HEAVEN AND NATURE
SING.*

— L. D. Redlin

"And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:18-19).

ON WONDERING AND PONDERING

Psychologists warn us, especially young people, of "the wonderful, terrible power of the takeover of Christmas," because of which "many are bound to feel disconsolate when Christmas Day finally arrives."

Little wonder that a letdown of sorts strikes those who view Christmas as a mountain-peak rather than the beginning of a wonderful journey with God and His Christ. For believers the celebration of the Savior's birth is the beginning of a journey, a launching pad if you will, and not a mountain top after which everything is downhill.

Many "Wonder"

The multitude of angels had announced: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord..." And how did the shepherds react? They wondered at the message; they marveled at it; they were amazed. But they didn't just sit in some kind of stunned stupor as if in a dream-world. No, they hastily went to see the heaven-sent Babe. Then without delay they went and told the news.

The immediate object of the wondering of "all they that heard" the shepherds' account of the Bethlehem miracle was "the saying which was told them concerning this child" (v. 17). What had the shepherds told them? Surely they told of the multitude of angels which had appeared to them. Surely they told of the Child to whom



they had been directed: Mary's Son and God's, lying in a manger in the little town of Bethlehem.

Unlike the shepherds, the immediate reaction of most to the news was *mere* wondering. That is not unnatural. Whenever something happens beyond the ordinary course of things—in this usually quite orderly "law of nature" world—most all of us wonder and are amazed. And there's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong or sinful about wide eyes and gaping mouths at "acts of God."

But *just* wondering is never enough. *Just* wondering, without investigation, can result in Satan convincing us that it was a fraud or freak of nature. *Just* wondering at supernatural happenings or miracles will make skeptics of faithless souls—as happened with most of those who "wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds"!

As it happened to most of that first-Christmas crowd, so it happened to the "wondering" Palm Sunday crowd; most rejected Christ days later. Both crowds were without excuse.

The first-Christmas crowd was in

David's city where their prophet had told them the Savior of the world would be born. Why didn't they bother to check it out? After Peter wondered about the empty sepulchre, he didn't just go back to his fishing boat. He went to find the other disciples and pondered the unnatural (supernatural!) fact that the grave was empty.

Few "Ponder"

As Peter was among the few at Easter, so Mary was among the few at Christmas: "But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart..."

What things did Mary ponder? Surely about everything the shepherds had reported regarding the supernatural announcement of her Son's birth! And we can well imagine that she might lullaby her Baby to sleep with the words she had sung nine months earlier to cousin Elizabeth: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior..."

Dear readers, *wonder* at Jesus' supernatural birth, but don't stop there! With Mary *ponder* its holy meaning—

for yourself, your children, your children's children, the world!

It's safe to say that every Christmas crowd since the first one has had more wonderers than ponderers. Wonderers fill churches on Christmas Eve (and Easter Day?) and let it end there; ponderers are found investigating these supernatural events with regularity. Wonderers are those who go back to living cold and self-centered lives; ponderers find the message warms their hearts and all their human relationships.

In other words, mere wonderers are prime candidates for the post-Christmas letdown syndrome, while ponderers don't understand how anyone can feel a letdown on December 26th.

Ponderers know they have a long-promised Savior from sin, death, Satan, and hell—and in Him peace, sweet peace, with God, now and forever. And with that gift in their heart, ponderers don't sit in stunned silence as if in a dreamworld; like the shepherds they busy themselves with spreading the Good News!

—Pastor Paul Fleischer



The Discourses of Christ

Christ, the Light of the World—John 8:21-30

Part Two

Separation, Sin, and Salvation

When confrontations between Jesus and the Jews are stacked back to back like this, we wonder what is different

about this one. With the first reading, we catch on that at least one core message is **separation**; Jesus would be

separated from the Jews because He would go to heaven, where they could not come. Bad news for them—though good news for His disciples and for us.

"I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come." Each has his natural habitat due to native origin, and that would cause the coming separation. Separation has to happen between you and Me, says Jesus, for "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world."

He was going to heaven, where nobody dies (life and death are mutually exclusive); but the Jews couldn't escape Earth, for they were already corpses, and corpses do not go to heaven. Only living persons belong in God's living room; corpses belong in the pits where they functioned and were at home.

Throughout this dialogue we see how corpse-like the Jews were—suffocating with fatal spiritual emphysema, they could hardly catch their breath over "I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come." They took a quick gulp at the notion that Jesus might commit suicide, but while savoring that prospect they entirely missed the news that they would be the ones dying.

We know that it is human nature to not relish dying—and dying in sin at that. We can dwell on our own dying only due to God's grace, for Jesus has seen to it that our dying will not be IN our sin, but OUT OF our sins!

Jesus did not allow His adversaries to get sidetracked away from the sin-and-death factor, though they wished to avoid it. "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do

not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." Here every word carries a freight-load of crucial meaning, especially the two words "for if...." Here is the reason they will die in their sins: under the circumstance that IF they continue to live as they have been, sinfully discarding Jesus, then that specific **sin** will bind all other sins onto their necks when they die.

How's that again? "If you do not believe that I AM (He), you will die in your sins!" The one and only condition that keeps a soul bound IN its sins is the sin of unbelief. Unbelief about what? Unbelief that Jesus is the great I AM, one-and-the-same with Jehovah (Ex. 3:14; Deut. 32:39)—the one-and-only Supreme Court Justice who because of His Saviorhood has authority to render eternal judgment on souls.

Were they ready to listen to Jehovah? Were they ready to lay their sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God? Would they bring their guilt to Jesus to wash away their crimson stains white in His blood most precious?

Where should Jesus start with such folks? Perhaps with an affidavit to the authorization He had from His Father? "I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him." But "they did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father."

Dead end. Try again.

Many Believed—Hallelujah!

Was there no way He could get them to understand what He was talking about until it was too late for them to awaken to their mistake? The problem with being from beneath is that "the natural man does not receive the

things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

If they did not awaken to reality via His words, would they perhaps "get it" from God's deeds on Calvary? Sorry to say, since they rejected Jesus all the way through Good Friday, not even the events on Calvary converted them. The darkening of the sun for three hours, an earthquake splitting the landscape, the graves opening and yielding their dead—none of those testimonies brought them to repent and turn to Jesus for their salvation. The miracles surely proved that Jesus was I AM, but for them it would be mere head knowledge, the same spiritual deadness that on Judgment Day will merit, "Depart from Me, you cursed...!"

Now, what about the **salvation** part of this discourse? Surely Jesus wanted them to hear the good news, take it to their hearts, and reap God's blessings for themselves! The gospel is there, of course, and we saw it all along. It's the flip side of "if you do not believe that I AM He, you will die in your sins." For if their hearts are brought to believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be (over and over again), then it shall be brought to pass that they reap the blessings of such faith in Jesus.

So, one more time: "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him." Were any hearts out there still loving the Father in heaven and resonating to His messages?

"As He spoke these words, many



believed in Him." Hallelujah!

What turned the tide in these hearts? What brought them around, unto their salvation? During those moments when Jesus was speaking, reminding them that He was communicating to them what the heavenly Father sent Him to teach, they were reviewing in their minds what they had learned and cherished from the Scriptures—and it all added up! They were brought to realize that everything He said and did matched their Bible!

Their hearts became convinced that Jesus was none other than the suffering Servant of Isaiah, that He was the Seed of the woman, the one-and-only Son of Man/Son of God, the Messiah, their Savior from sin and damnation.

And thus it came to pass for them, as it has for us, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12)—"that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16).

Hallelujah and Amen! See you in heaven!

—Paul R. Koch

As explained in our October issue (when Part 1 appeared), a series of three articles on the subject at hand was written some years back by Pastor Em. Paul F. Nolting. These articles with their compelling message are worthy of our review and reflection in our "non-confessional" day and age. — Editor

CONFESSIONAL UNITY

(Part 3 of 3)

A child is conceived and born in sin. David confessed: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:5). Our Lord stated the matter pointedly: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" (Jn. 3:6). A child enters the Kingdom and the congregation through the washing of water by the Word, "Baptism doth also now save us" (1 Pet. 3:21).

Imperfect in Children

But what does that child know of doctrine? Nothing at all! But as soon as the child begins to comprehend, the parents begin the life-long teaching process, and the child begins its life-long learning process. The child learns the name "Jesus." It learns "Jesus loves me" and "Jesus died for me." Gradually the child learns the great truths or doctrines of salvation through the Bible stories. When a child is in the sixth or seventh grade, it usually begins confirmation instruction. In a systematic way it is taught the great truths of the Bible and so is slowly led by the Spirit into the unity of faith and confession. The child is being prepared for admittance to the Lord's Table. Wherever the old custom of public examination is still observed, the child makes its confession by answering questions concerning the great doctrines of the Scriptures. The adults are given an opportunity to relearn forgotten truths. Sometimes the child may come up with a wrong answer. It can't

be otherwise, for confessional unity is never perfect.

Imperfect in Adults

We receive adults by patiently instructing them in the great doctrines of the Scriptures so that the Spirit can lead them to a confession of the unity of faith with us. Some adults may have had no previous religious instruction and so have much to learn. Some may have to undergo the "unlearning process"—getting rid of opinions and beliefs that are contrary to the Scriptures. When the Spirit leads the individual to the point that he or she can say honestly: "I believe as you do on the basis of the Scriptures," then that person is ready to be received into the congregation. But then often follows forgetting and relearning, a resurfing of old errors and their suppressions, the struggle to apply principles of the Word to varying situations, and so on and on. The result again is imperfect unity.

Such an imperfect unity is present among both clergy and laity, young and old, novice and mature Christian. That is why we all need daily and rich forgiveness from our Lord, not only for sins against the second table of the Law but also for sins in doctrine against the first table.

Unity Preserved, though Imperfect

The way the Spirit of God preserves confessional unity in Christian congregations

gations and church bodies is two-fold—patient instructing of the weak who truly want to learn, but separating from those who stubbornly maintain, defend, and proclaim error. No Christian ever reaches a full and complete knowledge of the Bible. Every Christian is attacked by doubts at times. Every Christian has difficulty applying scriptural principles to given situations. But as long as the individual is willing to learn in humble submission to the Word of the Lord, the patient instructing is to continue. We are to restore anyone who is overtaken in moral or doctrinal error with all meekness (Gal. 6:12). Growing in grace and knowledge is a lifelong process!

But when it becomes evident that a person changes from a learner of the truth to an advocate of error, when a

person's "I can't see it" becomes "I don't want to see it," or when a person begins to make propaganda for his error, then the "avoid" of Romans 16:17, the "come out and be separate" of 1 Corinthians 6:17, and the "receive him not into your house" of 2 John 10 are to be applied. Why?

Leaven

... Because error works in the body of doctrine and among believers as leaven does in a lump of dough. Our Lord warned, "Beware of the leaven (doctrine) of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Mt. 16:6). Paul warned, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9). Unchecked error destroys both unity and the gospel. Error always attacks Jesus as Savior.



SMORGASBORD

•DAILY BIBLE READINGS

In connection with the Daily Devotions in this issue will be found something old/something new. As assistant Editor Paul R. Koch explains in his opening comments, this coming calendar year our *Lutheran Spokesman* will be adapting some Bible Readings for home devotions from past volumes.

This resurrected approach will, we think, be a holy prod to the spiritual laziness of us all. May the monthly column admonish us to do what we know we should be doing, living "in the Word" each and every day, thus growing up in Him who was and is the Word made flesh to accomplish our salvation.

Thank you, Professor Koch, for assuming the work involved in coming months for these daily Bible readings for home devotions!

Below will be found some timely pieces forwarded to us from a Christian friend (lifted from the holiday issue of a Lutheran publication some fifty years ago).

•"WONDERFUL"

The world is full of wonders. In fact, as somebody has said, the world is one big wonder. The very common salt which we use at every meal is a wonder. Salt is composed of two poisonous substances, sodium and chlorine, either of which if taken alone is destructive. But the two together, salt, is necessary for health. Water, composed of oxygen and hydrogen, is another wonder. Oxygen is flammable; hydrogen will burn. But put the two together and you have water, which will put out fires. However, these wonders are not to be compared with the wonder of the Christ-Child lying in a

manger. "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh," says the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 3:16). Yes, Christ's very name is WONDERFUL (Is. 9:6).

• **"BLESSED CHRISTMAS"**

A blessed Christmas to you all! But, you ask, how can that be possible in these hectic days (this was written in 1953, during the Korean War)? Granted, it is not only difficult; it is impossible, humanly speaking. However, with God all things are possible. It is possible if we let the

Holy Spirit nourish our faith through the Word. Professor Walther once said that a man could listen to a thousand sermons, but if there is no more than a mechanical hearing, the net result will be something like water running off a duck's back. So, if we listen to the Christmas gospel without THINKING, the good will be zero. Therefore, this Christmas let us determine, by the grace of God, to listen to Luke's supernaturally beautiful *EVANGELIUM* with spellbound hearts. Then we will say: "The Savior born in Bethlehem is MY Savior."



Daily Bible readings for home devotions, 2005

Thirty-nine years ago the *Spokesman* launched a Bible Reading program for family devotions, organized to present God's great plan of salvation. The readings were brief in order to "not try to accomplish too much, nor to do that which does not serve the devotional setting" in contrast to reading a whole book at one sitting or the entire Bible in one year. "The family devotion time serves a different purpose again. It is to provide the entire family with a united moment with their Lord."

We find this *Bread of Life* series so enriching that we are adopting it as our Bible reading program for 2005, to appear one month at a time in place of the usual pull-out sheets. We adapt the guidelines (from *Bible History for Christian Day Schools*, NPH, 1928) for tracing God's plan of salvation from Genesis through Revelation. Hymns are from *The Lutheran Hymnal* (CPH, 1941). May these devotional readings serve to help the Word of Christ dwell in us richly!

I. The period of the undivided human race

Man, created after God's image, yields to the temptation of Satan and becomes the slave of sin and death. God promises a Savior and uses this good news to create faith in human hearts and thus counteracts the powers of sin and Satan.

When humans hardened themselves against this grace, God destroyed them and the surface of the planet, but by His underserved, steadfast love saved Noah and his family. When humans in turn became vain in their imaginations, He gave them up to their own ways and scattered them by confusing their language.

Out of nothing God created the universe, matter, energy, space, time, and the laws of nature—to make mankind happy in union with Himself. In six days He prepared the Earth as mankind's home.

<u>Jan.</u>	<u>Genesis:</u>		<u>Hymn</u>
1	1:1-13	Preparations of light, sky, land, and plant life	98,1
2	1:14-25	luminaries, water, and land creatures	98,2
3	1:26-2:3	God and man in close communion	98,3
4	2:4-14	The perfect home environment	98,4
5	2:15-24	and a spouse, to worship God together	98,5

When man turned his back on God, God in His love did not cast His fallen children away, but promised to save them from their sin through the Seed of the woman, Jesus.

6	3:1-7	The first humans rebel against God	353,1
7	3:8-15	Yet He seeks and saves through Jesus	353,2
8	3:16-25	Sin works its way out in penalty and tribulation	353,3

When man yielded to the influence of sin (behold its active power in the world!), God came to the rescue with His Word.

9	4:1-16	Man's religion and God's religion are opposites	353,4-5
10	4:17-26	Beware the culture of this world!	353,6-7

Seth's family was also infested with sin, and death reigned. By God's grace some resisted the inroads of sin and idolatry. Finally the human race as a whole fell away.

11	5:1-20	The history of mankind: "and he died."	369,1-2
12	5:21-32	The hope of mankind: "he shall never die"	369,3-4
13	6:1-8	Sin multiples and grieves God	369,5-6

When humans had altogether hardened themselves against His abiding Spirit, God announced His judgment: destruction through the Flood. But in order that His promise of salvation might stand, He spared Noah and family.

14	6:11-22	Judgment and blessing, Act I	383,1-2
15	7:1-16	Judgment and blessing, Act II	383,3-4
16	7:17-24	Judgment and blessing, Act III	383,5-6
17	8:1-12	Jehovah remembers Noah	329,1-2
18	8:13-22	Noah remembers Jehovah	329,3-5

God warned against violence and instituted government to check it. Man started again – in sin, so Noah promised the Savior to Shem. When humans exalted themselves, God gave them up to their own ruin.

19	9:1-7	All creation groans together (Romans 8:22)	528,1-3
20	9:8-17	Man forgets; Jehovah remembers!	528,4-6
21	9:18-29	Love provides covering for shame	528,7-9
22	10:6-32	Lo! How the world prospers!	528,10-12
23	11:1-9	Lo! How the mighty have fallen!	528,13-15

II. The time of the patriarchs

While the world powers were trying to achieve greatness, God chose the nation of Israel to be His children and the bearers of His promised Savior. He carefully trained the ancestors of this people in the faith they should hand down to their children, and He preserved them from being contaminated with the idolatry of the heathen. Abraham, the father of all who believe (Rom. 4:11), portrays the course of faith—its beginning, growth, trials, blessings, and happiness.

24	11:26-32	But they settled in Haran	421,1&4
25	12:1-9	"Lord, 'tis not that I did choose Thee!"	37,1-2
26	12:10-20	Human strategy is no substitute for godly trust	425,1&5

God had chosen a secluded territory for Israel to keep itself undefiled while it proclaimed the gospel. By rescuing Lot from marauders, Abram became a hero in his country.

27	13:1-18	"Love does not insist on its own way."	228,6
28	14:1-12	The little things confound the powerful	366,1-2
29	14:13-24	Can Sodom make Jehovah rich?	438,1-2

Abram again resorted to strategy, but Jehovah taught him that Ishmael was not the God-appointed heir of the Promise. In a miracle God would give him Isaac to make His promise come true.

30	15:1-11	"Fear not, I am your Shield!"	427,1-3
31	15:12-21	God's one-way treaty/covenant	427,4-5



In mid-October Pastor Todd Ohlmann sent along this report of the Fourth Annual Joint English Indian Pastoral Conference—

Pastoral Conference of the CLCI and the BELC September 8-10, 2004



Center: Pastor Ohlmann and Missionary Koenig.

I am writing this report after attending the first two days of the Conference. Tomorrow morning we will conclude the conference with two more essays delivered by Pastor Koenig and myself along with a service of the Word and the Lord's Supper. Then during the mid-day meal, we will also view a slide show of pictures that Pastor Jyothi Benjamin has prepared from the conference held last year in Chenna.

There are over fifty men in attendance at this conference. This number includes the twenty-one full-time seminary students. The conference is being held at the Hotel Sitara in Guntur, which is about forty minutes away from the CLCI headquarters in Nidibrolu.

The conference alternates locations

and host church bodies every other year. This year it is being hosted by the CLCI. Next year it will be hosted by the BELC in Chennai, which is about 10-12 hours south of Guntur.

Thus far, we have heard fourteen essays from both BELC and CLCI pastors along with reports on the various ministries of the two church bodies. Essays have covered topics such as "Christians and Government," "Be Strong" (an encouragement to find strength for all things in Christ), and an excellent Law and Gospel study of Galatians 3:23-29, titled "Children of God by Faith."

These are just a sampling of the essays that have been delivered. The conference is conducted--and all the essays are delivered--in English,

because the pastors of these two church bodies are spread across three different states in South India.

Most every state in India has its own particular language. These are not different dialects of the same language, but completely different languages. There are some sixteen different and distinct languages spoken in the nation of India. In Tamil Nadu, where a good many BELC congregations are located, they speak the Tamil language. In Andhra Pradesh state, where the CLCI is generally located along with quite a few BELC congregations, they speak Telegu. There are also some congregations where they speak the national language, Hindi. So for such a conference to be useful to those in attendance, there must be one common language.

Here in India, many who have reached the point where they are able to pursue a level of higher learning have learned English. The English that has been written in the essays is easier to understand (for me at least) than spoken English (due to the thick Indian accent). But the message being delivered in these essays is the language of God's Law and Gospel in the context of true Lutheran theology, the theology of the Scriptures. For this we praise the Lord!

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Delegate Paul Bade, Immanuel, Mankato, checks mission display at Convention